Interactional Competence of Low-intermediate EFL Learners in a Cultural Exchange Conversation Task with Non-Thai English Speakers

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Abstract

Interactional competence has received much attention recently as it is considered imperative for effective spoken communication between interlocutors, and especially for English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners. This study examined interactional features of low-intermediate Thai EFL learners which were employed as they engaged in a cultural exchange conversation task with foreigners. The prompts used in this classroom assessment task served as the instruments that yielded data in the form of audio recorded conversations, transcriptions and learner reflections of their conversations. Conversation analysis and quantitative analysis of the conversational data revealed four 'basic conversational actions' underlying 12 interactional features displayed. Findings suggested the possibility of basic interactional competence (Kecskes et al., 2018) contributing to the actualization of some of the exchanges, as the EFL participants were able to utilize interactional features to interact with their foreign counterparts despite their language limitations. Thematic analysis of learners' written reflections on their conversations provided insights into their perceptions in relation to the interactional features used in their conversations. Similar cultural exchange conversations are recommended, as these types of tasks can elicit facets of interactional competence carried out in authentic contexts; however, they should be carried out as low-stakes assessment tasks. Engaging in a conversation with foreigners allows EFL learners to exercise their communicative agencies and interactional skills, given that proper scaffolding is carried out prior to the task. Including interactional features as constructs on a scoring rubric for such a conversation task may be possible with careful design and validation, and with reminders for learners to approach the task with the four underlying conversational actions in mind for a successful conversation.

Keywords: interactional competence, conversation analysis, classroom assessment, low-intermediate EFL learners

ความสามารถในการปฏิสัมพันธ์ของผู้เรียนภาษาอังกฤษเป็นภาษาต่างประเทศ ระดับกลาง-ล่าง ในการสนทนาแลกเปลี่ยนวัฒนธรรมกับชาวต่างประเทศที่พูดภาษาอังกฤษ

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บทคัดย่อ

ในปัจจุบันความสามารถในการปฏิสัมพันธ์ได้รับความสนใจเป็นอย่างมาก เนื่องจากเป็นทักษะที่มีความจำเป็นต่อการพูดสื่อสารอย่างมีประสิทธิภาพโดยเฉพาะสำหรับผู้เรียนภาษาอังกฤษเป็นภาษาต่างประเทศ การวิจัยนี้มีวัตถุประสงค์เพื่อศึกษาความสามารถในการปฏิสัมพันธ์ของผู้เรียนภาษาอังกฤษเป็นภาษาต่างประเทศ ระดับกลาง-ล่าง (Low-intermediate) ในการสนทนาแลกเปลี่ยนวัฒนธรรมกับชาวต่างชาติ ข้อมูลที่ใช้ในการวิเคราะห์เก็บจากกิจกรรมการสนทนาซึ่งเป็นส่วนหนึ่งของการวัดและประเมินผลในชั้นเรียน ได้แก่ บทสนทนาในรูปแบบไฟล์เสียง บทสนทนาที่ถอดความแล้ว และบันทึกของผู้เรียนที่ทบทวนการสนทนาของตนเอง ผลจากการวิเคราะห์บทสนทนาประกอบกับการวิเคราะห์เชิงปริมาณพบว่าระหว่างการสนทนา ผู้เรียนใช้รูปแบบการปฏิสัมพันธ์ทั้งหมด 12 ลักษณะ แต่ละลักษณะเป็นไปตามพฤติกรรมพื้นฐานของการสนทนา (basic conversational actions) ทั้งหมดสี่ประเภท ผลการวิเคราะห์ยังพบความเป็นไปได้ว่า ความสามารถในการปฏิสัมพันธ์ขั้นพื้นฐาน (Basic interactional competence) (Kecskes et al., 2018) อาจมีส่วนช่วยให้การสนทนาของผู้เรียนส่วนหนึ่งเป็นไปได้ด้วยดี เนื่องจากผู้เรียนสามารถใช้การปฏิสัมพันธ์ในรูปแบบต่าง ๆ เพื่อสื่อสารกับชาวต่างชาติ แม้ตนเองจะมีข้อจำกัดด้านภาษา การวิเคราะห์ประเด็น (Thematic analysis) จากบันทึกของผู้เรียนที่ทบทวนการสนทนาของตนเอง ทำให้เห็นมุมมองของผู้เรียนที่เกี่ยวโยงกับการใช้ความสามารถในการปฏิสัมพันธ์ของตนในระหว่างการสนทนา กิจกรรมการสนทนาแลกเปลี่ยนวัฒนธรรมในลักษณะนี้สามารถใช้ประเมินทักษะการสื่อสารของผู้เรียนได้เป็นอย่างดี เพราะเอื้อให้ผู้เรียนใช้รูปแบบการปฏิสัมพันธ์ในหลากหลายลักษณะซึ่งสะท้อนทักษะการสื่อสารที่ใช้ในชีวิตจริง ทั้งนี้ควรใช้ในการวัดและประเมินผลที่มีความสำคัญต่ำ (Low-stakes assessment) การสนทนากับชาวต่างชาติส่งผลให้ผู้เรียนภาษาอังกฤษเป็นภาษาต่างประเทศต้องบริหารทักษะการสื่อสารและการปฏิสัมพันธ์ต่าง ๆ ของตนในการสนทนา แต่ผู้เรียนจำเป็นต้องได้รับการอบรมและฝึกฝนอย่างเหมาะสมก่อน ในการสร้างเครื่องมือเพื่อประเมินงานสนทนาประเภทนี้ สามารถนำรูปแบบการปฏิสัมพันธ์ในลักษณะต่าง ๆ มาใช้เป็นคุณลักษณะ (constructs) ในการประเมินได้ แต่ควรออกแบบและตรวจสอบเครื่องมือการประเมินด้วยความระมัดระวัง อีกทั้งเน้นให้ผู้เรียน

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คำสำคัญ: ความสามารถในการปฏิสัมพันธ์ การวิเคราะห์บทสนทนา การวัดและประเมินผลในชั้นเรียน ผู้เรียนภาษาอังกฤษเป็นภาษาต่างประเทศ ระดับกลาง-ล่าง

Introduction

In recent years, there has been a growing interest in interactional competence (IC) of non-native speakers of English with the possibility of including IC as one of the criteria of measurement of spoken interaction. This is because it has been acknowledged that successful communication relies not only on a learner's individual cognitive knowledge of the second language, but also on the social dynamic process between interlocutors as they work together through talk-in-interaction to make meaning (e.g., Galaczi & Taylor, 2018; Roever & Kasper, 2018; Waring, 2018; Young, 2011). In light of this context, there has been an interesting proposal put forth that non-native speakers (NNSs) are already equipped with a basic interactional competence (BIC), interactional capabilities which they transfer into the L2 (Kecskes et al., 2018). In the theoretical part of their study, Kecskes et al. (2018) contrasted BIC with applied interactional competence (AIC), which they believe learners acquire when being oriented and becoming accustomed to culture-specific knowledge—pragmatic procedures and practices—in order to interact effectively in a host culture. In the empirical part of their research, they identified interactional resources or strategies that participants utilized throughout conversations with L1 speakers. The researchers maintain that these interactional resources, which cover different types of responses and repair mechanisms (e.g., making sure interlocutor understands before moving on, remedying misunderstandings that arise, etc.), are more basic than their participants' acquired 'repertoire of socio-culturally appropriate practices', or AIC, and contribute to the success of the interactions. They believe that BIC is more prominently evident in interactions between speakers who are less proficient in the L2, and/or speakers who are from different cultural backgrounds and who are not proficient in the lingua franca.

There remains room for discussion on how EFL learners draw on BIC in conversational talk. Particularly in the Thai context, where low-intermediate learners are most likely stifled by language deficiencies, it is questionable how these learners are able to interact with foreign interlocutors. Examining interactional resources employed by low-intermediate EFL learners as they engage in conversations may reveal how BIC comes into play and help to understand specific interactional features employed for successful conversations. Interactional resources have generally been observed by analyzing speakers' interactional behavior in their moment-by-moment interaction with interlocutors. These elements of interactional competence observed in previous research have been referred to as interactional facets, features, displays, moves, practices, resources, or strategies (e.g., Galaczi, 2013; Lam, 2018; Morris-Adams, 2014; Patharakorn, 2018; Plough et al., 2018; Waring, 2018). In this study, these terms will appear interchangeably.

To observe EFL learner IC also calls into question the appropriate task to use. One task that has been initiated as a means to expose EFL learners to other cultures and to create opportunities for them to communicate in the target language is to have learners conduct interviews with foreigners (e.g., Rao, 2002; Su, 2008). Such interview tasks have been met with challenges, as poor communication skills or insufficient knowledge of the target language become obstacles (Su, 2008). Rao (2002) also found that learners' lack of confidence and the difficulty of locating foreign speakers of English outside of the classroom are additional impediments. The main shortfall, however, is that such interview tasks allow for mostly one-way communication where learners prepare questions to be asked, obtain information from their interlocutors, and may not be truly exercising their interactional resources to the fullest. Thus, an interview task might not provide the best opportunity to observe how EFL learners make use of interactional strategies.

Research studies in speaking assessment that have contributed to our knowledge of IC as part of a speaking construct (e.g., Ducasse & Brown, 2009; Lam, 2018; May, 2011; Plough et al., 2018; Roever & Kasper, 2018) have offered insights on how IC may best be observed. Plough et al. (2018) reviewed IC studies in language assessment that investigated various features

of IC employed by language learners, elicited in various ways and in various institutional settings (e.g., Brown, 2003; Lam, 2018; Roever & Kasper, 2018; Ross, 2012). In their analysis, they have drawn our attention to the relationship between the task and evidence of IC that is elicited, noting possible limitations and inconsistencies of tasks that require learners to provide language samples for different communicative purposes, tasks that require interaction with test-givers who play the role of both interlocutor and evaluator, and tasks that are tightly prescribed and structured which do not allow interactional opportunities. To ensure opportunities to elicit and evaluate IC, a task-based approach is suggested in order to obtain a well-rounded picture of a test-taker's IC. The concerns laid out in the work of Plough et al. (2018) were with reference to formal standardized language testing, the purpose of which is to ensure that tasks can operationalize facets of IC and that such IC constructs captured in test-takers' performances can actually be carried out in real-world contexts. However, for standardized language testing or even formal institutional summative testing, it is often difficult to devise tasks that are not too tightly structured and prescribed. Being tests of medium to high stakes, they need to meet strict requirements of reliability, practicality and are subjected to other limitations (e.g., time, number of students, etc.)

The current study attempts to address the abovementioned issues by making use of a 'contact-assignment' (Bailey, 2003) where students converse with, rather than interview, English-speaking foreigners in a task called 'Cultural Exchange', as part of classroom formative assessment. A cultural exchange conversation allows learners to discover socio-cultural values and norms of English speakers from a different cultural background, which is not necessarily limited to cultures of native English speakers, and opens up an opportunity for learners to share their own culture and interact in the target language. This task offers the elements of active engagement and spontaneity as the learners' roles are not merely to question, but also to exercise their agency, socialize, and negotiate meaning while learning from their counterparts. To further extend our current knowledge of how low-ability learners succeed in conversation, it is of particular interest in this study

to identify the types of interactional resources displayed by low-intermediate EFL learners and how they are applied to assist them through conversations with non-Thai English speakers—foreigners who are either native speakers of English or English speakers of other languages—rather than peers, and in an informal assessment setting, rather than a standardized test context. Reflections of these students on their own performance may also shed light on which interactional resources they are aware of and which ones are of most concern to them. Thus, the research questions addressed here are:

1. What interactional features, as part of interactional competence, are displayed in the conversations between low-intermediate EFL learners and non-Thai English speakers?
2. What are learners' perceptions towards their conversations with relation to interactional features?

Literature Review

Galaczi and Taylor (2018) define interactional competence, at the macro level, as "the ability to co-construct interaction in a purposeful and meaningful way, taking into account socio-cultural and pragmatic dimensions of the speech situation and event" (p. 8). This ability is carried out, at the micro level, utilizing linguistic knowledge and resources, such as topic management, turn management, non-verbal behavior, interactive listening, and breakdown repair in order to interact and reach mutual understanding. In defining the construct of interactional competence, these micro-level skills and the macro-level elements, have been represented in the form of a tree (See Galaczi & Taylor, 2018, p. 9). Galaczi and Taylor (2018) explain that the trunk of the tree represents interlocutors within a shared time and space, with the speech situation (macro-context) and micro-level context of speech event and speech act situated at the root of the tree. Respective interactional skills (e.g., topic management) are the larger limbs with micro-features of each skill branching out into smaller extremities (e.g., initiating, extending, shifting topics, etc.).

Some other micro-features that Galaczi and Taylor (2018) suggest be added to this list of resources, subjected to further investigation, are, for

example: to assign conversational rights via asking questions or collaboratively completing turns, nonverbal features (e.g., laughter), and politeness control. As the constructs of interactional competence are still being explored, Plough et al. (2018) also suggest further research on 'the asking of questions' as a facet of IC, and whether a test task can emulate real world conditions in which questions are asked. Some of these suggested micro level features may emerge in the current study since the task is of a conversational nature.

Several studies that have contributed to our knowledge of the interactional competence of lower-performing learners are Galaczi (2013) and Gan (2010). Galaczi's (2013) research on interactional competence in a paired speaking test investigated interactional skills of test-takers across proficiency levels in an attempt to reach a more comprehensive understanding of the constructs of interactional competence that would be helpful in measuring interactional skills in speaking assessments. In doing so, her research distinguished interactional profiles of test-takers taking the Cambridge English speaking test at four different proficiency levels. Of interest in relation to this study is the profile of lower-proficiency (CEFR B1) level students who were characterized as showing low mutuality due to minimal listener support (e.g., backchanneling) and underdeveloped topics that were 'short-lived' and consisting mostly of self-initiated topics rather than development of their counterparts' previous turns. Another interactional feature characteristic of this proficiency group was abrupt or 'disjunctive' topic shifts which were thought to be the result of pressure on test takers to complete all components under time constraints. Galaczi's (2013) study provides a coherent picture of the interactional features that may be expected of learners of different proficiency levels in a standardized assessment context.

In another study, Gan (2010) compared group interaction between students distinguished into higher- and lower-scoring groups based on a standards-referenced summative oral assessment carried out in Hong Kong schools. The two groups of four students chosen for comparison in his case study were required to watch a movie and have a discussion based on what they had viewed using preset prompts assigned by their teacher. Similar to Galaczi (2013), Gan (2010) found that the lower-scoring group demonstrated

limited engagement with each other as extensions of the preceding interlocutor's input were deficient. Despite the lack of topic development and critical discussion within the group, there emerged active assistance between members who were determined to overcome their linguistic limitations by encouraging one another to co-construct. Gan (2010) characterized the style of interaction of this group as that of Lave and Wenger's (1991) concept of 'legitimate peripheral participation' where novice learners assume an expert role but can only participate to a limited degree and, thus, have only limited responsibility for the outcome. These two studies, which contributed to a description of interactional features characteristic of lower-proficiency learners, pave the way for the current study which also investigates interactional features of lower-ability learners, albeit in a different context and under different factors.

On the local front, a study related to IC and assessment was conducted by Patharakorn (2018) who investigated Thai students' performances on a multiparty role-play socializing task with the purpose of developing an assessment instrument for measuring interactional competence. Conversation data via thirty-four video recordings from the role-play task were collected from undergraduate students taking a communication course. Participants were randomly grouped and required to have a conversation, with the aim of introducing themselves as professionals and to establish business connections for hypothetical companies that they represented. Conversation analysis revealed participants taking both active speaker and recipient roles. The speaker role involved self-introductions, work talk, business contact exchange, post-conference arrangement, and closure of the role-play task, while the recipient role involved management and display of understanding, management of alignment, and display of affiliative stance. The proposed rubric assessment instrument measured both productive and recipient actions with six raters demonstrating a higher degree of inter-rater reliability when rating the productive actions than when rating recipient actions. For participants, challenging items from most to least were bringing up contact exchange, making post-conference arrangements, activity termination, affiliation display, work talk, and alignment display, whereas self-

introduction and alignment display were found to be the easiest to accomplish. Research recommendations made by Patharakorn (2018) were to investigate interactional activities other than the ones identified in her study and to observe how learners with limited linguistic abilities mobilize their interactional resources to accomplish fundamental actions.

Methodology

Context of the study

The context of this classroom-based research study was a Thai university spoken communication course offered as an elective to all undergraduate students. In the semester this study took place, 27 undergraduate students were enrolled in the course. To fulfill one of the course requirements, students participated in a 'Cultural Exchange' project in which they prepared themselves to engage in a conversation with an English-speaking foreigner in an out-of-class 'contact assignment' (Bailey, 2003). This task rendered a corpus of 27 conversations. Evaluating all the conversations, the researcher noticed that students with a lower language proficiency level were able to sustain and meet task objectives to different degrees, with several performing surprisingly better than other, more proficient, students enrolled in the course. This prompted investigation into the way these lower-proficiency students engaged in the conversation despite their relatively weak language skills.

Data collection

The Cultural Exchange Task

The overall purpose of the task was for students to practice and gain experience conversing in English with people of a different cultural background. More specifically, the objectives of the task were for students to be able to start, engage in, and end a conversation properly. In preparation for this assessment task, nine contact hours were spent on various classroom activities, such as students practicing introducing themselves properly, making small talk, speaking on various topics surrounding culture, expressing opinions, and using conversational strategies, e.g., backchanneling, interrupting, and asking for clarification.

To accomplish the task, students were reminded that the task was not an interview and were prompted to contribute actively to the conversation with their own views and experiences. Each conversation was carried out in a public space for 12 to 15 minutes, covering two prescribed topic areas: culture and controversial issues. Students were able to choose subtopics of their interest that were appropriate and within the scope. One or two classmates could accompany the student for support, but each one had to submit his or her own audio-recorded conversation with his or her own foreign guest in order to fulfill this task. While the task was of an elicited nature, once the conversations started, each one proceeded naturally with an element of spontaneity, since students could not script the conversation and their interlocutors were unknown to them prior to commencement of the task.

To meet the requirements of the project, students had to submit: 1) the conversation, submitted as an audio file, 2) a transcription of the conversations, and 3) a written reflection of students' Cultural Exchange experience. The purpose of transcribing the audio recordings was for students to notice details of how they performed during the conversations. Thus, the transcription served as a reflective task carried out in conjunction with written reflections on how students perceived their performances. The conversations on audio files, students' transcriptions of their conversations, and their written reflections, which were all counted towards a score for this Cultural Exchange project, comprised the data for analysis in this study (for information on the assessment of their conversations, see Appendix A).

Student participants

To obtain the sample of low ability students, five students—out of the 27 enrolled in this course—who received the lowest scores on role-play speaking pre-tasks given at the beginning of the course, were purposively identified for this study (for information on the speaking pre-tasks and the criteria used to assess the pre-tasks, see Appendix B).

As no standardized proficiency score was available for any of the participants, these students were identified as low-intermediate level English speakers based on language use scores (e.g., grammatical accuracy,

appropriateness, fluency) they had received on the speaking pre-task (see Table 1 for their scores on the pre-task). A rough estimate based on these scores placed their oral proficiency levels in a low-intermediate group, closely matching an A2+ to B1 level on the CEFR global scale as they were able to use a range of simple language to deal with everyday situations, express personal opinions, and exchange information on familiar topics or situations related to daily life, such as making introductions, making brief small talk, or making, accepting or declining invitations with a degree of fluency. Their speech included some grammatical errors that, in general, did not interfere with comprehension. Some hesitation related to lexical planning was evident, as well as the need for circumlocution at times. The five participants, all female, were from both the science and social science fields, namely, the Faculty of Science (3), Psychology (1), and Political Science (1). Four of them were senior students; one was a junior. A demographic form which participants completed at the beginning of the course informed the researcher that none of them had extensive experience in countries where English was spoken as the official language, and that they seldom spoke with foreigners.

Caution was taken to address ethical issues concerning data collection. Given that the conversations were carried out in public and exposed to the casual over-hearer, these conversations were considered non-confidential public talk. Moreover, foreign counterparts granted permission to students before the task proceeded and the audio recording of the conversation was made. Informed consent, following recommendations of Mackey and Gass (2016), was obtained from participants. Above all, the anonymity of both participants and foreign guests was of utmost importance and accomplished by assigning numbers and pseudonyms and not revealing information that would possibly give away the identity of the speakers.

Data analysis procedures

Prior to the main analysis, the researcher examined participants' performance on the pre-task, the Cultural Exchange conversation, and conversation data. It should be noted that both the pre-task scores and the Culture Exchange scores were awarded prior to this study. Table 1 shows

quantitative data on participants' conversations, i.e., the length of the conversation, the number of turns taken out of the total turns, the number of words spoken, and the scores they received on the conversation task. According to speaking pre-tasks scores, it can be seen that among the five participants, Fah and Karina received the least scores (7.5 points, 50% of the total), while Thaniala, Samantha and Pasha received the same scores (9.5 points, 63.33% of the total). From the Culture Exchange scores, it was interesting to see that Thaniala and Karina performed better, both receiving approximately 80%. The conversation data also illustrates that Thaniala and Karina produced more turns (136 and 113 turns, respectively), speaking more than the remaining participants and having longer conversations with their counterparts. This analysis provided background information that helped with an initial understanding of how these participants performed.

Table 1 Participant pre-task and Cultural Exchange task data

Assigned codes and pseudonyms	Speaking pre-task language use scores		Culture Exchange conversation scores		Conversation data		
	Raw score (15 points)	In Percentage (%)	Raw score (15 points)	In Percentage (%)	Length of conversation (Minutes)	Number of turns taken	Number of words spoken
2-Fah	7.5	50	10.5	70	10.05	66/132	452/1160
3-Karina	7.5	50	12.25	81.66	19.10	113/223	879/2470
4-Thaniala	9.5	63.33	12.13	80.87	17.32	136/269	1326/2395
5-Samantha	9.5	63.33	7.88	52.53	9.11	50/110	439/1323
6-Pasha	9.5	63.33	9.13	60.87	12.53	88/176	802/1816

As previously mentioned, data from three sources were analyzed: audio-recordings of participants' conversations, accompanying transcriptions, and their written reflections on the task. Four steps of analysis were carried out. Firstly, adhering to conversation analysis conventions suggested by Sidnell (2010) and Sidnell and Stivers (2013), each conversation was first listened to entirely while simultaneously reading through the rough transcriptions submitted by participants as part of the task assignment. This was considered part of data exploration. No data were available on gaze, facial expressions, or body-language, which is considered a limitation of this study. Although non-verbal data obtained through video recordings would

have yielded richer information on the interactions, use of video recordings would have been intrusive and difficult for participants to obtain from foreigners they had just met. However, the rough transcriptions made by students supplied useful information on non-verbal actions that occurred during the conversations and on areas where participants had difficulty understanding their interlocutors. This initial data exploration phase helped to organize the conversational data into 'episodes' and 'sequences' as part of preparing the data to be analyzed more systematically. Episodes are defined by van Dijk (1982) as coherent sequences of sentences of a discourse marked into chunks that carry thematic unity, while sequences are "courses of action enacted through turns-at-talk" (Schegloff, 2007, p. 2).

After this initial phase, the rough transcriptions were adjusted by making use of conversation analysis conventions (Appendix C) adapted from Atkinson and Heritage (1984) and Jefferson (2004). The purpose of this phase was "to make *what* was said and *how* it was said available for analytic consideration..." (ten Have, 2007, p. 33). Re-transcribing the audio recordings helped to elaborate, clarify, and explicate the primary evidence. This phase allowed the researcher to identify areas where there were overlaps, latches, pauses, and other delivery features that would help to develop an understanding of how participants tackled the conversation.

The third analysis then continued with reading the adjusted transcripts and listening to each episode repeatedly turn by turn to "make observations as a basis for theorizing" (Sidnell, 2010, p. 28), in particular, to determine what conversational actions existed. This observational analysis was carried out by identifying the action of statements or questions uttered. Notes were made on the transcript margins and later observations were transferred into separate documents with tables separating each utterance into categories according to conversational phenomena identified (ten Have, 2007). For instance, questions could be identified and coded as either requests for repair or repetition, follow-up questions to extend topics, or questions inquiring new information, etc. Thus, codes were assigned at the action level, rather than turn level, and this was carried out for all the utterances made by each participant. By following this data-driven analysis, interactional

features emerged under three broad areas: listener-oriented practices, speaker-oriented practices, and repairer practices.

Thematic coding of types of listener-, speaker-, and repairer-oriented practices was carried out multiple times for internal consistency by the researcher; however, this analytical coding being conducted by only one coder poses a limitation to this study. The qualitative data was complemented with quantitative data, despite the small sample size. This quantitative analysis of the conversation data was manually conducted by tallying the frequencies of specific types of interactional features for each participant, calculating the average of each interactional feature used and converting them into percentages for easy comparison of interactional features used among the participants (Table 2). This yielded a clearer visualization of the IC resources utilized by the low-intermediate participants.

Because the researcher was interested in how each interactional feature functioned in a reciprocal manner, and because the third analysis only lent itself to a "regular pattern of (inter)action" (ten Have, 2007, p. 40), a fourth procedure was warranted. This procedure was carried out by systematically re-examining each interactional feature in order to find commonalities and to build collections of actions that fit a functional specification. This procedure, referred to as 'analytic induction' (ten Have, 2007), enabled the researcher to tease out differences in the proportions of interactional features each participant utilized in a more meaningful way. This ultimately helped to make better sense of the types of contributions participants made in the conversational phenomena.

To provide more depth to the analysis of conversations, content analysis of participants' written reflections was carried out to understand participants' perceptions towards their own performance with relation to interactional resources, and to observe any other sentiments they had as they engaged in the conversation. This was carried out by identifying emerging themes and assigning coding categories from the data (Mackey & Gass, 2016), giving insight into areas of concern to these low-intermediate learners in relation to interactional features used and their performance in general.

Findings

Interactional features displayed in the conversations

The turn-by-turn analysis revealed 12 interactional features low-intermediate participants displayed in their conversations particular to this conversation task. These were divided into listener-oriented practices, speaker-oriented practices, and repair practices, and further categorized into four basic yet determining conversational actions, namely, sustaining interaction, creating mutual comprehension, inquiring, and contributing information, as seen in Table 2.

Table 2 illustrates the frequency of each interactional features displayed by each participant, the total instances of all interactional features used by each participant, and the average number of each interactional feature employed among the five participants. The instances are reported in raw counts and percentages. Interactional features found under the four basic conversational actions are delineated below.

Table 2 Interactional features of low-intermediate learners in a Cultural Exchange task

	A. Listener-oriented practices					B. Speaker-oriented practices				C. Repair practices			
Basic Conversa-tional Actions	I. Sustaining interaction	II. Creating mutual compre-hension	IV. Contributing information	III. Inquiring information	III. Creating mutual compre-hension	III. Inquiring information	III. Inquiring information	IV. Contributing information	IV. Contributing information	II. Creating mutual compre-hension	II. Creating mutual compre-hension	II. Creating mutual compre-hension	Total number of interac-tional features utilized by each particip-ant
Parti-cipants	1. Reactive devices	2. Collaborative contributions	3. Participatory extensions	4. Question extensions	5. Requests for reformation	6. Transitioned topic-initiating questions	7. Abrupt topic-initiating questions	8. Topic-initiating propositions	9. Own-topic extensions	10. Facilitative checks	11. Self-initiated repairs	12. Other-initiated repairs	
2-Fah	28 (42.42%)	1 (1.52%)	10 (15.15%)	2 (3.03%)	5 (7.57%)	5 (7.57%)	4 (6.06%)	1 (1.52%)	1 (1.52%)	0 (0%)	1 (1.52%)	8 (12.12%)	66
3-Karina	51 (41.46%)	6 (4.88%)	11 (8.94%)	15 (12.19%)	6 (4.88%)	7 (5.69%)	0 (0%)	4 (3.25%)	14 (11.4%)	1 (0.81%)	4 (3.25%)	4 (3.25%)	123
4- Thaniata	48 (29.45%)	3 (1.84%)	10 (6.13%)	3 (1.84%)	8 (4.91%)	9 (5.52%)	0 (0%)	6 (3.68%)	33 (20.25%)	6 (3.68%)	13 (7.98%)	24 (14.72%)	163
5-Samantha	21 (40.38%)	0 (0%)	3 (5.77%)	5 (9.62%)	1 (1.92%)	6 (11.54%)	3 (5.77%)	1 (1.92%)	4 (7.69%)	0 (0%)	4 (7.69%)	4 (7.69%)	52
6-Pasha	59 (50.43%)	9 (7.69%)	0 (0%)	4 (3.42%)	12 (10.26%)	7 (5.98%)	8 (6.84%)	1 (0.85%)	5 (4.27%)	2 (1.71%)	6 (5.13%)	4 (3.42%)	117
Mean (%)	41.4 (40.83%)	3.8 (3.2%)	6.8 (7.2%)	5.8 (6.02%)	6.4 (5.91%)	6.8 (7.26%)	3 (3.73%)	2.6 (2.24%)	11.4 (9.02%)	1.8 (1.24%)	5.6 (5.11%)	8.8 (8.24%)	104.2 (100%)

I. Sustaining interaction

It was found that, to sustain interaction, participants took a less active listener role using *(1) Reactive Devices*. These reactive devices or reactive

tokens (Clancy, Thompson, Suzuki, & Tao, 1996) were displayed in various forms such as continuers (e.g., uh-huh, mm-hmm), acknowledgements (e.g., yes, yeah), brief assessments (i.e., wow), or echoes, repeating the speaker's words (Gardner, 2002). These interactional features were mainly listener-oriented and utilized as a means of showing engagement and/or encouraging conversation.

As seen from the quantitative analysis, the Reactive Device was the most dominant interactional feature (40.83%) used among this group of participants, with the majority comprising echoes and reactive tokens. Qualitative analysis revealed instances where a number of reactive tokens were employed as continuers without participants genuinely understanding what was being said. The following excerpt where Pasha interacts with a German guest illustrates this. Departing from the conventional way of transcription, the overlapping reactive tokens made by Pasha are embedded within her guest's speech bracketed in bold to illustrate her close involvement.

Excerpt 1 6-Pasha

091 Pasha:		Ah, okay. Like when:: if I *wisit* the Germany, would you recommend me what
092		place is (.) I must (.) go.
093 Guest 6:		Um, I think you hafta go to Berlin,
094 Pasha:		[Berlin?] The [capital?] or:::
095 Guest 6:	→	[Berlin.] [Yes.] The capital city, uh:: the Brandenburger Tor is very nice, **[Mm-hmm?]** to see, (.) and also uh because I dunno know the English word for
	→	this is. It's called the Reichtag, **[Mm-hmm?]** well ah (.) the politics is also *wery*
	→	interesting **[Mm hmm,]** and. (.) Yah in my eyes, we don't have so many beautiful uh **[Uh-huh.]** places $in Germany,$ ((laugh)) **[Uh-huh?]** For us - in my
	→	opinion, erm. (.) Frankfurt's also *wery* nice, the skyline – t'see the skyline, from the European Central uh Tower, (.) **[Mm-hmm,]** a::nd (.) then...

Pasha engaged in this part by heavily relying on continuers to encourage the guest to speak. Because her guest used the German pronunciation when giving examples of important monuments, it seemed that her responses, spoken mostly with a rising intonation, functioned more as continuers rather than confirmations of comprehension. Although Pasha did not really understand what her interlocutor had said, as she would later reveal in her written reflection, using these reactive tokens allowed Pasha to actively engage by encouraging conversation.

Echoes as reactive tokens were used in a similar manner. In some instances, though participants were able to produce an exact copy of the speaker's utterance, they may not have genuinely understood the word. Hence, echoing, without knowing the meaning, served as an interactional feature to mask their lack of intersubjectivity in an attempt to align with the interlocutor.

Laughter as a reactive device also played an important part in the conversations between participants and their guests, as it functioned to relieve tension and create alignment between speakers, as illustrated in Excerpt 2.

Excerpt 2 5-Samantha

025 Samantha:		Ah::: uh okay (.) I will (.) I will talk about (.) uh::: (.) $sorry for$
026		my [EngLISH.]
027 Guest 7:		[Take your time.] NO. My Thai is worse.
028 Samantha:	→	((Laugh)) Okay. Uh I will talk about uh do you like to watch movies?
		...

Reactive tokens found in this study are distinguished from collaborative contributions, mentioned below, as they worked to acknowledge but not necessarily to align, affiliate or endorse the interlocutor's stance (Stivers, 2008). That said, in this excerpt, we see how Samantha responded with laughter to her American guest's light-hearted and witty reply, as she was encouraged to take the time needed (Line 028) to find the right words. By responding with laughter, Samantha created alignment with her guest, alleviating any existing tension. Laughter was present in all

five conversations analyzed, playing an important part in creating alignment and, in some instances, even establishing affiliation among the participants of diverse cultural backgrounds.

Reactive tokens are the easiest interactional resource for low-intermediate language learners, as they do not require much language knowledge to produce yet allow learners to participate in the conversation to a certain degree. In other words, these reactive features functioned as the oil that sustained the advancement of the conversation. Reactive Devices were the only strategies categorized under 'Sustaining interaction'.

II. Creating mutual comprehension

Listener-oriented practices that worked to create mutual comprehension included *(2) Collaborative Contributions* and *(5) Requests for Reformation*. As active recipients, participants responded to their counterparts with *(2) Collaborative Contributions* which comprised assessments, rephrasing, or 'collaborative completions' (Gardner, 2002). These responses or 'alignment moves' (Dings, 2014) endorsed what the speaker had previously said, and were evidence of listener comprehension, confirmed understanding, and alignment (Dings, 2014). This recipient practice is illustrated in Fah's conversation with her Dutch guest in Excerpt 3.

Excerpt 3 2-Fah

037 Guest 10:		= I have seen Wat Arun, =
038 Fah:		= Wat Arun. yes.
039 Guest 10:		and uh:::=
040 Fah:	→	= Wat Phra Kaew.=
041 Guest 10:		= Wat Pho,
042 Fah:		yes,

In Line 040, Fah took an active-listener role, using local knowledge she had of temples to help add to the list of possible temples her guest may have visited. Although it was not the name he was searching for, it can be seen how enthusiastically she volunteered, latching her answer on to his

filler. In Excerpt 4, Thaniala participated by completing her guest's answer in an overlapping manner (Line 149).

Excerpt 4 4-Thaniala

145 Guest 22:		I-I was confused too when I came here and I saw all the people uh by taxis
146		doing this ((Guest gestures)) like uh:: they wanna get uh:: a cab.
147 Thaniala:		Ah. yes yes.
148 Guest 22:		And in [Holland.=
149 Thaniala:	→	[You don't? =
150 Guest 22:		= In Holland, we do [THIS ((Guest gestures 👌)) when we wanna get a cab.
151 Thaniala:		[Oh. ((laughs))

These two excerpts provide examples of participants making collaborative contributions without any intention of entirely assuming the floor. As Mandelbaum (2013) explains:

> "A speaker who is aligned as a recipient of an ongoing storytelling usually enacts this alignment by producing talk that is hearably relevant at the possible end of a unit of the ongoing story, and does not launch or participate in a competing action" (p. 500).

Another type of collaborative feature found in the data was rephrasing and making assessments, or evaluating the content of their interlocutors. Although no new information was given, actively providing input in this manner transformed a passive recipient into an active participant and demonstrated that the listener was on the same page. It can be seen from the quantitative data, however, that these collaborative contributions were not prevalent, accounting for only 3.2% occurrences on average.

As a listener-oriented practice, participants also displayed *(5) Requests for Reformation.* The term 'reformation' is applied here as it encompasses listener-responsible moves that request the interlocutor to make adjustments of any kind (e.g., repair, clarify, rephrase, reformulate, or recast) when mistakes are made or when incomprehension occurs. Incomprehension may

be due to interlocutor's pronunciation, the participants' own incognizances of words or concepts, or a failure to follow the speaker's flow of words. This feature, accounting for an average of 5.91% occurrences, was utilized by participants to different degrees depending upon whether it was required. Whether or not participants were able to request repair, however, takes less precedence over whether repair was requested when needed. Excerpt 5 shows Samantha at a loss for words and Patricia, her friend, alleviating the awkward situation.

Excerpt 5 5-Samantha

041 Guest 7:	→	Um. For us, it does happen, …
042		Um a lot of places to rent, is very very expensive, especially in XXX,
043		And when you get out of college, or high school,
044		you might have a lot of debt to pay for school,
045		so I know a lot of people who move back home with their parents
046		to live with them. to save up money and pay off their debts …
047 Samantha:	→	Ah.
048 Guest 7:		I haven't seen a documentary about it though. I know it's bigger in Japan.
049		XXX and they have a big it's called um: NEET, It's like no education,
050		[employment, yeah.]
051 Patricia:	→	[Ah. I see.]=
052 Guest 7:		= and it's the same thing when people will just live in the
053		house just live with their parents for a long period of time.
054 Samantha:	→	Uh. (.) okay. (#3) (…) ((laugh)) (…) Uh:: okay uh::=
055 Guest 7:		= Am I talking too fast? [Can I slow down?]
056 Samantha:	→	[((laugh))]
057 Patricia:		[(…) it's OK] =

Line 041 shows Guest 7 responding to Samantha's question about whether children in his culture continue to live with their parents even when they have already become adults. There were no recipient tokens from Samantha, except for a brief "Ah" (Line 047). Guest 7 continued to

elaborate, still without any reactive devices offered by Samantha. Only Patricia pitched in with acknowledgement in Line 051. In Line 054, there was an awkward 30-second break, and undecipherable talk after the guest had completed his explanation. The guest, detecting misalignment, responded by offering to speak more slowly when Samantha burst into what sounded like a nervous laugh (Line 056). Whether Samantha understood her guest or was unsure how to respond, a request for reformation may have been warranted. Nonetheless, the conversation did not end in a complete breakdown. As Pitzl (2010) asserts, not all cross-cultural miscommunications need repair and not all miscommunications result in negative outcome. This excerpt is contrasted with Karina's Excerpt 6, in which she admits not being able to follow her guest and, consequently, requests aid.

Excerpt 6 3-Karina

096 Guest 19:		=So you see, [It's two things]
097 Karina:		[Ye::s,]
098 Guest 19:		very separate - different. In Algeria, erm::: you free, as I told you,
099		to practice as you want to erm::: your religion, but in
		France, °it's difficult. It's more close.°
100 Karina:	→	Difficu::lt?=
101 Guest 19:		=Yes, to practice. Many peoples *aboard* don't know that thing
		but it's - it's
102		true. In France, you cannot practice err: specially when you're
		Muslim, you
103		cannot really practice your religion (.) *crrectly*. Yeah,
104 Karina:	→	(...)
106 Guest 19:		°Understand? (.) or° You understand me?
107 Karina:	→	No, I don't $understand.$ [((laugh)) ((laugh))]
108 Guest 19:		[$OH sorry.$]
109 Karina:	→	You can explain [me again?
110 Guest 19:		[Um ° I mean° it's a – it's a difficult thing, Um::: in uh:: Algeria. ...

With a rising intonation, Karina echoed the word, "difficult" (Line 100), prompting Guest 19 to provide further explanation. Karina reacted with unclear utterances in the background and admitted, laughingly (Line 107), that she did not comprehend, finally requesting reformation (Line 109). The

15 turns that followed (Lines 110 onwards) were devoted to clarifying Guest 19's point. Despite the arduous work on Guest 19's part, mutual understanding was developed in transit, resulting in a rich exchange of ideas and leading to mutual understanding and affiliation as a result of the requests for reformation.

Repairer-oriented practices that functioned to create mutual comprehension included *(10) Facilitative Checks, (11) Self-initiated Repairs,* and *(12) Other-initiated Repairs* (Kitzinger, 2013). These devices worked to ensure intersubjectivity between speakers. Self-initiated repairs (5.11%) were made by participants out of their own volition, while other-initiated repairs (8.24%) were made by participants upon request from their foreign interlocutors or perhaps instigated by their interlocutors' facial expressions, which were not observable in this study. These interactional strategies occurred when questions were being asked or as topics were being extended.

Although few in number, found in the data were the occurrences of facilitative checks (0.96%) or 'proactive strategies' (van Batenburg et. al., 2018), in which participants, Thaniala (5 occurrences) and Pasha (2 occurrences), would check whether their interlocutors were following or whether they needed any explanation before proceeding. In Excerpt 7, Thaniala displays both other-initiated repairs and facilitative checks when she brings up the subject of fried insects. Line 062 illustrates Thaniala's first display of a facilitative check when she asks if her guest is familiar with fried insects and then again in Line 086 when she asks whether her guest has been to Khao San Road. Lines 064 and 066 show Thaniala making repairs initiated by her guest's incomprehension. Line 064 illustrates her failed attempt to repair by repeating the word, "fried", without the /fr/ consonant cluster, and Line 066 shows how she finally conveys her message using pictures to help.

Excerpt 7 4-Thaniala

061 Thaniala:		OK. and for me in Thailand I think about ah in- ah *fied* insect.
062	→	Do do you know it or have you ever try it.
063 Guest 22:		Sorry can you erm =
064 Thaniala:	→	= *fied fied* insects insect ah =
065 Guest 22:		= yes, fly like zzzzzzz ((clapping sound as if to swat an insect))

066 Thaniala: → the *fied* erm /diaao/ I have (.) picture -- (6) can you see this, {Student shows pictures.}

.....

084 Thaniala: = yes yes uh:: if but if you wanna try it you can find it at Khaosan Road.=

085 Guest 22: = Yes. Khaosan Road. =

086 Thaniala: → = Have you been there,

087 Guest 22: Yeah. I was there YESterday and they were walking with these [sticks and ah (...)

088 Thaniala: [Yes.

This excerpt demonstrates how meaning is negotiated and how both interlocutors try to accommodate each other. *Facilitative Checks* are supportive and accommodating gestures that facilitate the interlocutors' understanding, and ensure that interlocutors are following and informed. Mutual comprehension can be created via listener-oriented and repairer-oriented interactional displays.

III. Inquiring information

Listener-oriented practices that functioned to inquire were: *(4) Question Extensions.* To seek information, participants taking the recipient role produced *(4) Question Extensions*, questions related to the ongoing topic that had the effect of extending and developing the interlocutor's topic. This accounted for an average of 6.02%. In Excerpt 8, Karina made small talk with her Algerian-French guest to create rapport before the cultural exchange part of the conversation. Both speakers spoke with a slightly heavy accent.

Excerpt 8 3-Karina

014 Guest 19: *Ze* first month I was traveling, -I-I did uh: south of Thailand, and south of Asia? I::

015 we::nt in Malaysia, and Singapore? and after I come back in- in Bangkok, yes,

016 a::nd e:::r... I was looking for a job, °and I found a job. So I'm staying here.°

017 Karina: → You found a [job?] What [do you job?]

018 Guest 19: [Job.] [Teaching job.] Teaching job. XXX ...

...

031 Karina: → XXX °yes.° And you work with uh teenager, kids or:::=

032 Guest 19: =Kids? A::nd err::: *ze* weekends, like err:: Saturdays, I teach teenagers in agency, 033 XXX

034 Karina: Oh. That sounds interesting::,

035 Guest 19: It's very interesting. yeah.=

036 Karina: → =Do you love kid?

037 Guest 19: Uh- YES -uh- I DO. YEAH.

038 Karina: [$I love kid too,$]

039 Nadia: [Awesome. That's awesome.]

040 Karina: Yes? I *yude* to {used to} uh I *yude* to be a *wolunteer* that'*sh* helping a kid,=

Excerpt 8 shows Karina taking part as an active listener and topic manager simultaneously. Her questions in Lines 017, 031, 036, which were directly related to the ongoing story, invited Guest 19 to further expand and develop the conversation.

Speaker-oriented practices that functioned to seek information, were: *(6) Transitioned Topic-initiating Questions, and (7) Abrupt Topic-initiating Questions*. Assuming the role of speaker in control of the floor, participants used topic-initiating questions which worked to introduce new topics or switch topics. They also had the effect of extending and developing the topic, moving the conversation forward, and could be executed either smoothly or abruptly. It was evident that all participants were capable of initiating topics smoothly using *(6) Transitioned Topic-initiating Questions* (7.26%) with 'pre-sequences' (Sacks, 1992) between episodes, but some still displayed *(7) Abrupt Topic-initiating Questions* (3.73%). In Excerpt 9, Samantha provided a transitioned topic-initiating question when she wanted to learn about the lifestyle of her American guest. In Line 028 she asked a question that served as a bridge to her topic about adults living with parents, which she mentioned having seen in some movies (Line 030). This was also linked to her intended question in Line 038.

Excerpt 9 5-Samantha

028 Samantha:	→	((Laugh)) Okay. Uh I will talk about uh do you like to watch movies? …
029 Guest 7:		Mm-hmm,
030 Samantha:	→	Uh:: I see that um movie uh (.) uh (.) they show about adult
031		people, who (.) still (.) live (.) with their parent.
032 Guest 7:		Okay. D'you mean a documenary?
033 Samantha:		Uh okay I (.) it (.) it's (.) ah (.) er::: araiwa {Speaking in Thai}
034 Patricia:		If someone who are already [adults,] but they still live with [parents…]
035 Guest 7:		[Uh-huh,]
036 Patricia:		[(……)]
037 Guest 7:		[Yeah,] [Mm-hmm,] [Mm-hmm,]
038 Samantha:	→	It is uh it uh it is real for your.
039 Guest 7:		Uh. for us, it does happen. …

This was evidence that Samantha was able to make transitioned questions; however, in Excerpt 10, when Samantha had just met her guest, she responded with only an "Ah." (Line 007) and then abruptly changed the topic.

Excerpt 10 5-Samantha

004 Samantha:	→	How long have you been in Thailand? =
005 Guest7:		= I got into Thailand yesterday, but I was in Thailand in Kraabi, Phuket, Koh Yao 006 Yai and Phi Phi for two weeks,
007 Samantha:	→	Ah. okay. uh::: uh do do you know about Thai food?

Especially during this icebreaking phase when interlocutors are starting to warm up to each other, and, because it was Samantha who initiated the topic (Line 004), a lengthier follow-up move could have helped to develop better mutuality.

Contrary to Samantha, we see Thaniala smoothly transitioning into a new topic. In Excerpt 11, after Thanalia actively responds to Guest 22 during the ice-breaking phase, she makes a pre-announcement (Line 031) that lays the groundwork for the following sequence in Line 033 where she makes the shift to a new topic by asking a question.

Excerpt 11 4-Thaniala

025 Thaniala:		and ah:: (.) How long you stay here in-in Thailand, *wus* you mind me asking.
026 Guest 22:		Erm I-I don't know exactly, but I think er:: 2 weeks,
027 Thaniala:		2 week,=
028 Guest 22:		=yes. and after that I'm going to La-os °and ah Cambucha. Vietnam°
029 Thaniala:		/ɑ:ʔ/ {"Oh" in Thai} Lao Cambu aah Cambucha it's ah: (.) Cambodia.=
030 Guest 22:		=Cambodia. [Yes,]
031 Thaniala:	→	[°and°] *Viesnam* okay. and:: you - d- um: (.) So ah:: I would like to *ark* you, I would like to talk, *ekchange*, conversation *wis* you about culture.=
032 Guest 22:		=OK,=
033 Thaniala:	→	=So. You from Holland right, Ah:: What some thing that ah *thas* foreigners *wisiting* your country *mut* might be ah:: surprised or shock at, would you (.) tell me?

Two out of the five low-intermediate participants were able to conduct their conversation tasks without any abrupt topic shifts, bringing each topic to relative closure before starting a new one. The remaining three participants made some abrupt topic shifts without bringing prior turns of their guest to proper closure before proceeding to a new topic.

IV. Contributing information

Only one listener-oriented practice, namely, *Participatory Extensions (3)*, functioned to contribute information. They accounted for an average of 7.2% of all the interactional features displayed. Unlike *(2) Collaborative Contributions,* which helped to sustain the conversation with assessments, rephrasing, or 'collaborative completions', *(3) Participatory Extensions* were distinguished by new information that was supplemented by the listener. New information added on to the development of the speaker's ongoing topic, thus extending the conversation in short increments that were no longer than one or two sentences. Particular to this culture exchange context, extensions were achieved by providing useful information, making

recommendations, or adding personal accounts or opinions, as exemplified in Excerpt 12.

Excerpt 12 2-Fah

049 Guest 10:		Uh::: I go to Kraabi, uh::: I go the ocean first (.) Time? In uh:: Kraabi? I will go to Ao-Nang, Railey beach, and I will go (.) to uh Koh Phi-Phi, with the boat, and I will come back (.) for see Kraabi again.
050 Fah:	→	°Uh-huh,° Uh: about Phi Phi *aisland*, there are many °tsk° place to (.) snorkeling,
051 Guest 10:		Yeah?
052 Fah:	→	It - it was beautiful.
053 Guest 10:		Okay.
054 Fah:	→	Uh: I think - I - I have to go (.) there one a day.
055 Guest 10:	→	You did snorkeling?
056 Fah:	→	Yes. I am scuba *daiwer*.
057 Guest 10:	→	Ah. Scuba *driving*. Okay. Maybe I can do that also. Yeah.

As observed, Fah informed her guests that snorkeling was possible on the island (Line 050), gave her own assessment of Phi Phi Island (Line 052), and mentioned her wish to pay a visit there one day (Line 054), adding a personal touch to the dialogue. These are considered participatory extensions as they were "other-initiated" (Galaczi, 2013) stemming from Guest 10's prior proposition. The extension was taken up by the guest, as can be seen in Lines 055 and 057, where the guest continued to expand, moving away from the initial proposition.

Speaker-oriented practices that functioned to contribute information included: *(8) Topic-initiating Propositions and (9) Own-topic extensions.* To contribute to the conversation as speakers, participants utilized *(8) Topic-initiating Propositions* (2.24%), assuming the role of speaker. This feature was evident when a participant extensively shared information. All participants, except Samantha, employed this strategy using pre-sequences, pre-expansions or the "pre-pre" (see Schegloff, 2007), smoothly transitioning to new topics and using declarative sentences rather than interrogatives (See Excerpt 13 for an example of a topic-initiating proposition).

To contribute to the conversation, participants displayed a final feature evident in the data: the *(9) Own-topic extensions* device (9.02%), which extended and developed the speaker's initial Topic-initiating proposition. Excerpt 13 Lines 102, 105, 106, 108 show how Thaniala extended and elaborated on her proposed topic (Line 091).

Excerpt 13 4-Thaniala

091 Thaniala:	→	Yes yes. Uh uh okay let's move on to next question, Uh have you ever felt *confue* by action of someone from another culture, /baeb/feel [*confue* from someone,
092 Guest 22:		[err:: 093 *Confue*?
094 Thaniala:	→	*Confue* u::m
095 Guest 22:		Confused?
096 Thaniala:	→	Confused. Just like=
097 Guest 22:		= you don't know what the other person erm is saying to you.=
098 Thaniala:	→	= Uh:: [action action.
099 Guest 22:		[Uh-huh, erm and from another culture you mean uh this culture or::
100 Thaniala:	→	Another. Um have you ever, Oh okay I-I will give =
101 Guest 22:		= My English is also not that very good I'm [I'm it's not my first language
102 Thaniala:	→	[((laugh)) Me too. so so erm I-I will give a 103 example.
104 Guest 22:		Mm hmm,
105 Thaniala:	→	I don't have uh much - I didn't have much time to travel for another [country.]
106		But I just read uh some book, it's call India diary book,
107 Guest 22:		[Mm-hmm,]
108 Thaniala:	→	It *abous* uh a man. He is Thai he travel to India in India culture, ah. …

With her failed attempt to invite her guest to be the first to speak (Line 091), Thaniala proceeded to share her story by deploying a "pre-pre" in Line 102, announcing the coming of her story and illustrating her Topic-initiating proposition. The following span of ten turns beginning from Line 105 was dedicated to Thaniala's story of how a person from one culture was misled by the body language of a person from another culture. This

sequence (Lines 102 onwards until the end of her story), therefore, was identified as an extension of the topic she initiated in Line 091. Indeed, this sequence may have partly served to repair Thaniala's initial question in Line 091. However, as contributing to the conversation was part of the cultural exchange task requirement, this sequence was interpreted as Thaniala's extension of the topic she herself initiated. Also, Lines 094, 096, 098, were evidence of Thaniala's immediate attempt to make repair initiated by Guest 22 in Line 92. Own-topic extensions found in the present data covered a span of many short turns or were made up of one long turn. The longest turns, counted as Turn Construction Units or TCUs (see Schegloff, 2007), were made by Karina (5 TCUs) and Thaniala (11 TCUs).

Distinguishing interactional features used among participants

It is worth noting that several participants, although categorized under the same language ability group, performed better than the rest, as observed from their Culture Exchange conversation scores (Table 1). Further quantitative investigation was conducted to compare interactional features that participants utilized under each of the four underlying conversational actions. This analysis revealed that the dominating factor discerning those who performed better was the high frequency of participants' contributions to the conversation, as seen in Figure 1. Figure 1 illustrates the proportion of interactional features employed by each student under each conversational action.

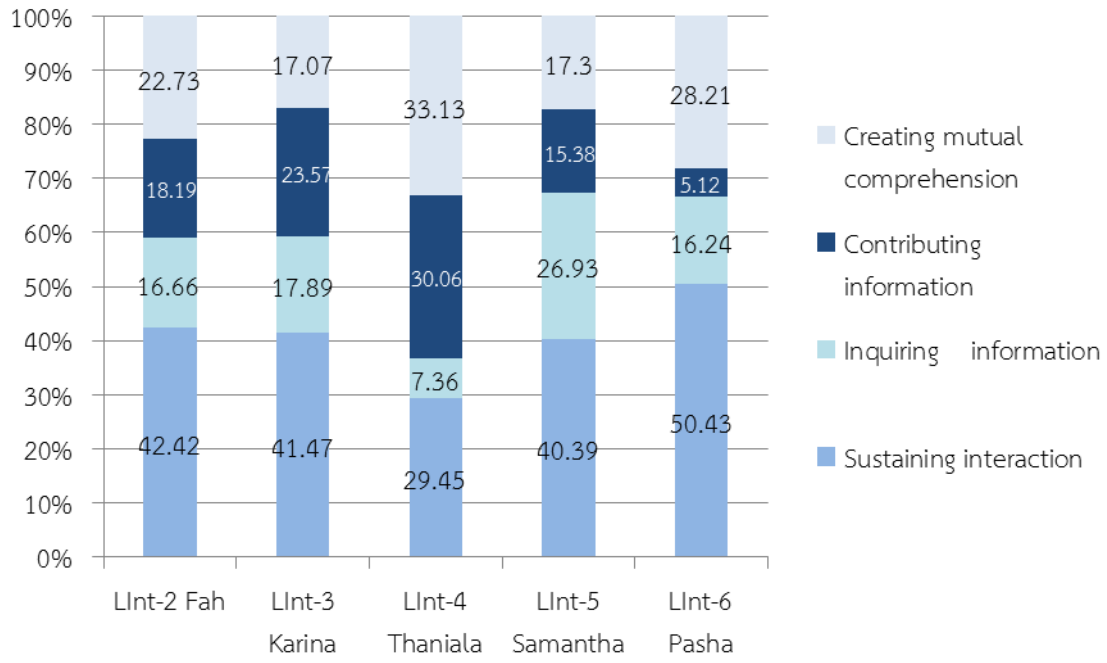

Figure 1 Distribution of interactional features underlying the four basic conversational actions

Thaniala and Karina displayed a high frequency of contributions to their conversations (30.06, 23.57% respectively), while Fah and Samantha made fewer contributions (18.19, 15.38%, respectively). Pasha made the fewest contributions to the conversation (5.12%, which was 13.34% less than average). Contributive interactional features being the determining factor of strong performance was expected, since the purpose of the task was for learners to exchange with their guest. Thus, interactional features that extended and developed the conversation contributed to the overall success of this task.

On the contrary, unsuccessful conversations seemed to be characterized by an imbalance of interactional features under each conversational action. Pasha over-utilized reactive devices, speaking mainly to sustain the conversation (50.43%) and contributed only minimally to the conversation (5.12%). Meanwhile, Samantha—not counting reactive devices,

which were the most widely used feature to sustain interaction (with an average of 40.83%)—dedicated most of her actions to inquiring (26.93%).

Interestingly, Thaniala and Pasha displayed a high frequency of 'creating mutual understanding' actions (33.13% and 28.21% respectively). This was due to one salient factor—the lack of intelligibility between interlocutors. Pasha found difficulty in understanding her German guest's speech. Conversely, Thaniala's guest found her speech to be challenging and often unintelligible. Therefore, the frequency of interactional features utilized under this conversational action is dependent upon the needs of 'speakers as listeners' and must work alongside 'sequence expansions' or topic extensions, which provide the base content that is significant to participants in relation to indicating stance, managing affiliation, alignment, or intersubjectivity (Stivers, 2013). Hence, the content available under the 'contributing information' conversational action accounts for much of the mutuality developed between interlocutors.

Participant perceptions towards their conversations with relation to interactional features

Keywords or phrases as the unit of analysis that emerged from participants' written reflections concerned: topic development, topic shift, listener engagement, and politeness control (Brown & Levinson, 1987). Confidence was an additional element mentioned as affecting their performance. The following excerpts give insights into participants' perceptions towards interactional resources used in their conversations. Spelling and grammatical errors were left as is. Some bracketed letters and words were added by the researcher for clearer understanding, and italics were used to add emphasis to specific words in the quotations.

1. Topic development

All five participants reflected on topic development, stating their regret of not contributing when the occasion arose. Four participants indicated that this was largely attributable to nervousness. Fah stated that, "When I start[ed] the conversation, *I'm very excited so my brain was blank. I*

forgot everything that I have prepared. ☹" Samantha mentioned, after learning that her foreign guest used English as his native tongue, that she "was very nervous" and wanted to leave.

The inability to draw on culture-specific knowledge or general knowledge that would add interest to the conversation put the participant in a difficult position. Pasha wrote in her reflection that "my guest was interested in culture because he said he was surprised about culture. *But I could not explain to him…. There is only once time I explained him about Songkran festival but it is just a little*." It seemed that lack of vocabulary and high cognitive demands required to express ideas rendered some participants unable to contribute substantially to the conversation. When discussing culture, one strategy used to cope with lack of vocabulary was to show pictures on the cellular phone to aid topic development. Thaniala explained, "There are the pictures to show him *and it easy to make him understand or see the real things that I talk about.*"

The same participant, Thaniala, did not let language deficiency prevent her from having equal participation in the conversation. With invested effort, she expressed herself as best as she could. She explained,

> "…my English skill is bad. There are a lot of gramma mistake and something that why I think he must know. But I really try to explain him and finally he got it. I didn't give up. It shows I can have communication with foreigners even I'm quite bad in English." (4-Thaniala)

This also illustrates effort on the foreign guest's part; he also sought to understand the participant. Without effort exercised by the student, however, their conversation may not have been successfully actualized. This highlights the importance of co-construction of meaning and taking action to create mutual comprehension via repairs, facilitative checks and other interactional devices. Thaniala's account also supports quantitative findings that showed a high frequency of interactional features she used to create mutual understanding in her conversation.

2. Listener engagement

All participants mentioned listening as being a challenge. In fact, some revealed that lack of topic development was attributable to their limited listening skills. Upon reflection, these participants knew that where they should have asked for clarification, they either utilized acknowledgement tokens or shifted topics instead:

> "*...there are many words and sentence that I do not understand, so that is the reason that I can't talk and ask him after he said.* May be I should [have] ask[ed] him to repeat it again, but I don't. It is because I want to finish it fast." (5-Samantha)
>
> "There are too many backchanneling sounds, many dead air also. *And I always acted like I got what he talked but in fact I don't really understand....* There is only once I told him that I don't understand and asked him to say it again." (6-Pasha)

Participants failed to respond to guests and extend ongoing topics because of their inability to comprehend their foreign guest, as it has been noted that speakers can only move the conversation forward if they have understood what their interlocutor has said (Roever & Kasper, 2018).

On the other hand, participants who performed better mentioned using interactional strategies to help them better understand their counterpart. In her reflection, Karina stated she was focused on maintaining the flow of the conversation by observing her guest's body language, paying special attention to what her guest was saying, and asking questions when she did not understand.

> "*I try to keep conversation flow and smooth. By asking questions or tell my view. Sometimes, I don't know the word or meaning. But I try to understand from body language that they express. Moreover, I can learn from it. .... I pay attention on this conversation. ... And when I wasn't understanding I said no. ... And in this conversation I pay attention to listen and think. I restatement a little bit when I don't understand.*" (3-Karina)

Being task-focused and wanting to connect with and learn from her counterpart helped Karina to overcome her limitations. Similarly, Thaniala tried to understand her guest's speech, referring to the initial part of her conversation with her guest, Jeremy (his pseudonym). This was when she repeatedly asked him to pronounce his name because she could not distinguish the sounds and found them difficult to say herself. She wrote, "…I like this part because *I didn't ignore his answer I really want[ed] to know it* …"

From these two accounts, it appears that interactional strategies used to alleviate listening barriers throughout the conversation are evidence of the degree of listener engagement, as well as the *degree* of emphasis placed on and the priority given to understanding the interlocutors' message. Thus, it could be said that successful listener engagement requires effort in noticing body language, giving undivided attention to the speaker, being genuinely interested in what the interlocutor has to say, and asking relevant questions.

3. Topic shift

Two participants mentioned abrupt topic shifts in their written reflections. Being aware of changing topics abruptly, Pasha reported, "*When I changes topics, I did suddenly*. No the word 'by the way' that I should say…" Explaining more in detail, Karina unveiled her inability to express herself in the target language in real time. This she solved by changing the topic, stating that:

> "*I never explain[ed] that I want to talk [what I wanted to say] because I don't know what [how] I should answer or explain. I changed the topic*. [For] Example when the gues[t] told me about rice those in Thai culture people like to eat. I think in mind yes of course. Rice is always a part of Thai food. Because rice is a main food [our main staple]. In each day most of Thai people must eat rice at least one meal per day or third [three] meal[s]. I want to ask and explain every topic." (3-Karina)

Evidently, not only were abrupt topic shifts strategies induced by participants to cope with instances of incomprehension of what the

interlocutor had said, but they were also strategies used when participants did not know how to express themselves due to their language limitations.

4. Politeness control

Under the theme of politeness control, Fah expressed her pride in not forgetting to say thank you. This seemed important to her as she mentioned this twice in her reflection, stating: "...I'm not forget to [say] thank you [to] him..." and "...I thank to him *again* and told him 'Have a nice trip in Thailand'." As for Thaniala, she regretted asking her guest if he had a nickname like Thais who commonly take a nickname in addition to their first names. She wrote:

> "Do you have another name? *It's the bad question.* I ask[ed] him because There are some my friends or my teacher....They first name hard to call [say] but [so] they have another name. It['s] easier. *But in this case, I should not ask him like this. I feel sorry*." (4-Thaniala)

In relation to these two accounts, it appears that politeness control is an area of concern even for learners of lower ability whose priority would be to produce the language accurately in order to clearly express themselves.

5. Confidence

Although the main purpose of the analysis of written reflections was to uncover participants' views related to interactional strategies employed, confidence was a salient factor mentioned as either helping or hindering their success in achieving the task. Fah reported that, to her, the most challenging part was to initiate the conversation. Commenting on her second attempt to speak to a foreigner, she wrote, "...for *this [second] time* the best thing for me is *I can [was able to] start the conversation.* ☺"

Karina mentioned gaining increasing confidence as a result of approaching more than one foreigner to complete the task, stating, "*I'm dare to talk with foreigner[s].* Because I talk[ed] to many foreigners in [for] this assessment." For Samantha, lack of confidence was an obstacle to performing well. Although Samantha and her conversational partner appeared

to be interacting quite well, exchanging stories of their travel mishaps in a light and good-humored way, she recounted:

> "XXX is very friendly and a kind person. I knew that he perhaps saw me getting *nervous*, he tried to *listen me and encourage me to speak in English, and so I felt comfortable in our conversation, at the late of conversation I enjoyed and forgot the feeling about tense and nervous*. … And at the late of conversation, we talked about traffic jam and footpath in Thailand, …. I prepare I should say about the solution … but I don't. I think that it is because I really want[ed] to end the conversation and I got nervous and can't stand [it] anymore. *For these reason[s], I think the big problem is my self-confident… I should try to improve my confident*. In this project, it make[s] me know that foreigner[s] is [are] not…scary but something that make me scare[d] is my mind." (5-Samantha)

This account helped to elucidate the quantitative findings of Samantha's short conversation, which lasted less than the targeted time, and the limited interactional features Samantha displayed, particularly her lack of collaborative contributions and participatory extensions that would have shown better alignment with her guest. Thus, confidence, in addition to the four basic conversational actions discussed previously, can be considered a key factor propelling interactional features during the conversation.

From participants' written reflections, it could be deduced that four variables, namely, nervousness, having limited knowledge on the topic, insufficient vocabulary, or inadequate listening skills could, to an extent, be compensated with interactional features utilized, given that confidence, determination and persistence are also present as elements that drive the interaction forward.

Discussion

Qualitative findings from the conversational data have delineated 12 interactional features particular to these EFL learners' conversations. They have been organized, under four basic conversational actions, into listener-, speaker-, and repair-oriented roles. To summarize the interactional features found in this Cultural Exchange conversational task, the researcher would like

to put forward an approach to how the mechanics of interactional elements might work, as illustrated in Figure 1. This diagram is divided into four sections representing the underlying conversational actions: to sustain interaction, create mutual understanding, inquire, and contribute information, with 12 interactional features placed in corresponding areas. The diagram is also divided into three layers: the innermost ring represents the listener role; the middle ring represents the speaker and/or turn manager role; and the outermost ring represents the role of repairer. The interactional features based in each section may function to fulfil the corresponding conversational action.

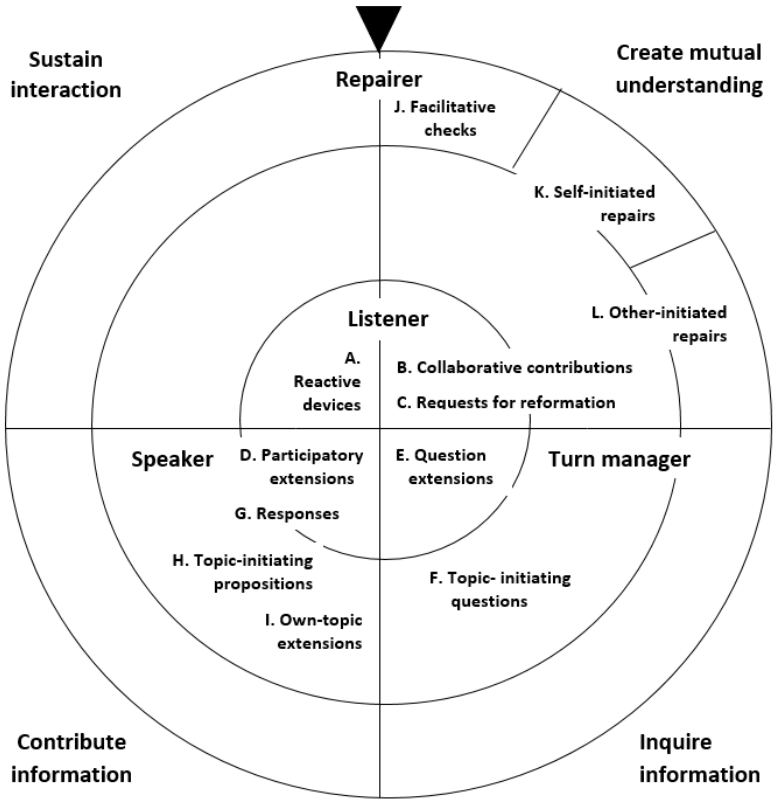

Figure 1 Interactional features, communicative roles and basic conversational actions

The diagram, with each interactional feature set in this neutral position, might be compared to a combination lock with rotating rings. If a conversation begins, for example, with Ms. X deploying a Topic-initiating proposition (H), Mr. Z could assume the floor entirely as speaker and present

a lengthy Response (G) to contribute as much information as he feels is needed. Alternatively, as a recipient, he could supply a short Participatory extension (D) if he would prefer to briefly join the conversation. If he needs to inquire about what Ms. X had said, he could utilize a Question extension (E), or he could merely acknowledge her with a Reactive device (A) (e.g., laugh, echo, etc.) which will not disrupt the 'speakership' of the primary speaker, Ms. X. He may even display alignment, producing a Collaborative contribution (B). If, during the conversation, a communication breakdown occurs, he might request Reformation (C). As turn-manager/speaker, Mr. Z could also opt to change the topic entirely using a Topic-initiating question (F) or a Topic-initiating proposition (H), whether that change is abrupt or transitioned. Lastly, after having initiated a new topic, Mr. Z could take up the role of speaker and add on to the initiated topic using Own-topic extensions (I). Thus, the innermost dial (the listener role) and the middle dial (the speaker/turn manager role) can be rotated to the arrow indicator at the top (12 o'clock position) when it is at work. Similarly, the outermost dial can be rotated to the arrow when the action serves to co-create mutual understanding by unlocking communicative difficulties via Facilitative checks (J), Self-initiated repairs (K) or Other-initiated repairs (L). Hence, the dials can be rotated, depending on the basic actions taken and context (e.g., speech event), and will return to their original positions once the transaction or sequence is completed. It should be noted that 'Responses (G)' has been added to the diagram as an interactional feature and placed in an overlapping position, being both a speaker- and listener-oriented practice. This is because "speakers become hearers as hearers become speakers" (Viechnicki, 1997, p. 105) as they alternately take turns at talking.

Whereas Galaczi and Taylor (2018), in defining constructs of interactional competence, represented interactional features in the form of a tree, the interactional elements in this study figuratively take the form of a combination lock. This illustration is by no means definitive but offers an analysis of interactional resources from a different perspective based on basic underlying conversational actions. The spaces on the dials remain to be filled in as our understanding of interactional features in relation to

communicative roles and basic underlying actions in conversation become more fully understood. For example, non-verbal features, which were not available in this study, could perhaps be placed in the top left hemisphere in the area of Sustaining Interaction. Turn management, which was not analyzed in this study, could refer to how promptly the dials on the interactional diagram are turned or the interactional strategies employed. Recasts and joint utterance creations, which were found in Galaczi and Taylor's (2018) representation of IC, could be placed in the top right hemisphere under the area of Creating Mutual Understanding, while their 'initiating' and 'shifting' topics would be equivalent to Topic-initiating questions (F). 'Backchanneling' and 'continuers' would be equivalent to Reactive devices (A). Interlocutors, making use of the different combinations on this lock appropriately, given whatever social context they are in, could unlock any misunderstanding that arises, creating alignment or even displaying affiliation. To address Plough et al.'s (2018) concern of whether to explicitly test certain features of IC or to do so more holistically, this diagram, with four main components may be used as a tool to view IC on a more global level.

Quantitative findings helped to elucidate the proportions of interactional features produced by each of the participants. Naturally, the type and frequency of interactional features displayed varied from conversation to conversation depending on the context of the speakers, the length of the conversation, and the intricacies of each interaction. The conversational actions, exhibited via interactional features utilized, seem to have derived from the speakers and the diligence with which those speakers sought to attain mutual understanding. Thus, one may not be able to conclude what a balanced proportion of interactional features used to render successful interactions should be; however, to maintain interactional ease, participants in a face-to-face interaction must do their part by "attending to the right things at the right moments and conveying just the right degree of involvement" (Sidnell, 2010, p.7). Nonetheless, for this culture exchange task, what set the more successful interactions apart from the less successful

ones was the higher frequency of features deployed under the 'contributing information', as the task required equal participation of both interlocutors.

Moreover, it was found that abrupt topic switches were absent from some of the participants' (i.e., Karina's and Thaniala's) conversations. This was unexpected, as it contradicted Galaczi's (2013) finding that disjunctive topic shifts are typical of lower-performing students' interactional profile. Although the other three lower performing participants, Fah, Samantha and Pasha, displayed noticeable abrupt changes of topics, Thaniala and Karina did not. The reason for this contradictory outcome could be attributed to motivation or willingness to communicate (MacIntyre et al., 1998), as both Thaniala and Karina remained determined to align with their interlocutors by keeping to the topic and managing topic changes in a smooth and accommodating manner. Motivation and willingness to communicate, which are believed to be important factors for effective intercultural communication, are, however, elements beyond the scope of this study. Nevertheless, although there is insufficient evidence from this study to make any conclusion about the motivation of participants, with further research, there may be evidence to suggest that the four basic conversational actions found here could actually be the motives underlying the interactional features employed.

A closer look at one of the better performing low-intermediate participants, Thaniala, sheds light on how interactional resources were implemented to the fullest capacity. Thaniala demonstrated her ability to deploy all the interactional features in this study without any abrupt topic shifts and with a number of facilitative checks on top of other repair moves. Questions arise, then, as to whether facilitative checks or 'proactive strategies' (van Batenburg et al., 2018) could well be part of basic interactional competence (BIC) (Kecskes et al., 2018) at work. Thaniala's poor language proficiency and heavy Thai accent made the conversational exchange challenging for her sympathetic interlocutor. However, by drawing on available interactional resources, Thaniala was ultimately able to convey her messages and comprehend her interlocutor, and vice versa. This may also reflect the possibility of BIC contributing to the success of this

conversation, but not without evidence of acquired interactional competence (AIC), as Thaniala made use of some formulaic expressions, such as “Would you mind me asking?” (Excerpt 10). This warrants further investigation into how BIC can be clearly distinguished from AIC and, if they are distinguishable, how they can be elicited and work together to foster successful intercultural communication.

Quantitative analysis also revealed that reactive devices were the most prevalent interactional feature utilized overall. In general, participants seemed to actively display recipient-actions, making listener-oriented practices more dominant than speaker-oriented practices in this study. This was in contrast to Galaczi’s (2013) findings where lower-proficiency level learners produced a higher frequency of speaker moves and a low frequency of listener supporting moves. This may have been due to three reasons. First, reactive responses, like acknowledgement tokens, were included as one of the criteria used in the assessment of this Cultural Exchange task as it was the only evidence of listener support on audio recording. Also, for some participants, there may have been a tendency to overuse these devices partly to mask their lack of intersubjectivity. This may be considered a useful interactional resource when they were not able to respond otherwise. Thirdly, in a high-stakes speaking test, such as in Galaczi’s (2013) study, participants may have put more emphasis on the speaker, rather than listener role, in order to display their speaking ability.

Focusing particularly on laughter as a reactive token, qualitative analysis in this study illustrates how it was utilized to overcome lack of intersubjectivity. Laughter evident in participants’ conversations may have been emitted as a tension-reliever, or it may have possibly stemmed from the fun-loving nature of Thais. Creating a friendly and amusing atmosphere and using intensifiers and spontaneous expressions is typical of Thai social life and characteristic of rapport management in Thai culture (Aoki, 2010). Thus, laughter might be considered an interactional feature displayed naturally among Thais. At the same time, however, laughter may be unique to the individual; hence, laughter itself as a non-verbal reactive feature, would be

difficult to operationalize in assessment scales due to its culture-specific and idiosyncratic nature.

In terms of topic development, the present study, in line with Gan's (2010) study, found that topic development was as much a challenge as was critical discussion for these lower-ability performers, as their limited language ability may have prevented them from having an in-depth conversation. It was also found that the participants overall utilized a higher frequency of other-developed topics (i.e., participatory extensions and question-extensions) than of self-developed topics (i.e., topic-initiating propositions, own-topic extensions). This was contradictory to Galaczi's (2013) and Gan's (2010) studies which revealed lower-performing participants demonstrating mostly self-initiated topics as opposed to the development of their counterpart's previous turns. The difference in these findings may point to the influence of task characteristics or task variables (e.g., task design, time allotment, etc.), contextual factors (e.g., high-stakes vs. low-stakes assessment; institutional setting vs. outdoor contact assignment), or the foreign interlocutors, who brought with them different speaker variables (e.g., accents, different socio-cultural backgrounds)—elements which all have bearing on the interactional moves participants implemented in this study.

Findings from participants' written reflections, in general, align with the quantitative findings of the study and reveal that participants were aware of their interactional shortcomings. Two salient concerns brought up by all participants were the challenges as listener and the inability to externalize their thoughts. Similarly, Galaczi's (2013, p. 561) results indicate that lower-performing learners have "difficulty keeping both the speaker and listener role active concurrently" which she attributes to the high cognitive demands of decoding their partners' speech and composing their own contributions. Findings from the present study indicate that it could be one reason or the other; learners may either understand their interlocutors but are unable to respond, or not understand their counterparts at all.

Topic shift was mentioned in participants' written reflections as a strategy they resorted to when they were unable to respond to their interlocutors. Utilizing abrupt topic shifts seemed to help them sustain

interaction but did not help with displaying alignment or intersubjectivity. Interestingly, no noticeable abrupt topic shifts were detected in the qualitative analysis of Karina's conversation, although Karina herself stated in her reflection that she utilized topic changes when she was not quick enough to respond. Indeed, while researchers (Sacks, 1992; Jefferson, 1984) have described stepwise topical movement as being a general feature of conversations, other researchers, Holt and Drew (2005) state that "topic transitions in conversations rarely have clear-cut boundaries" (p. 41) and "finding an analytic basis for separating one from another has not proved straightforward." (p. 39). Abu-Akel (2002) also stated that topic shifts are often subtle and "do not require the speaker to explicitly indicate the transition point" (p. 1798). Hence, especially for assessment purposes, more work would be required in unravelling the complexities of effectively operationalizing topic changes and turn management in assessment scales for different interactional tasks.

Politeness control was also mentioned indirectly in one participant's reflection. Politeness control may be related to what Kecskes et al. (2018) referred to as 'acquired interactional competence'. They have stated:

> 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. (Kecskes et al., 2018, p. 91)

It would then seem to follow that politeness control could be closely related to pragmatic knowledge reflected in the speaker's use of conversational protocol (e.g., pre-expansions, such as pre-invitations, pre-offers or other preliminaries; mitigation; post-expansions, etc.), politeness markers, and formulaic expressions employed throughout the conversation, all of which help to mitigate potential threats to face and reflect sensitivity to the context and its formality. Further multi-disciplinary research, drawing on current knowledge in the fields of conversation analysis, politeness in pragmatics, language instruction, and language assessment, may shed light on

the specifics of politeness control in conversation, how it could be taught systematically, and how it may be operationalized in assessment scales.

In addition to interactional resources, confidence was a significant factor mentioned by the poorer performers in their written reflections. For example, Fah, who performed adequately, stated that she was able to accomplish this task with confidence. Samantha who performed quite inadequately, on the other hand, showed signs of anxiety during different parts of her conversation and admitted lacking confidence. This echoes findings from Rao (2002) who noted that it is lack of confidence, rather than language proficiency, which hinders learners from speaking with foreigners. Other studies (e.g., Park & Lee, 2005; Tridinanti, 2018) looked specifically into the relationship between confidence, anxiety and oral performance in EFL learners. Park and Lee (2005) found that the more anxious learners feel about speaking English, the more poorly they perform regardless of their language proficiency. They also found that the more confident and positive learners are, the better they can perform orally, especially when using communication strategies and applying social conversation skills. Further, in Tridinanti's (2018) investigation on anxiety and self-confidence in speaking achievement, she found that self-confidence is a significantly stronger predictor of speaking achievement than speaking anxiety. This confirms how confidence works as an essential element, in conjunction with interactional features employed under the four basic conversational actions, which make successful conversations possible.

Conclusion

This study focused on interactional features that low-intermediate Thai EFL learners employed during a low-stakes "Cultural Exchange" conversation task. The study revealed 12 interactional features displayed in learners' social interactions with non-Thai speakers of English and offers a template of how these interactional constructs may be employed based on four basic conversational actions. Moreover, it provides evidence and explanation for low-intermediate learners' shortcomings in their moment-by-moment interactions and the interactional moves they deployed to manage the situational contexts. Findings also suggest the possibility of 'basic

interactional competence' (Kecskes et al., 2018) coming into play, as some participants were able to utilize a range of interactional features to productively interact with their foreign counterparts despite their language deficiencies.

However, the study was not without limitations. Firstly, the sample size did not allow for strong statistical support that might lead to more useful generalizations. The coding procedures were carried out solely by the researcher, which poses a concern, even though attempts were made to address issues of reliability. Also, some areas were left unaddressed, such as interlocutor gender, which was not taken into account. Only one participant, Karina, spoke to a female guest, while the remaining participants interacted with male counterparts. This may have had implications for her strong performance; having a female counterpart may have afforded her greater ease of bonding and reaching mutual understanding with her partner. In addition, the opening and closing of the conversations could have been studied in more detail to reveal other interactional moves, as the demand for pragmatically challenging speech acts are expected, such as requesting or inviting guests to engage in the conversation, ending the conversation, or taking leave. Thus, future research could be conducted in these areas for a more generalizable, and comprehensive understanding of interactional features of low-ability EFL learners. Further investigation into BIC and AIC, such as how they can be clearly distinguished and how they can be assessed in EFL learner conversations, would also contribute to a more comprehensive and refined understanding of interactional competence and its constructs.

Despite its limitations, findings of this study reiterate the value of integrating similar cultural exchange tasks into EFL speaking or conversation classes to facilitate the development of specific interactional resources that EFL learners need because this type of task enables elicitation of a variety of IC features which are transferrable to authentic social contexts. Moreover, the opportunity to interact with people from different cultural backgrounds and reflect on the conversation requires learners to take control of the conversations, exercising speaker agency to the best of their abilities, and it exposes EFL learners to intercultural-socialization. This is especially crucial

for low-ability language learners, as it has been shown that IC can be acquired via interaction and participation with more experienced speakers (He & Young, 1998). Similar cultural exchange tasks put novice learners in the position of 'legitimate peripheral participation' (Lave and Wenger, 1991) where they must inevitably participate and take full responsibility for the outcome. Thus, providing opportunities for face-to-face interaction with speakers of English from different cultural backgrounds is one potentially valuable option. In cases where out-of-class contact assignments are not possible, arranging conversational activities via virtual platforms may provide an alternative means for learners to speak with foreigners. To be most effective, conversations should not be limited to a one-off task; rather, if it is feasible, more than one conversational task that can elicit a variety of interactional features should be undertaken in order to help improve learner interactional competence.

In terms of instruction, learners should be made aware of listener-, speaker-, and repair-practices, as it is this combination of practices/roles that makes for effective conversational interaction. Along with reinforcement of active listening, instructors could point to the importance of noticing body language cues to help with understanding foreign interlocutors, keeping in mind the conversational action of creating mutual understanding. For listener-oriented practices, lower-ability learners may first be trained to encourage and sustain conversation using reactive devices. However, they should aim to employ collaborative contributions and participatory extensions in order to make shared understanding known to the interlocutor. Eventually, learners should practice using question extensions or follow-up questions during interaction, particularly extensions that develop the ongoing topic. Active use of collaborative contributions, participatory extensions and question extensions are especially crucial during the initial phase of cultural exchange conversations of this sort, as their use effectively contributes to building rapport. Small talk or networking speaking tasks present opportunities for learners to practice these strategies. Listening practice should also be included as an integral part of speaking classes, as we now know that for learners to produce contingent responses, which are more

accurate indicators of listener comprehension and engagement than reactive tokens (Plough et al., 2018), they will first have to understand what is being said. Comprehension of spoken language can be attained with rigorous listening practice.

As for speaker-oriented practices, because lower-ability language learners remain challenged with structuring their own utterances within real time constraints, they may be able to only successfully maintain supportive and friendly discourse, rather than engage in critical in-depth discussion. Therefore, speaking tasks that allow learners to prepare their content, ideas and keywords beforehand are likely to be helpful. Structured speaking tasks requiring learners to expand and develop topics in a critical way, such as discussing current events, social issues, or lifestyle trends may be carried out following such preparation. To develop speaker- and turn manager-oriented interactional features, such as topic-initiating questions, topic-initiating propositions, and own-topic extensions, low-intermediate language learners should be given opportunities to lead small-group discussions and practice speaking in longer turns to expand on what they have prepared to say, without the help of a script. EFL learners should also be allowed to code-switch to maintain fluency when assuming the speaker role, while more advanced learners can help with missing vocabulary in a collaborative learning atmosphere.

To develop repairer-oriented practices, effort and determination seem to play essential roles in generating interactional moves (e.g., facilitative checks, self-initiated repairs, and other-initiated repairs). Unless EFL learners set clearer goals for themselves to attain mutuality with their foreign interlocutors, they may not be able to display these interactional features. Thus, instructors should instill in learners the priority of creating reciprocal understanding and, whenever needed, applying interactional features that lead to mutual comprehension, including requests for reformation. In an EFL learning environment, where learners speak the same native tongue, learners may not encounter any difficulty understanding each other or may overlook instances of misunderstanding when practicing amongst themselves. Thus, instructors would have to devise scenario-based exercises or activities that

would require learners to produce and practice using repairer-oriented interactional features automatically.

Confidence was found in this study to be a key factor empowering learners to put their interactional competence to work. Thus, instructors are encouraged to raise learners' awareness of the significant impact that self-confidence has on interactional competence in particular, and on speaking skills in general. In addition, instructors are advised to create supportive learning environments where learners can also cultivate their own confidence and develop a positive mindset towards speaking with foreigners. Instructors should also organize speaking activities comparable to those learners will encounter in real world contexts and recommend other platforms where learners can practice having conversations outside of class. Learners should be encouraged to seek, on their own, opportunities to interact in the target language so they may gain experience and, in turn, boost their confidence.

In relation to classroom assessment, the interactional features found in this study could be further adapted into a checklist or rubric form that could be useful for observing which interactional features learners apply and how learners engage in conversations. It is also suggested that instructors conduct more than one conversation task to assess interactional ability so that learners recycle and internalize interactional skills with repetition. Including certain interactional features as constructs should be carried out with caution. For example, including reactive devices as a criterion of assessment in a conversation task may cause learners to be too focused on producing such features to gain scores. They may lose touch of authentic communication which takes place. As Young (2011) has stated, "The command of language form is not enough to ensure successful communication" (p. 426). After all, the heart of a good conversation lies in its affiliative strength, which cannot be found in empty tokens, but through the effort of co-constructing mutual understanding. Thus, items or descriptors of interactional features included in such an evaluation rubric should not be too specific, and tasks should allow opportunities to use interactional features with regard to the four underlying basic conversational actions.

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Appendix A

Assessment of the Cultural Exchange conversations

The conversation audio recordings were submitted as part of the project requirements and were evaluated as a performance task, worth 15 points, using a holistic rubric consisting of the following criteria:

- Content (85%)

  - Interactive (5%): based on evidence of backchanneling, offering comments, asking for clarification as needed, or asking follow-up questions

  - Informative (40%): based on how substantial participants were in sharing cultural experiences and opinions on issues, and on their overall contribution to the conversation

  - Preparation (40%): based on the quality and appropriateness of selected topics and task achievement

- Language (15%)

  – Overall accuracy of sentence structure and vocabulary use, fluency, and appropriateness and overall politeness

Appendix B

The speaking pre-tasks

The speaking pre-tasks were the assessments used in the class project preceding the Culture Exchange project. These assessments tasks required students, in pairs, to randomly pick from sets of unknown social scenarios (e.g., making small talk with strangers; making, accepting, and declining invitations.) Students were given 1-2 minutes to read and understand the situation. They were allowed to ask questions to clarify the situation but were not allowed to hold or read from the role card during the interaction. Students were required to play the roles indicated on the role cards. Each student gets their turn to randomly pick a role card, thus having opportunities to demonstrate their spoken ability in all designated roles. The following scenario, which closely resembles the Cultural Exchange task, assessed the students' ability to start a conversation with strangers, engage in a brief small talk and end the conversation. The criteria of assessment of the speaking pre-task included: 1) Use of appropriate expressions to start and end the conversation 2) Grammatical accuracy 3) Fluency 4) Engagement and convincing interaction.

Sample task

Carrying conversations

Directions: With a partner, act out the situation. You (Student A) open the conversation. Engage in a brief conversation/small talk with your partner (Student B). Student B closes the conversation. Then reverse roles using another role card. You may NOT look at the role card during the assessment NOR use exact wording from the card.

Situation A:

You are out in a park looking for a place to sit. The sun is shining brightly, the sky is blue and there is a cool relaxing breeze. All the benches are occupied, but you see a space next to a wo/man who is sitting alone.

Appendix C

Transcription conventions adapted from Atkinson and Heritage (1984) and Jefferson (2004)

[ ]	Beginning and end of overlapping utterances
=	A turn latched immediately to a subsequent utterance with no overlap
(.)	A brief pause
(#)	A timed pause in seconds
CAPITALS	Emphatic stress
Underline	Stress on syllables
Italics	Mispronunciations transcribed as heard
…	Utterances removed
XXX	Utterances removed to protect privacy of the speaker
.	Falling intonation
,	Slightly rising intonation, not necessarily a question
?	Slightly stronger rising intonation, not necessarily a question
-	False start or stammer, e.g., then-then-then he said
--	Cut-off of sound
,,,	Voice trailing off
$…$	Smiley-voice or speech with suppressed laughter
#…#	Creaky voice
°…°	Soft voice

:	Extension of vowel sound with extra colons indicating longer stretch
(( ))	Non-verbal actions, e.g., ((laugh)) or non-verbal elements indicated by the participants in their transcriptions, e.g., ((☺))
(...)	Doubtful transcription or indecipherable part of the conversation
{ }	Comments made by participants in their rough transcriptions or transcriptionist comments

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