

# Improving English conversation skills through explicit CA-informed instruction: A study of Thai university students

การพัฒนาทักษะการสนทนาภาษาอังกฤษด้วยการสอนการสนทนาแบบประจักษ์ชัดตามแบบ CA: กรณีศึกษานักศึกษาไทยระดับมหาวิทยาลัย

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## Abstract

To develop human resources capable of effectively using English as a lingua franca, especially in response to the ASEAN Community integration, the approach to teaching English conversation needs to be made more efficient. This study aims to explore the effectiveness of the CLT-oriented versus the Conversation Analysis (CA)-informed approaches to teaching English conversation. Thirty-six Thai non-English major undergraduates with elementary English proficiency (A2), that enrolled in an English conversation course at Prince of Songkla University, were selected and equally divided into (1) the experimental group with explicit CA-informed conversation teaching and (2) the control group using the typical CLT-oriented conversation teaching. The findings showed that the experimental group outperformed the control group and the impact of the CA-informed approach was moderately large. An evaluation questionnaire completed by the participants confirmed that explicit CA-informed conversation instruction helped improve their English conversation and increased their confidence in speaking English. It is recommended that teachers of English conversation acquire a comprehensive knowledge of CA concepts so that they can raise learners' awareness

of conversation features so as to ultimately enhance their interactional competence.

**Keywords:** Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), Conversation Analysis (CA), English conversation skills, EFL classroom, interactional competence (IC)

## บทคัดย่อ

การปรับเปลี่ยนกระบวนการสอนการสนทนาให้มีประสิทธิภาพมากขึ้นนับเป็นสิ่งที่จำเป็นอย่างยิ่งในการพัฒนาทรัพยากรบุคคลให้สามารถใช้ภาษาอังกฤษเป็นภาษากลางในการสื่อสารได้อย่างมีประสิทธิภาพ เพื่อรองรับการเข้าสู่ประชาคมอาเซียน งานวิจัยนี้จึงมุ่งศึกษาเปรียบเทียบวิธีการสอนการสนทนาแบบเน้นการสื่อสารกับวิธีการสอนซึ่งอาศัยการวิเคราะห์บทสนทนา Conversation Analysis (CA) กลุ่มตัวอย่างที่ศึกษาเป็นนักศึกษาไทยระดับปริญญาตรีที่ไม่ใช่เอกภาษาอังกฤษจำนวน 36 คนซึ่งมีสมรรถภาพทางภาษาอังกฤษอยู่ในระดับพื้นฐาน ผู้วิจัยได้แบ่งนักศึกษาในกลุ่มดังกล่าวซึ่งลงทะเบียนเรียนรายวิชาการสนทนาภาษาอังกฤษ ที่มหาวิทยาลัยสงขลานครินทร์ ออกเป็นกลุ่มทดลองซึ่งได้รับการสอนการสนทนาแบบประจักษ์ชัดตามแบบ CA และกลุ่มควบคุมซึ่งได้รับการสอนที่เน้นการสื่อสารตามปกติ ผลการศึกษาพบว่านักศึกษาที่ได้รับการสอนการสนทนาแบบประจักษ์ชัดสามารถสนทนาภาษาอังกฤษได้ดีกว่ากลุ่มที่เรียนการสนทนาตามแบบปกติ และจากการวัดค่าขนาดอิทธิพลทางสถิติปรากฏว่าการสอนแบบดังกล่าวมีประสิทธิภาพค่อนข้างสูง ทั้งนี้ผลการสำรวจความคิดเห็นของผู้เรียนยังยืนยันอีกด้วยว่าการสนทนาแบบประจักษ์ชัดช่วยทำให้ทักษะการสนทนาดีขึ้นและมีความมั่นใจในการพูดมากขึ้น ด้วยเหตุนี้ ผู้วิจัยจึงเสนอแนะให้ครูผู้สอนการสนทนาภาษาอังกฤษทำความเข้าใจและนำแนวคิดเกี่ยวกับการสนทนาแบบ CA มาใช้ในการสร้างความตระหนักถึงเรื่องธรรมชาติของการสนทนาเพื่อเพิ่มขีดความสามารถในการปฏิสัมพันธ์ให้แก่ผู้เรียน

**คำสำคัญ:** การสอนภาษาแบบเน้นการสื่อสาร การวิเคราะห์การสนทนา ทักษะการสนทนาภาษาอังกฤษ ชั้นเรียนภาษาอังกฤษในฐานะภาษาต่างประเทศ ความสามารถในการปฏิสัมพันธ์

## Introduction

Since the world is becoming smaller thanks to modern technology and a fast growing global economy, more and more people across the globe are using English as a vehicle of communication with companies and businesses favoring employees who can speak English. Additionally, English is an official language in world organizations such as the UN, UNESCO, and the EU, and more recently English has been adopted as the official working language by the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) community (Kirkpatrick, 2012). In 2015 and 2016, the new phenomenon which will make every member government in ASEAN pay even more attention to English learning and teaching is the ASEAN Economic Community (AEC), which brings more challenges and competition. The AEC will lead to competitive movements in the economy, services and workforce within the ASEAN community. Given the important role of English, the policy of every member nation in ASEAN has been to push their citizens to learn English and to promote English language teaching (ELT), highlighting the important role English will play within this new community.

In Thailand, where English is acquired as a foreign language, the Thai government has made substantial efforts to improve its citizens' English speaking skills. New policies have been set to improve ELT by launching English programs taught by native speakers of English and promoting approaches such as communicative language teaching (CLT) or student-centered approaches (Punthumasen, 2007 cited in Kongkerd, 2013). According to Nonkukhetkhong, Baidauf Jr., & Moni

(2006), CLT is one of the educational reforms considered to be at the heart of the country's development into a sustainable knowledge-based society embracing English as a global language. It appears more promising than the traditional approach because in CLT teachers have to change their roles from tellers to facilitators or guides and from materials users to teaching-material makers. The aim is to create a learning environment which fosters meaningful student-centered interactions so as to boost learners' communicative competence and their resourcefulness for life-long autonomous learning.

While CLT has become the most preferred and widely adopted approach currently employed in Thai ELT (Methitam, 2009 cited in Methitham & Chamcharatsri, 2011), Thai students' proficiency in English still remains unsatisfactory (Atagi, 2011; Bruner, Shimray, & Sinwongsuwat, 2014; Khamkhien, 2010; Kongkerd, 2013; Noom-ura, 2013; Phuetphon, Chayanuwut, & Sitthitikul, 2012). The students' poor English has in fact been hotly debated on the Internet, calling the application of CLT into question (Teng & Sinwongsuwat, 2015). Some researchers have argued that CLT fundamentals are too broad to be implemented (Aliakbari & Jamalvandi, 2010; Islam & Bari, 2012), while others have remarked that CLT cannot fit all EFL classrooms in Asian contexts such as Thailand (See Ellis, 1996; Jeon, 2009; Le Ha & Chowdhury, 2008; Lin, 2009; Lochland, 2013; MacDonald, Thiravithul, Butkulwong, & Kednoi, 2002; Saengboon, 2002; Tan, 2005).

Saville-Troike (2006) strongly argues for a combination of different methods in English language teaching to overcome limitations of a particular approach. Brouwer and Wagner (2004 cited

in Seedhouse, 2007) propose that language teaching should focus on interactional skill development and move away from individual cognition and the input-output approach and toward learning discrete linguistic items. Many researchers argue that when it comes to teaching speaking, Conversation Analysis (CA), a sociological approach to the study of talk-in-interaction which originated in the work of Harvey Sacks and his collaborators, Emanuel Schegloff and Gail Jefferson in the 1960s, can be especially useful (Barraja-Rohan, 1997, 2011; Richards & Seedhouse, 2005; Markee, 2009; Seedhouse, 2007; Wong & Waring, 2010).

Markee (2009) claimed that CA can offer a clear and comprehensive picture of how learners use the structure of conversation as a method to acquire comprehensible input and produce comprehensible output. CA can be employed to help teach L2 interactional competence (IC) (Barraja-Rohan, 2011) and boost interaction-based learning (Martin, 2000). As it has been able to uncover oft-seen but unnoticed natural features of conversation and make explicit its underlying sociocultural norms, CA can offer not only a firm direction in conversation teaching but a unique, innovative tool that can be used by teachers to achieve their speaking teaching objectives (Barraja-Rohan, 1997, 2011; Wong & Waring, 2010). However, in the Thai EFL context, there is a dearth of research investigating the effectiveness of CA in improving students' speaking skills. In fact, none of the research papers related to English conversation teaching (out of 107) listed in the Thai Library Integrated System (ThaiLIS) (2015) has employed CA to teach English conversation, or considered CA as a

tool to address critical problems in CLT.

### **Research Questions**

This paper aims at investigating the effectiveness of CA-informed conversation teaching and attempts to answer the following questions:

1. Can the CLT-oriented conversation teaching and explicit CA-informed conversation teaching approaches improve the students' conversation performance?
2. If so, in what respects do the two approaches improve the students' performance?
3. Which teaching approach better contributes to the improvement of the students' English conversational skills?

### **Literature Review**

#### **1 Communicative Language Teaching (CLT)**

To help students communicate effectively in real situations outside the classrooms, CLT is a corrective approach to more traditional ones that have apparently failed to produce students capable of saying what they want to say in real situations. Nunan (2001a) argues that the traditional methods are ineffective in helping students authentically communicate beyond the classroom. CLT is an approach to the teaching of L2 which puts emphasis on communication as both the goal and means of L2 learning. In this approach, students usually work in pairs or groups. Authentic materials and tasks are employed, and the main four skills (speaking, writing, listening and reading) are integrated from the beginning (Wong & Waring, 2010).

According to Richards (2006), the primary goal of CLT is to develop communicative competence in order to employ language for various purposes and functions; adjust the use of language according to different contexts; create and comprehend various kinds of texts, and keep communication going despite having limited language knowledge. Brown (2000) maintains that CLT techniques are organized to get students involved in the sociolinguistic, authentic, functional use of language for meaning-making purposes. Littlewood (1981) contends that CLT can develop students' communicative abilities and help them produce both functional and authentic language. CLT activities offer students a context for various communicative functions and opportunities for genuine interaction.

However, Teng and Sinwongswat's (2015) review of critical weaknesses of CLT especially within the Thai ELT context emphasizes Bax (2003)'s comment that CLT has proven inadequate to help students effectively communicate in cross-cultural settings due to its failure to take into account such factors as learners' needs, wants, course materials, school and classroom cultures, and learning preferences. Additionally, CLT has yet to address the acquisition of interactional competence (IC). He and Young (1998) suggested that communicative competence oriented to CLT be replaced by IC since individuals acquire a practice specific competence through social interaction with others rather than by themselves in a vacuum of social practices. Especially when it comes to conversational competence, Sun (2014) calls for greater attention to interactions between learners as it is co-constructed by all the speakers involved

in the conversation. Seedhouse (2004) argues that in CLT L2 classroom, interaction is taken into account from only invariant pedagogical concepts or a structural approach, not from any sociolinguistic or communication theory.

Moreover, CLT does not appear to adequately highlight the features of everyday conversations. Norms of interactions are often ignored and no firm direction is given to conversation teaching. Barraja-Rohan (1997) and Wong and Waring (2010) remarked that features of everyday conversation are often undervalued in conversation teaching books claiming to focus on oral use. Language teachers have not been made aware of how spoken interaction works and their conversation instruction does not reflect the way real conversation takes place. Therefore, when they teach conversation, teachers feel perplexed and just rely on communicative activities, their own imagination and a selection of predesigned activities prescribed in the teachers' manuals (Barraja-Rohan, 1997).

## **2 Conversation Analysis (CA)**

CA makes it possible to analyze, illustrate, and explicate how people interact with each other in and via talk-in-interaction (Betz & Huth, 2014). It has particularly unveiled four basic notions related to the organization of interaction sequences: turn-taking, adjacency pairs, preference organization, and repair. CA can be used as a pedagogical tool to teach interactional competence, and a diagnostic tool to reveal and diagnose sources of communication problems (Fujii, 2012; Martin, 2000). Below are some of the fundamental concepts of Conversation Analysis.



## 2.1 Adjacency pairs

An adjacency pair is a type of utterance which conventionally comes in pairs. For example, questions are followed by answers; greetings are returned by greetings; and invitation is followed by acceptance/declination (Hutchby & Wooffitt, 1998). Cook (1989) maintains that in adjacency pairs, there is often an option of two possible answers (e.g. a response to a blame might be a denial or admission), and if there are no answers, it is interpreted as rudeness, lack of attention or deafness. However, adjacency pairs do not always occur in order (question – answer, but question –question). There might be an insertion sequence or side sequence (See also Hutchby & Wooffitt, 1998; Seedhouse, 2004; Wong & Waring, 2010).

For example, A: Did you enjoy the meal?

B: *(Did you?)*

A: *Yes.*

B: So did I. (Cook, 1989, p.54)

## 2.2 Turn-taking

Turn-taking is an important component of interactional practices and can vary from culture to culture. Unintentional mistakes in cross-cultural interactions can arise if these differences in turn-taking are not fully understood (Wong & Waring, 2010). According to (Hutchby & Wooffitt, 1998, p. 47), in conversation, there are three basic aspects: “(1) turn-taking occurs; (2) one speaker tends to talk at a time; and (3) turns are taken with as little gap or overlap between them as possible”. Uncovered through CA, turn-taking comprises two important components: turn-constructive and turn-allocational components.

The turn-constructural component consists of the building blocks of turns called turn-constructural units (TCUs), each of which has a possible completion point with transitional relevance place (TRP), which makes speaker transition relevant (Hutchby & Wooffitt, 1998; Seedhouse, 2004). The turn allocational component, on the other hand, involves speakers' exercising their rights to take turn at a TRP via current-speaker-selects-next, next-speaker self-selection, or current-speaker continues (See Seedhouse, 2004; Wong & Waring, 2010).

### 2.3 Preference organization

Preference organization is an integral part of an adjacency pair. It does not refer to liking or disliking something, but refers to responses treated as preferred or dispreferred based on social norms. Typically, there are different possible second parts in adjacency pairs; for instance, a question may be followed by an answer or not. An invitation or offer may be followed by acceptance (a preferred action) or declination/refusal (a dispreferred action) (Hutchby & Wooffitt, 1998; Seedhouse, 2004). Cook (1989) defines the notion of preference organization with respect to commonality; that is, the response which most frequently occurs is considered a preferred action, whereas the other is a dispreferred one as it is less common.

For example,

First Pair-Part: *Question*

Second Pair-Part: *Expected Answer (preferred)*

*Unexpected or No Answer (dispreferred)*

(See Cook, 1989)

Boyle (2000 as cited in Seedhouse, 2004), on the other hand, posits that preference organization deals with issues of affiliation and disaffiliation, noticeability, accountability and sanctionability of social actions. Hutchby and Wooffitt (1998) contend that preferred responses are characteristically delivered straightforwardly and without hesitation or delay, whereas dispreferred ones are performed with some delay, and often marked or prefaced by discourse markers such as *well* or *um*. The absence of the former is noticeable and often signals a certain degree of problems or disaffiliation between participants. The second-part speaker is held accountable for such absence and may be negatively sanctioned if his or her dispreferred action is not accounted for.

Seedhouse (2004), for instance, illustrates that the acceptance of an invitation is seen but unnoticed because it conforms to the norms, constitutes the default way of behaving, and is socially affiliative. On the other hand, the declination of an invitation does not conform with the norms, thereby being disaffiliative and dispreferred. Especially when a rejection of the invitation is delivered without mitigation and delay, it is considered sanctionable since it does not attempt to minimize the degree of disaffiliation.

#### **2.4 Repairs**

Repairs are problem-preempting mechanisms used by speakers in talk-in-interaction when they encounter and address problems of understanding such as incorrect word selection, mishearing, misunderstanding, and slips of the tongue. Wong and Waring (2010) remark that there are many mistakes in everyday

conversation such as errors, imperfections, and Freudian slips, so repairs are brought into play to deal with all types of errors and keep conversation going. According to Hutchby and Wooffitt (1998), there are four types of repairs: (1) Self-initiated self-repair (the speaker of the trouble source prompts and repairs the trouble); (2) Other-initiated self-repair (the speaker of the trouble source carries out the repair but the trouble is prompted by the recipient.); (3) Self-initiated other repair (the speaker of a trouble source has the recipient clear the trouble); (4) Other-initiated other-repair (the recipient of a trouble source prompts and repairs the trouble.)

Over the past decade, CA has been making inroads into L2 teaching as evidenced by the burgeoning body of (1) research articles (inter alia, Barraja-Rohan, 2011; Betz & Huth, 2014; Clifton, 2006, 2011; 2012; Fujii, 2012; Gardner, 2008; Huth & Taleghani-Nikazm, 2006; Kasper, 2006; Mori, 2007; Quan & Zheng, 2012; Sert & Seedhouse, 2011; Sert, 2010; Tan & Tan, 2006), and (2) monographs drawing on CA perspectives in second language acquisition (SLA) (inter alia, Barraja-Rohan & Pritchard, 1997; Have, 2007; Hutchby & Wooffitt, 1998; Markee, 2009; Richards & Seedhouse, 2005; Seedhouse, 2004; Sidnell & Stivers, 2013; Wong & Waring, 2010).

Many CA researchers believe that CA and SLA can achieve a happy marriage because SLA processes entail interactional resources such as turn-taking, sequencing, and repair. These interactional resources are part of the foundation of CA which learners employ to acclimatize one another's talk to make sense of each other's contribution and thereby to learn a language (Have, 2007; Markee,

2009; Richards & Seedhouse, 2005; Seedhouse, 2004; Wong & Waring, 2010). Sert (2010) argues that CA is necessary for SLA studies and second language teacher education. Its explication of social organization via talk-in-interaction has vast implications for L2 teaching (Button & Lee, 1987 cited in Barraja-Rohan, 2011).

Being an ordinary and pervasive form of spoken interaction (Barraja-Rohan, 1997), naturally occurring conversations provide the basics of all language learning and the medium via which language learning takes place (Wong & Waring, 2010). Heritage (1987 cited in Markee, 2009) affirms that the goal of CA is to reveal the interactional competence (IC) that shapes social interaction in which participants take turns talking and make sense of each other's contribution. According to Barraja-Rohan (2011, p. 482), IC can be briefly defined as the ability to

1. engage in various interactional events to co-construct talk with various participants and display pragmatic knowledge through the use of conversational syntax, including paralinguistics, kinesics, facial expressions, gaze, and proxemics for social/institutional purposes; and
2. jointly manage the turn-taking system with co-participants adopting appropriate interactional roles. This entails an understanding and demonstrating of how turns are designed and responded to in a sequentially coherent manner, displaying common understanding and repairing any threat to or breakdown in communication, showing engagement and empathy when relevant or intended, as well as

accomplishing social actions befitting the interactional context and goals.

Wong and Waring (2010) maintain that CA is a powerful device for uncovering systematic verbal and nonverbal interactional practices that constitute IC. Drawing on CA, our understanding of IC will become more specific and more pedagogically sound. Huth and Taleghani-Nikazm (2006) further posit that CA-based materials are important resources for teaching and raising learners' L2 pragmatic awareness and recommend that L2 instructors have sufficient knowledge of basic CA concepts in order that they can effectively teach their students. They particularly argue that CA-based materials provide blueprints of sequences of social interaction (e.g. greetings: hello-hello; invitation–acceptance/declination) and effectively get students actively involved in communicative situations when they interact with one another.

Barraja Rohan's (2011) study using a CA-informed pedagogical approach proved successful; the participants improved their listening and speaking skills and increased their speaking confidence. It was found that CA helped facilitate participants' interactions and, as a result, the participants became more effective conversationalists. In Fujii's (2012) study, the participants were able to see the differences between contrived dialogues in textbooks and naturally occurring conversation in authentic language situations. They also affirmed that CA was helpful in understanding the key principles of spontaneous conversation. Both Barraja-Rohan (2011) and Fujii (2012) showed that CA was a powerful tool to analyze L2 interactions as well as to identify reasons for interactional problems. Additionally, Clifton (2011)

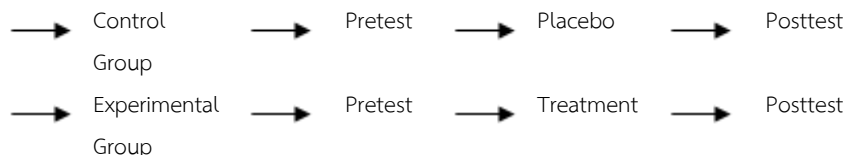
affirmed that students learning English for a specific purpose (ESP) can also benefit from doing CA. The students were able to analyze transcripts of spoken interactions using CA, reflect upon their practice, and improve their interactional skills. It was suggested that CA could be used as a tool to analyze interactions between learners and instructors.

According to Betz and Huth (2014), even non-native speakers who are highly proficient in the target language in terms of vocabulary, grammar, and overall fluency, may not become successful communicators in cross-cultural interaction if they are not aware of the connection between organization of interaction sequences and social meaning-making. They may fail to anticipate, interpret, and produce next turns relevant to prior turns at talk-in-interaction. Seedhouse (2004) posits that systematic interaction practices with normative forces such as adjacency pair thus serve as an important action template for interaction and interpretation, reflecting the core CA question “ why this, in this way, right now?”

Many researchers and scholars have suggested a strong relationship between CA and sociocultural theory, which sees language learning as social practice. Interactionally constituted and socially distributed, learning occurs via learners’ engagement in social practice and mutual support between learners and their more competent peers (Brouwer and Wagner, 2004; Kasper, 2006; Mondada & Pekarek Doehler 2004; Ohta, 2001; Markee, 2009; Seedhouse, 2004, 2007; Richards & Seedhouse, 2005).

## Research Methodology

This is a quasi-experiment study, following the Farhady's (1995) schematic pattern.



## Participants

Two classes of non-English major undergraduate seniors from different faculties who took an elective English course (890-212 English Conversation I) in the first semester of academic year 2014 at Prince of Songkla University (PSU) were selected for the training course. The students had already completed the fundamental English courses (i.e. 890-101 Fundamental English Listening and Speaking and 890-102 Fundamental English Reading and Writing). To assure the homogeneity of the participants, an online English proficiency test was administered. Based on their test scores, 18 students from each class with the majority level of English proficiency (A2) were chosen for data collection. Regardless of participant's gender, one class was assigned to the experimental group and the other the control group. The selected participants, 26 female and 10 male students, were in their early twenties.

## Instructional Materials

A set of materials used for data collection included a textbook (*Speak Now 3*) and CA-based handouts adapted from *Beyond Talk* by Barraja-Rohan and Pritchard (1997) as well as



*Conversation Analysis and Second Language Pedagogy* by Wong and Waring (2010) (See Appendix A for a CA-based lesson plan and handout). The teacher researcher also used videotaped and/or recorded non-scripted conversations taken from English movies and IELTS tests to familiarize students with features of spoken language and help them to understand how conversations are conducted by native speakers of English.

### **Research tools**

A pre-course oral interview and post-course oral interview were treated as a pretest and posttest respectively. A scoring criteria and descriptors for oral interaction adapted from Barraja-Rohan (2011), Luoma (2004) and O' Loughlin (2001) were employed with five different features of speaking: fluency, vocabulary, appropriacy, comprehensibility and grammar to rate students' conversational performance (See Appendix B). An evaluation sheet was given to two raters to mark each student's conversation performance. The sheet was composed of a 5-point scale: 1= very poor / unacceptable; 2= poor; 3= average; 4= good and 5= excellent. An evaluation questionnaire was also given to the student participants to assess their reactions to the CA-informed lessons. A participant consent form adapted from Robson (2011) was signed by all the participants.

### **Data Collection and Analysis**

To conduct the study, a number of steps were followed in the first semester of 2014. First, two classes of non-English major seniors from different faculties taking an elective course (890-212: English Conversation I) were selected: Sections 09 and 10 with 42 and

49 students respectively. Before the class started, all the participants had to take an online English proficiency test from <http://www.transparent.com/learn-english/proficiency-test.html>. The test consists of four components: Grammar I (15 questions); Grammar II (15 questions), while Vocabulary and Reading Comprehension have 10 questions each. Based on the test score, there were four levels of English proficiency: Just Starting, Beginner, Elementary and Intermediate. The majority of students tested at the Elementary level. All students in Section 10 were treated as an experimental group and those in the other section the control group.

Next, all the students had to participate in two oral interviews with a native speaker who is an experienced English teacher. Each interviewee had to speak with the native speaker for about one-to-two minutes. In the pre- and post-course oral interviews, the interviewer engaged the students in a conversation using the same general questions about family, hobbies and future plans. All the interviews were video recorded and scored by two raters not involved in the research project; one was an English native speaker teacher and the other a Thai professor of English. The students' scores from both raters were totaled, averaged, and used as the real score. To guarantee the reliability of the rating process, inter-rater reliability was computed. In the pretest and posttest score computation, the result was 0.95 and 0.96 respectively, which were considered highly acceptable.

The teacher-researcher asked the student participants to sign a consent form before the training course. The students had to participate in their 90-minute class session twice a week. The teacher researcher taught one class (control group) with the CLT-oriented conversation teaching approach prescribed in the teacher's manual of *Speak Now 3*; each lesson followed the same format: (1) *Vocabulary*, (2) *Conversation* (3) *Language Booster*, (4) *Listening or Pronunciation* and (5) *Speak with Confidence*.

### 1. The CLT-oriented method

First, vocabulary about the lesson's topic was introduced. Then, a model conversation with either Additions or Expansions with CD recordings was presented. In a conversation with Additions, students have to listen and write down three extra sentences, not printed in a conversation. On the other hand, in a conversation with Expansions, students have to read four sentences below the conversation and place the expansion sentences in the correct place. Later, the examples of target language in a lesson were highlighted. In the listening, main ideas and details were focused, while some features of pronunciation or intonation were also explained. Last, the students engaged in free practice of the target language that had been taught. In general at the end of every lesson, CLT offers free practice activities consolidating the aim of the lesson.

The other class (experimental group) was taught with the same textbook but with the addition of explicit instruction in CA concepts

## 2. Teaching methods used with the experimental group:

Raising students' awareness of conversation features.	➔	Introducing CA concepts + videotaped or recorded non-scripted conversation Verbal ➔ Interaction ← Non-verbal
Having students practice each CA concept-based conversation.	➔	Evaluation of CA based handouts or lessons

The teacher-researcher drew students' attention to features of the everyday conversation they were engaged in, asked them to reflect on L1 and L2 conversations and made them aware that participants use both verbal and non-verbal language in talk-in-interaction. Next the teacher-researcher introduced CA concepts such as turn-taking, adjacency pairs, preference organization, and repairs. Other conversation-related topics such as the role of listener, conversation maintenance, topic initiation and topic shift as well as telephone conversation were also included in different lessons. Videotaped or recorded non-scripted conversations were used to consolidate the students' understanding of CA concepts. The participants were asked to practice each newly introduced CA-based conversation in every lesson. At the end of the semester, the teacher researcher administered a questionnaire to find out students' reaction to the CA-based handouts and/or lessons.

## 3. Data Analysis

The pretest and posttest scores of the two raters were statistically processed to determine mean and standard deviation, and independent *t*-test was employed to detect significant differences in

the students' conversational performance before and after the training. Based on the independent *t*-test run on the pretest scores, the two groups were found homogenous in terms of their speaking ability. At the end of the semester, the posttest scores of both groups were processed to address the research questions. Cohen's (1988) *d* measurement of the effect size (Cohen, 1988) was also run to determine the impact of the CA-informed approach.

## Findings and Discussion

Results from the statistical operations verified the homogeneity of the two groups of participants as displayed in Table 1.

Table 1 Independent *t*-test on pretest scores of both groups

Group	Control		Experimental		<i>t</i>	df	Sig(2-tailed)
Aspects	$\bar{X}$	SD	$\bar{X}$	SD			
Fluency	2.66	.90	2.77	.57	-.43	28.74	.66
Vocabulary	2.75	.67	2.92	.493	-.85	34	.40
Appropriacy	2.72	.73	2.94	.45	-1.09	28.24	.28
Comprehensibility	3.00	.92	3.19	.57	-.75	28.38	.45
Grammar	2.58	.75	2.61	.58	-1.24	34	.90
Overall Ability	13.72	3.77	14.44	2.30	-.69	28.11	.49

\* Significant at 0.05 level

\*\* Significant at 0.01 level

As revealed in Table 1, the mean scores of the two groups were similar and the result of the independent *t*-test showed that there was no significant difference at the 0.05 level (*t*= -.69, sig=0.49). Neither was there any significant difference in terms of discrete items,

i.e., fluency, vocabulary, appropriacy, comprehensibility, and grammar. It can be interpreted that the two groups had similar English ability before the treatment, hence homogeneity was ensured.

After a one-semester treatment, the next step was to detect any change in students' performance and any possible differences in terms of improvement between the experimental and control groups, the results of the posttest are presented in Table 2.

Table 2 Independent *t*-test on posttest scores of both groups

Group	Control		Experimental		<i>t</i>	df	Sig(2-tailed)
Aspects	$\bar{X}$	SD	$\bar{X}$	SD			
Fluency	3.25	.65	3.69	.72	-1.93	34	.06
Vocabulary	3.44	.52	3.68	.65	-1.19	34	.24
Appropriacy	3.22	.58	3.60	.56	-1.96	34	.05*
Comprehensibility	3.52	.58	3.87	.60	-1.96	34	.08
Grammar	3.24	.55	3.61	.55	-2.27	34	.03*
Overall Ability	16.68	2.58	18.46	2.96	-1.92**	34	.06

\* Significant at 0.05 level

\*\* Significant at 0.01 level

As shown in Table 2, even though the total score of the experimental group was higher, the students' overall ability was not statistically different at the 0.05 level ( $t = -1.92$ ;  $p = 0.06$ ), indicating that both groups similarly improved their speaking ability after the treatment. However, considering the average scores on discrete items, a significant difference in the degree of improvement in speaking skills was noticeable in the areas of grammar and appropriacy. This suggests that CA-informed instruction could assist students in using English more appropriately. In particular, those in the experimental group

were able to respond more effectively to their interlocutor's first- and second-pair-part turns as well as unpredictable questions. Participants also responded using a wider range of structures or expressions, thus outperforming the other group in grammar. This may be attributed to the fact that in the experimental group students' attention was drawn to conversational norms such as those used in conversation opening, centering, and closing as well as various patterns of language that can be used to perform actions according to those norms. Such improvement in grammar was in line with Ussama's (2013) study.

In terms of fluency, even though the statistical results did not show a significant difference at the 0.05 level in the improvement between the two groups, ( $t = -1.93$ ; sig = 0.06), the mean score of the experimental group was noticeably higher. In the CA-oriented group, the students had learned techniques to keep conversation going without leaving long pauses and causing communication breakdown such as using response or return questions (e.g., *How about you?*) and question tags (e.g., *Right? Aren't you?*). The fluency difference between the two groups became more obvious especially when the students' interactions were closely analyzed using CA techniques, though not in the scope of this paper.

Based on the statistical results, vocabulary and comprehensibility seemed to be more resistant to improvement than the rest of the speech features. This may be due to the scope of the lessons taught, not allowing the students to use a wide range of vocabulary necessary. Moreover, it usually takes more time for students to acquire vocabulary and use it effectively in various contexts.

Comprehensibility, on the other hand, was largely assessed in the study based on the intelligibility of students' pronunciation, which often resists change in adult learners. To master L2 pronunciation, students needed more practice on a daily basis. The three improvement-resisting features, i.e., vocabulary, fluency and comprehensibility, are also in line with those reported in Ussama's (2013) study.

The slight improvement in these aspects may also be due to the fact that the students often lacked motivation and were reticent about practicing English. Additionally, they had few opportunities to use English outside the classroom. Based on the teacher-researcher's observation and interaction with the students during the training course, although the importance of daily practice was greatly emphasized in class, the students were not enthusiastic about speaking English; they said they feared to make mistakes, so they preferred to speak in Thai. These problems have been identified in many previous studies (Khamkhien (2010), Kongkerd (2013), Noom-ura (2013), Saengboon (2002, 2006), and Wanchai (2012).

Based on the statistical results, infusing CA-informed conversation instruction into the existing curriculum appeared to contribute to the improvement of students' speaking performance. Considering the effect size of the new approach, 0.64, according to Cohen's (1988) *d*, the impact of the CA-informed approach was moderately large. This indicated that the new approach was quite effective in developing students' overall conversation performance, supporting the findings of studies using CA to teach speaking skills



such as Barraja-Rohan (2011) and Fujii (2012). This positive outcome may also have been even greater if the participants had been engaged in peer interaction, which better approximates everyday conversation than a casual interview as evidenced in Ussama (2013). According to Bachman (1990) and Young (1995), unlike peer interaction, interview interactions, although casual, still may not reflect the true nature of naturally occurring conversation. Since in the interview it was the interviewer who controlled the overall structural practices in the conversation such as turn-taking, topic initiation and sequence organization, students might have been deprived of opportunities to fully exercise their CA knowledge.

At the end of the course, the survey results on learners' reactions to the CA-informed lessons were positive and encouraging. Participants expressed a high level of interest in and appreciation for the value of CA-based lessons in helping them improve their English speaking abilities. All of the participants reported that their English generally improved and that they felt more confident in speaking after completing the training. The participants also reported finding the CA handouts useful and enjoyable to work with. Most expressed appreciation for the new learning experiences offered by the CA-informed class and concurred that to be able to speak well it is necessary to understand the nature and the norm of conversation.

### **Concluding remarks**

This study has shed some light on the benefits of adopting an explicit CA-informed approach to teaching English conversation. The performance differences between the two groups of students receiving

different kinds of treatment were fairly noticeable despite the limitations posed by the nature of the interview interaction on capturing their conversing ability. The research into this approach is new, particularly within the Thai EFL context and more validation studies are necessary especially ones using peer-interaction assessment with students at various proficiency levels and for a longer period of time. Close CA-based analysis of student interactions would also help offer a clearer and more comprehensive picture of the real potential of a CA-informed approach to teaching conversation and boosting interaction-based learning. Given the evidenced merits of CA, it is recommended that conversation teachers become familiar with its fundamental concepts and receive training in how to apply these concepts in the classroom to boost their students' interactional competence.

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## Appendix A

### CA based lesson plan (Sample)

#### Lesson one

Duration: 60 minutes

Topic: Stages of conversation.

Goal: To teach the following:

- 1) adjacency pairs: utterances of the same type and different types
- 2) techniques to make small talks
- 3) Pre-closing conversation expressions

Terminal Objective: By the end of the lesson students will be able to:

- 1) identify adjacency pairs: utterances of the same type and different type
- 2) use techniques to engage actively in conversation
- 3) politely indicate when they should stop talking

Enabling Objectives: Students will

- 1) learn adjacency pairs and practice utterances of the same types
- 2) talk about and change a topic in conversation
- 3) practice stages of conversation
- 4) listen to a recording consisting of a three-stage conversation

Sequence	Minutes	Activities	Materials/ Resources
Warm up	5	- Give students a jumbled conversation and get them to rearrange a conversation. (a three-stage conversation).	Markers Board
Vocabulary Adjacency pairs	10	1- Introduce adjacency pairs ( utterance of the same type: Greeting and Leave-taking) Greeting ( A: <i>Hello</i> B: <i>Hello</i> ) ; Leave-taking (A: <i>Goodbye</i> B: <i>Goodbye</i> ) 2- Introduce adjacency pairs (utterance of the different type) Questions and answers (A: <i>How are you?</i> B: <i>I'm fine.</i> ) 3. Get students to practice the utterances of the two types in pairs.	Markers Board

Sequence	Minutes	Activities	Materials/ Resources
Structure of conversation	20	1- Hand out a CA-based handout 2- Explain the handout with demonstrations. 3- Have students practice each stage in pairs. 4- Have students practice the three-stage conversation	Markers Board Handout
Listening	10	1- Have students listen to a full conversation recording and ask them to notice stages of conversation 2- Have students work in pairs to figure out what is said in each stage. 3- Elicit their answers.	CD Markers Board
Exercises	7	1- Direct students' attention to exercises 1 and 2 2- Have students match parts of conversation in exercise 1 in pairs. 3- Have students determine stages of conversation and practice the conversation. 4- Have students complete exercise 3. 5- Check the answers.	Book CD Markers Board
Wrap-up	3	- Recap the important points in the lesson.	Markers Board
Homework	5	- Assign students to practice short three-stage conversation.	Markers Board

## CA-based handout (Sample)

### Stage of conversation

- ❖ Any conversation has a stage with **the opening**, **the centering** and **the closing**. In the opening, participants usually say something like “*hello*” to each other and sometimes add health inquiry like “*how are you?*” In the centering, they talk about something, called *the topic*, and in the closing, they show that they want to finish the conversation usually by saying something like “*goodbye*”

(leave-taking) to each other.

## 1. Opening

Greeting		Inquiry into health	
Speaker 1	Speaker 2	Speaker 1	Speaker 2
<i>Good morning /</i>	<i>Good morning /</i>	<i>How are you?</i>	<i>I'm fine.</i>
<i>Hello / Hi</i>	<i>Hello / Hi</i>	<i>How's it going?</i>	<i>I'm good, thanks.</i>

## 2. Centering: Topic

We can introduce a topic, talk about and change the topic.

Read them and add some more topics to the right column.

Topics

1	Have you had lunch yet?	8
2	What can I do for you?	9
3	Did you enjoy the weekend?	10
4	How was your English class?	11
5	I have some good news.	12
6	You know I just...	13
7	Did you come to the class on Friday?	14

## 3. Closing

### 3.1 Pre closing:

❖ Pre closing signal:

Before you say goodbye, to show that you want to finish speaking, you may use one of the following.

*OK*      *OK then*      *Alright*      *Alright then*      *Well*      *So*      *Anyway*  
*I'm running late.*      *Oh, I've got to go now.*      *Well, nice talking to you.*  
*Alright, what time is it now?*      *OK, I'll talk to you later.*

## ❖ Closing

### Leave-taking: saying goodbye

#### Speaker 1

*Goodbye/ Bye; Bye-bye*

*See you later / See you on... / Catch you later. (+ Have a nice day)*

*Thank you. You too.*

#### Speaker 2

*Goodbye / Bye / bye-bye*

*See you soon / See you around / Catch you later. (+ Have a good day)*

*Thank you. You too.*

## Exercises

1. Match parts of the conversation below.
2. Identify conversation stages and then practice the conversation.

1	Hello	A	Thank you. You too. Bye-bye.
2	My name is Ceta.	B	I'm a student, too.
3	Nice to meet you.	C	Nice talking to you, too.
4	Where are you from?	D	I'm Chou.
5	Songkla.	E	Hello.
6	I'm a student. And how about you?	F	Bangkok. And you?
7	Well, nice talking to you.	G	Nice to meet you, too.
8	Bye. Have a nice day.	H	What do you do?

3. Read the conversation above and fill in the missing sentences.  
Practice the conversation with your partner.

A Hello.

B

A My name is Ceta.

B

A Nice to meet you.

B

A Where are you from?

B

- A Songkla.  
 B  
 A I'm a student. And how about you?  
 B  
 A Well, nice talking to you.  
 B  
 A Bye.  
 B

## Appendix B

Scoring criteria and descriptors adapted from O'Loughlin (2001), Luoma (2004) and Barraja-Rohan (2011)

Fluency	Students can speak fluently with only occasional hesitation and manage to keep the conversation going without making long pauses or causing communication breakdown even though they perform their speech rather slowly than a native speaker.
Vocabulary	Students has a large command of vocabulary and can use a wide range of vocabulary precisely, appropriately and effectively to express most ideas impressively.
Appropriacy	Students can use English appropriately and effectively according to sociocultural norms and usually can appropriately construct their turns in response to the interlocutor's first- and second-pair-part turn or even to unpredictable questions in conversation.
Comprehensibility	Students can produce speech which can be understood effortlessly by the interlocutor or the interlocutor may occasionally seek clarification.
Grammar	Students can interact effectively by employing a wide range of structures or expressions with only minor mistakes.

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