



ORIGINAL RESEARCH ARTICLE

Reasons to be transactive when working in small groups

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ABSTRACT

A conversation analysis of interaction among small groups of English for Academic Purposes (EAP) students, revealed that more transactive discussion leads to the prolonged discussion of themes and the subsequent contribution and development of ideas. Transactive interaction entails speakers being explicit when reasoning their points of view; demonstrating relationality by picking up on other speakers' points and showing openness towards other views. The contribution of new idea and the development of others' ideas have been linked to effective collective knowledge construction (CKC) in the field of the learning sciences. The analysis revealed a link between the use of language and transactivity. For example, reporting structures such as "as you said" increase relationality among speakers, whilst hedging structures facilitate cognitive openness. These conclusions imply that EAP instructors should aim to raise awareness of the three central aspects of transactivity and select task formats which allow students to use these when engaged in group tasks.

KEYWORDS:

Collaborative learning, transactivity, small group discussion, EAP, collective knowledge construction

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Introduction

The significance of spoken interaction to effective collaborative learning is unquestioned, yet it is an area which has not been widely addressed in research within EAP contexts. This article suggests that group interaction in EAP task-based learning can be enhanced by speakers' use of a transactive style of communication. Transactivity is defined by Berkowitz and Gibbs (1983, p. 402) as "reasoning that operates the reasoning of another". In practice, this entails that speakers demonstrate explicit reasoning (Tegos et al., 2016); pick up on each other's points (Kimmerle et al., 2021); and show openness to different viewpoints (van Heijst et al., 2019). This article is based on a study which places a linguistic lens on the spoken interaction that occurred when small groups of pre-sessional EAP students worked through a course task together. The principal aim of the study was to determine how transactive speaking affects learning potential, since if practitioners are to effectively support their students as they engage in small group work, it is important that they have comprehensive knowledge of what is going on in the interaction taking place (van Heijst et al., *ibid.*). This article begins by exploring the relationship between transactivity and collective knowledge construction and goes on to explore how this is affected by specific linguistic features. Finally, the article highlights implications for the EAP classroom and proposes some mechanisms which may be implemented to raise the profile of transactive spoken interaction in group work.

The theory of transactivity and collective knowledge construction through spoken interaction

In order to probe how transactivity affects learning in group settings, it is first necessary to define what is meant by collective knowledge construction (CKC). According to Hatano (1993), students contribute different pieces of knowledge and build on others' explanations to jointly create a complete idea or solution. In the task used for data collection in the study, students of English for academic purposes (EAP) discuss suitable steps and approaches for writing a summary paragraph of an academic article. For example, one statement in the task leads groups to discuss whether it is better to paraphrase instead of using direct quotations when writing a summary paragraph.

Rather than a model of knowledge as a collection of pre-existing individual opinions which cause group reactions, the study assumes knowledge as an emergent construct derived of group interactions (Stahl, 2009). It is through verbal engagement with others that speakers mutually influence, negate, and promote each other, contributing to the iterative process which foment the development of knowledge in group settings (Negueruela-Azarola et al., 2015). These fundamental premises are supported by the notion that oracy is a condition of learning in all subjects (MacLure et al., 1988), as the medium through which group knowledge construction may take place if learning objectives are shared. CKC is therefore primarily a linguistic process which centres on interactions taking place among peers (Stahl et al., 2014). The fact that such a process is contingent on active participation has implications for the relevance of productive

agency (Schwartz, 1999) in the collective learning process. Once it has been established that students are participating actively in the small group learning dynamic, it is logical to focus on what kind of talk is being produced and how transactive it is.

Transactive interaction in small group learning

In his prolific work on group interaction, Stahl (2006, 2009, 2011) defines the concept of transactivity as a property of conversation which requires that a contribution contains both an explicit reasoning display and an acknowledgement of a previous explicit reasoning display from another interactant. For Stahl and Rosé (2011), explicit reasoning is the act of making the grounds for a statement or premise known to a partner by means of explanation and example. Sionti et al. (2012) concur that explicit reasoning is a prerequisite for dialogic transactivity. This dual definition of transactivity is recurrent in the field of the learning sciences, with some variation of emphasis on each aspect. For example, Noroozi et al. (2013) describe transactivity as a practice which occurs when partners use each other as resources in the learning process, by referring to and building on each other's reasoning. A third aspect of interaction often linked to transactivity is cognitive openness, which involves taking a critical and flexible epistemic stance towards knowledge claims and developing alternative viewpoints during reasoning interaction (van Heijst et al., 2019). Cognitive openness affects relationality because if a participant demonstrates openness to alternative views expressed by peers, members of the group are encouraged to contribute more to the conversation (Teasley, 1997). The next section explores how all three components of transactivity are invoked by linguistic features and structures.

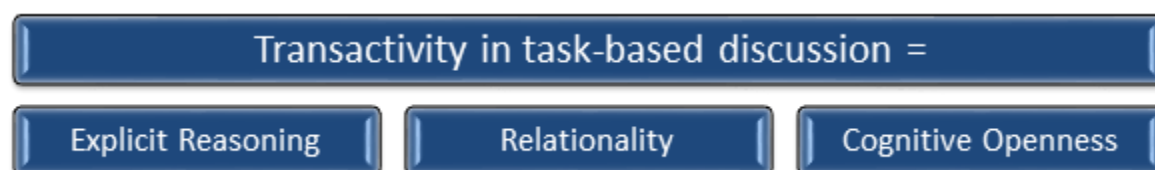


Figure 1: The components of transactivity in task-based discussion

Explicit Reasoning and how it is invoked linguistically

Howley et al. (2013a) explain that although the term 'reasoning' can vary in different subject domains, the basic process is usually the same when students are working on a given task in a team, as they vocally engage with information to help them solve the problem or reach understanding. Such a process amounts to the function of explanation, which according to Ploetzner et al. (1999) is a social action which allows understanding to be operationalised. The use of meta-textual features (Carter & McCarthy, 2006, p. 262) such as the framing device "for example" or "for instance" is a way for speakers to illustrate their claims effectively to

other learners in the group. Not only does such metalanguage make reasoning more explicit, it also fosters the engagement of other participants (Dillenbourg & Jermann, 2007).

Indicators of consequence used in explanatory discourse, such as the causal phrases “because”, “cause”, “so”, and “since” (Chi et al., 1989, p. 50), have been recognised in the literature as mechanisms which can help justify points and therefore make reasoning more explicit. It should be noted that the reference to the use of “so” in Chi et al.’s study (1989) is that of the resultative linking adjunct (Carter & McCarthy, 2006, p. 258), as opposed to the discourse marker “so”, which is associated with openings or closings within spoken interaction (Carter & McCarthy, 2006, p. 214).

Framing structures such as “you are saying” serve to reformulate a point. Such structures are described by Waring in their work on substantive reciprocity (2002) as having a relational function in that they directly implicate other speakers, but they also have the function of increasing explicitness by elucidating a point made by another speaker.

Relationality and how it is invoked linguistically

Heritage and Atkinson (1984) consider relationality as instrumental for meaning-making for successful argumentation. As Suthers et al. (2010) explain, relationality or uptake from one speaker to another can be cumulative, by adding to existing ideas. It can also be transformative, by modifying prior statements, or innovative by embodying new contributions. This may occur with the help of linguistic features such as causal mechanisms, the use of pronouns or deictic expressions (Weinberger & Fischer, 2006). Indeed, Stahl (2006), explores how students use particular linguistic structures such as ellipsis to link to previous ideas, concluding that this helps them form collective understanding in a math’s lesson. However, transactivity may be more covert in the interaction if, for example, one speaker’s reasoning statement links implicitly and conceptually to an idea which has already been raised in the discourse (Fiacco & Rosé, 2018).

Another way in which relationality is established is through the mention of shared references such as those found in the course materials or even a quote from the teacher, as this creates connections among participants (Stahl & Rosé, 2011). Ludvigsen (2016), proposes the use of shared tools as a medium which can foster shared knowledge by bridging the gap between individual and collective processes. Furthermore, Dillenbourg and Jermann (2007), found that the use of mutual explicit references among partners increases relationality, and is a decisive element for success in collaborative learning. Damşa et al. (2013) explain how linguistic features may facilitate this type of reference bonding, providing the example of the use of the third person pronoun in reporting structures to refer to a task item or text being discussed by the group.

Linguistic structures which demonstrate orientation towards other participants produce more likelihood of follow-up (Jeong 2006; van Heijst et al., 2019). First name vocatives can increase group cohesion according to Persico and Pozzi (2010), who cite direct personal subject pronouns and reporting structures as examples of such relational language. According to Carter and McCarthy (2006, p. 821) reporting structures such as “as X said...” also enable speakers to backchannel on others by repeating or returning to a point made previously. The pronoun “we” is also regarded as indicative of relationality because it indicates that the knowledge building process is shared (Roschelle, 1992).

Cognitive openness and how it is invoked linguistically

Cognitive openness may be conveyed with the help of linguistic structures which indicate the notions of uncertainty, possibility and tentativeness. Expressing uncertainty contributes to the open space needed to explore ideas in the knowledge building process (Jordan et al. 2012). According to van Heijst et al. (2019), the expression of uncertainty, possibility and tentativeness leads to the contribution of points by others and therefore to the prolongation of interaction between learners. If assertions are framed in such a way as to acknowledge that other participants may or may not agree, it sets up the claim for negotiation (Rosé, 2013). Similarly, speakers may use explicit language to express their lack of understanding of a topic or of another speaker’s point. According to Lindwall and Lymer (2011, in Koschmann, 2013, p. 156), in their work on students’ use of the lexis “understand” when working on group tasks in the science classroom, admission of failure to understand may be treated by co-participants as a prompt to provide further explanation of a point. Such prolongation is more likely to create space for participants to introduce further ideas and nuance to the ongoing discussion.

Weinberger and Fischer (2006) posit that by using linguistic framing structures such as “if” or “maybe” to precede a claim, an interactant qualifies the claim as being dependent on another independent attribute and therefore opens the scope of the claim. Howley et al. (2013b) state that the recognition of alternative possibilities is explicitly acknowledged by the use of the conditional tense with the auxiliary verb “would”. Similarly, Schwarz and Baker (2017) propose the use of the adverbial “perhaps” as a manner of expressing hypothetical propositions, claiming that the use of such hedging phrases communicates openness to alternative views, which fosters collaborative argumentation.

Questions, which are typically associated with upwards prosodic shift, naturally contribute to openness in dialogue as is discussed by Schegloff (1985). As well as the sense of invitation implied by the upwards prosodic shift which characterises many questions, a question usually implies the need for an answer. Schegloff explains this phenomenon by virtue of the adjacency-pair format of question response patterns, whereby the first pair part (FPP) of the interaction determines the second pair part (SPP). It is claimed in the literature that as well as contributing to openness, the use of questions by speakers may contribute to explicit reasoning and relationality in learner interaction. Schegloff (1985), posits that if one interactant

employs a question, this can lead to a reasoning display from a partner speaker. Howley et al. (2013a) claim that when contextualised, a direct question posed by a speaker as a way of checking understanding may count as reasoning discourse but also as relationality since the onus is placed on co-participants to contribute to the dialogue. Similarly, Littleton and Mercer (2013) explain that the reasoning process could be accounted for through evidence of critical, constructive engagement whereby participants widen themes by posing and responding to direct questions. The advocacy of critical questioning not only has implications for student agency (Schwartz, 1999) but strengthens the argument for dialogic interaction, where learners need to be actively involved in processing, creating and shaping knowledge in group situations (Basturkmen, 2016).

As well as placing a lens on linguistic items identified as affective on transactivity in existing literature and discussed in the sections above, other relevant linguistic features emerged in the analysis carried out for the study on which this article is based. These features include: recursive lexis when one speaker reiterates a phrase of a partner; the use of “just” which can have a relational function by appealing to others; the use of the discourse markers “so”, “well”, and “actually”; the use of speakers’ shared first language; and the use of the first and second person pronoun.

The research framework of the study

The setting for the study

The purpose of the study was to explore the notion that meaning and understanding are constructed (Stahl & Rosé, 2011) through collective interaction, and to take the findings forward to inform educator practice when faced with the task of helping students to improve their speaking strategies. The study was conducted using samples of group dialogue, recorded in an EAP setting on a pre-sessional course being run online at a university in the UK in 2021. Participants were all Chinese and there were 2 groups of participants (Group a and Group b) from two separate classes. Each group comprised 5 students. The participants in the present study are engaged in the common aim of discussing a set of 9 statements in order to complete a task. The task is based on curriculum material that has been delivered to the students in recent lessons and deals with how to summarise an academic article in one paragraph. Students were asked to discuss nine statements and decide whether they are true or false; for example, *a summary should not be more than 25% of the original text*. In the analysis and discussion, the spoken interaction corresponding to each statement is referred to as Item 1, Item 2 etc.

The analysis approach

A conversation analysis (CA) approach was followed in the study, adopting a three-part process of i. the transcription of the recordings, ii. a commentary of what is going on in the transcript for each item (i.e. ‘talk through’ in the practice of CA), and iii. the interpretation of the data. In line with CA practice, the study conducted was qualitative as opposed to

quantitative. Yet, in order to assess the prevalence of each of the dimensions of transactivity in the data, a count was taken of how many instances of explicit reasoning, relationality and cognitive openness were evidenced in the itemised transcripts. At the first stage of the interpretation section of the data analysis, I identify how the three dimensions of transactivity are activated through the talk. I do this by listing instances one by one under the abbreviated terms EXP (Explicit Reasoning); REL (Relationality); and OP (Cognitive Openness), and highlighting in the commentary the use of any of the structures to indicate transactivity, as precedented in previous studies. For example, the dimension of relationality is accounted for 6 times in the analysis of item 2, Group b. This can be seen in the following excerpt from the interpretation section of the data analysis, where speakers are represented by the initial letter of a pseudonymised name and the number in parenthesis denoted the corresponding line in the transcript.

REL - D (12) voices the interjection of surprise (↑ahh:) in response to L, which suggests that D is pondering L's point, which they had not thought of before.

REL- D (20-22) uptakes and develops L's (10) point about an original text being short.

REL- X (35-36) refers to a shared object for the group, the worksheet.

REL- Z, P and D (94-96) converge in their use of the word 'limit'. This mention of the word 'limit' links back to P's earlier mention of the concept (32).

REL- The recurrent referent of the words "limit" and "standard" by D (27), Z (43), Z (90), D (91), L (92), constitutes a constant link between speakers.

REL- D responds (101) to L (99-100) with an adjacent pair, using the collective possessive pronoun to voice a summary of L's argument "yeah that's our question".

Results

Figure 2 presents a collated view of the prevalence of each dimension of transactivity in the data set.

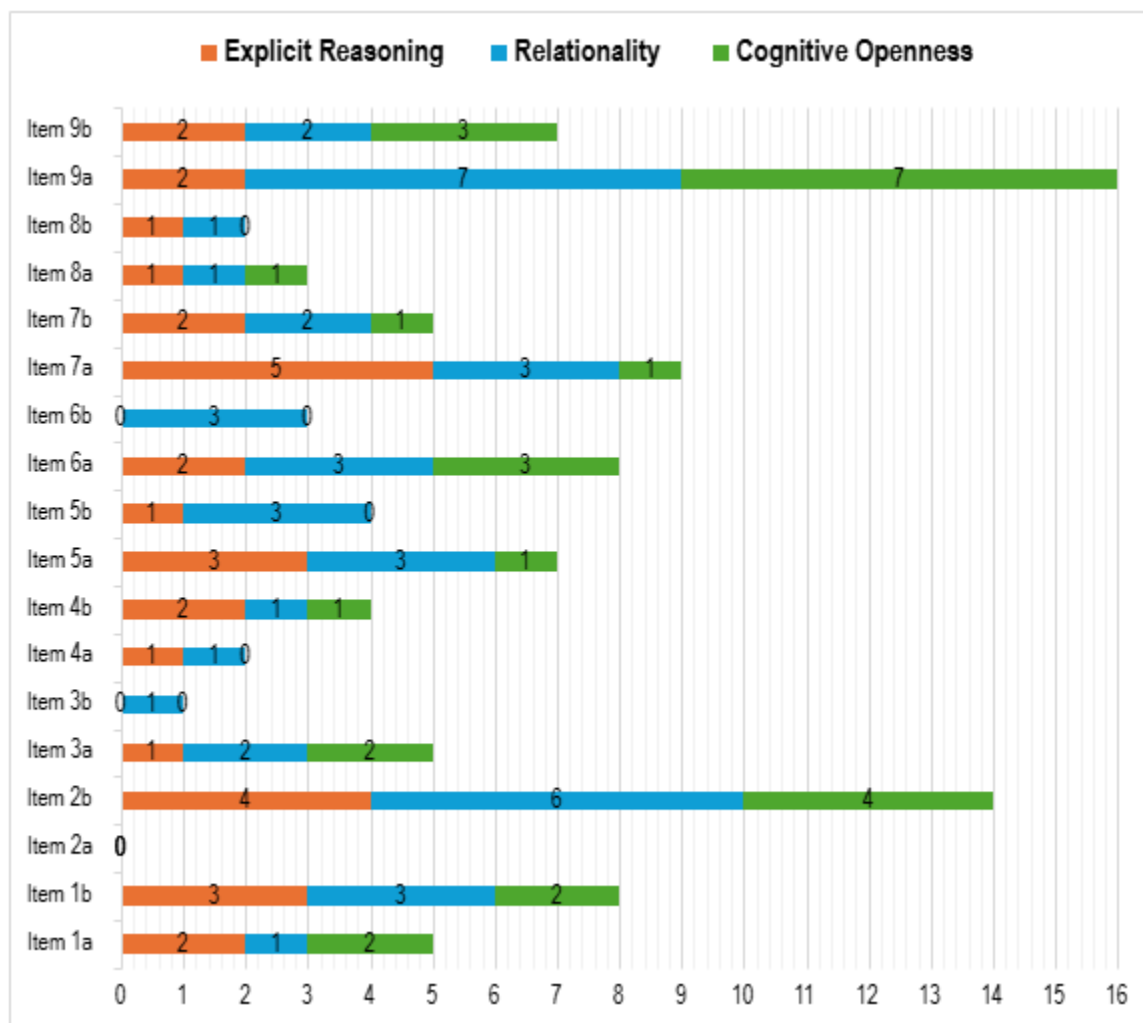


Figure 2: Instances of transactive dimensions in each Item

The discussions which took place range in length from 20 seconds to 450 seconds, with the lengthiest Items in the data set: Item 1 Group b (260 seconds), Item 2 Group b (400 seconds), Item 9 Group a (450 seconds), and Item 9 Group b (360 seconds), showing the highest levels of the three dimensions of transactivity.

Secondly, in order to assess the extent of linguistic features in the different items in the task, a numerically-influenced system was devised which involved counting the instances of each linguistic feature in each task Item by using a scale of 4, with 4 signifying four or more instances of an item, 3 indicating several instances, 2 for 2 instances, 1 for 1 instance, and 0 for no instances. The graphics in Figure 3, 4 and 5 refer to the prevalence of instances of linguistic items related to the three dimensions of transactivity in existing literature. As well as this, the analysis uncovered several emergent linguistic features which had a significant impact on transactivity.

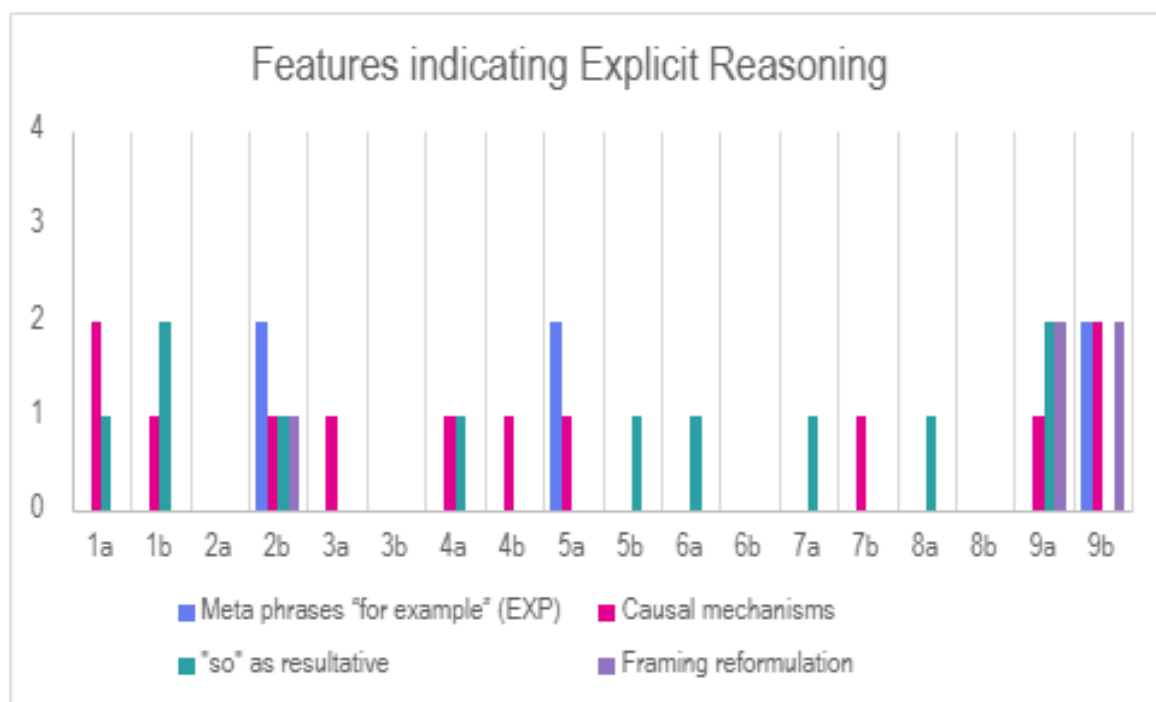


Figure 3: Features indicating Explicit Reasoning

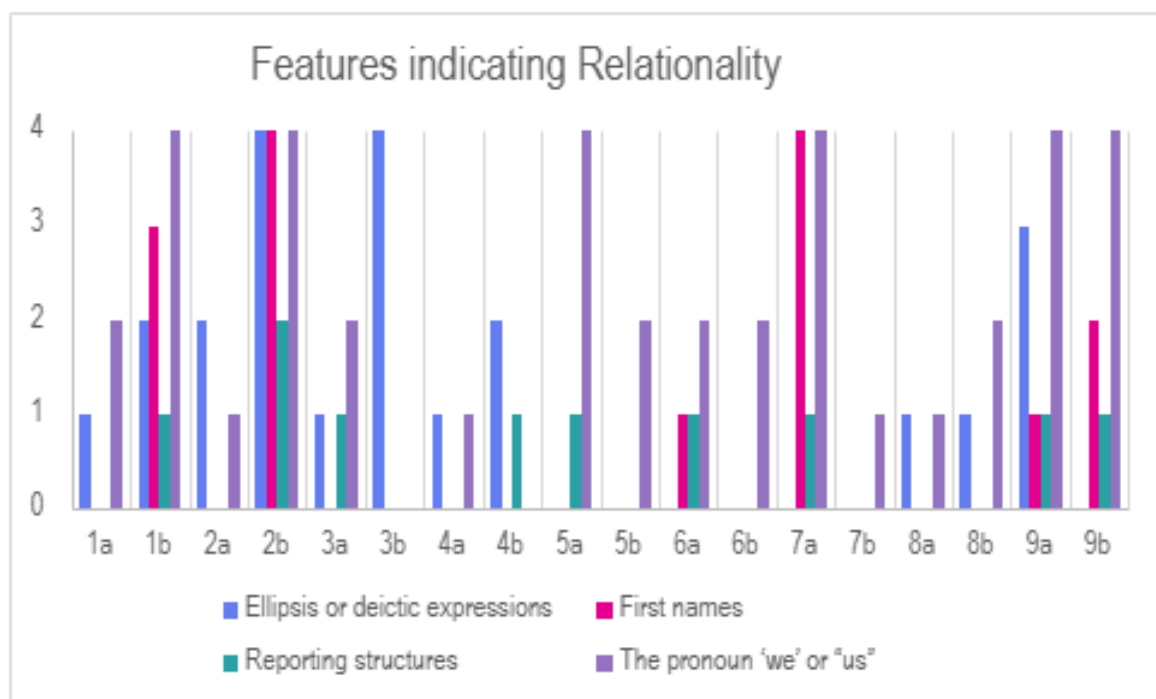


Figure 4: Features indicating Relationality

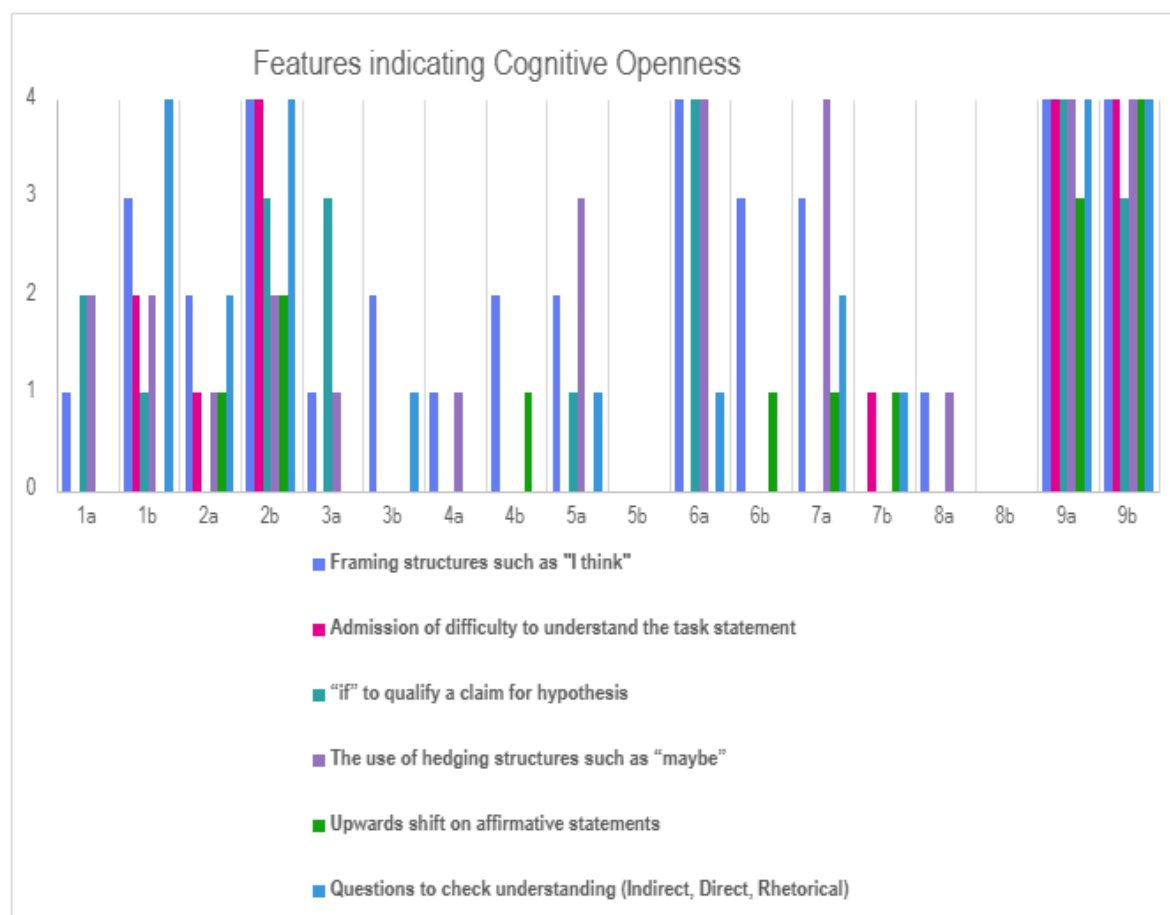


Figure 5: Features indicating Cognitive Openness

The effect of linguistic features on transactivity

The findings support the notion that particular linguistic structures facilitate explicit reasoning, relationality and cognitive openness. For example, reporting structures such as “as you said” increase relationality, while hedging structures facilitate cognitive openness (Howley et al., 2013b). The use of conditional tense is found to be impactful for speakers to hypothesise about their theses in a way that transmits cognitive openness. The excerpt below, from Group b’s discussion of Item 2 shows how speaker L (line 10) uses language of hypothesis to introduce a new idea that the original text might be very short, and this causes speaker X (line 13) to contribute to the discussion.

01	7:06	Z:	Ok, mhm. The second one.
02	7:09		(2.0)
03	7:11	D:	((Speaks Chinese to roommate))
04	7:15		I don't think, I I'm not sure th- that the second one it n be- be no more
05			than (.) 25% or less of the (.) original text, hhh Hmm maybe it's true?
06			What about others?
07	7:32		(2.0)
08	7:34	Z:	Yeah, I think it's true, a summary shouldn't be (.) ↓very long=
09	7:39	D:	Yeah a summary should be ↓very long, ↓yeah, hmm..
10	7:44	L:	= but what if the (.) original text (.) is a little short?
11	7:50		(2.0)
12	7:52	D:	Eh [↑ahh::
13	7:55	X:	[25% is the centre::
14	8:00		(2.0)
15	8:02	Z:	Hmm:=
16	8:04	D:	=↑Maybe it's the [↑centre
17	8:07	X:	[So (1.5) I don't think [the ((unintelligible))...
18		D:	[be NO MORE THAN 25.

Transcript excerpt from Item 2, Group b, in response to the statement: a summary should not be more than 25% of the original text.

Emergent linguistic features from the analysis

The following section discusses other linguistic features which emerged as affecting transactivity:

- i. Recursive lexis.
- ii. The use of “just” as a softener.
- iii. The use of the discourse markers “so” “well” “actually”.
- iv. The use of speakers’ shared first language.
- v. The use of the first and second person pronoun.

Recursive lexis

When a speaker replicates lexis used by a partner speaker in a following turn, this enhances relationality by binding content. This happens in Item 1a when X replicates J by using the lexical item “just key words”.

03	1:16	J:	.hhh eh, so I don't I don't really think we can eh write
04			write just key words without fully understanding the
05			original text if we want to summarising any articles .hhh
06			cause ehm just key words may eh cause some misleading
07			of the meaning of this article and eh eh (1.0) maybe,
08			maybe this article don't want to talk about eh the situation
09			we want to eh we want to mention but eh the it it has the
10			same [key words so we need to pay attention to pay more
11			attention to the eh the real eh- real meaning of the
12			original text. Eh, it's my opinion.
13		Y:	[Yes.
14	2:02	Y:	=Yes. Yes, I agree with you.
15	2:06	X:	Eh, yes, if we just knew the key words .hhh eh we can't
16			know the eh understanding of the (.) original text, so we
17			cannot write ↓a summary

Excerpt from Item 1, Group a in response to Statement 1 - you can write a summary without fully understanding as long as you use enough key words

The use of “just”

The use of “just” in the interaction is found to add to relationality when combined with the second person pronoun “you” in Item 9, Group a. The use of “just” has the effect of enhancing the argument made by speaker A.

81	22:27	A:	Eh I think maybe it's (.) eh false, because if you just skim
82			the article and you don't have the understanding of this
83			articles eh so you just make a summary just including some
84			of the key words but eh your summary is not related to the
85			original text so I think this maybe, eh, is not ↓not good

Excerpt of interaction produced by Group A in response to Statement 9 - you don't need to give the source of the information as long as you agree with the text

The use of the discourse markers “so” “well” “actually”

Discourse markers “so” or “well” and “actually” are used for openings or closings within spoken interaction (Carter & McCarthy, 2006, p. 214). This enables uptake on points made by others or self, according to Chi et al. (1989), and is associated with relationality by enhancing connections between speakers' points (Gosen et al., 2024).

This can be seen in excerpts from Item 2, where each group discussed the statement: *a summary should not be more than 25% of the original text.*

07	2:42	J:	.hhh Oh well↓ eh actually, I didn't, eh I'm not very sure
08			about this one so I want to (.) hear some (0.5) points of
09			view
10	2:56		(1.0)
11	2:57	Y:	I think (0.5) maybe it's right. It's right. I think [and eh..
12	3:02	H:	[((unintelligible)) what do you think?
13	3:03		(1.0)
14	3:04	Y:	Eh.. (.) I, I guess it's right. ((laughs)) What's your opinion?
15	3:11	H:	Eh.. I think the eh that a summary we should use some
16			brief, eh brief sentences .hhh eh:: but for the eh accurate
17			length I ↓ have no ↓ idea of it
18	3:25		(1.0)
19	3:26	Y:	Yeah (3.0) hmm (3.0), so we can talk about others and this

Excerpt from Item 2, Group A

The use of speakers' shared first language

The use of speakers' shared first language (Chinese) contributes to explicit reasoning by clarifying meaning through translation. It is also believe to enhance relationality between speakers by invoking response as one speaker offers a translation to another's point as can be seen in the excerpt from Item 2 where group b use their L1.

81	18:32	L:	I think the second one is a little ((speaks Chinese))
82	18:38	D:	Eh:: ((laughs))
83	18:39	Z:	Weird
84	18:40	P:	Yeah yeah yeah
85	18:41	():	Weird
86	18:42	L:	Weird, yeah kind of weird cause I don't know if we have to
87			set a eh- set a ((Speaks Chinese))
88	18:51		(1.0)
89	18:52	Z:	[A standard
90		D:	[A standard

Excerpt from Item 2, Group B.

The use of the first and second person pronoun

The use of the pronoun "I" could be a sign of visible thinking where the speaker talks through there ideation in Item 9b (3), for example. This feature would therefore be related to explicit reasoning, In the same excerpt, line 19 shows how speaker X uses the pronoun "you" to relate to others in the group.

03			↑a difficult I think, ehm (1.0), If I agree a agree with a an
04			opinion, I will give my source of of information, (.) it can
05			prove why, why I'm agree, yeah↓. But s- in in a summary I
06			don't (.) I don't think an opinion should do, a summary is not
07			(.) cannot be too long::, maybe short and ↑simple (.) hmm, I
08			think. [What about others?
09	15:33	Z:	[I think it's true
10	15:36	D:	↓Oh::
11	15:38	Z:	Yeah, (2.0) cause the summary is about the ↓original article,
12			yes, we shouldn't give our (.) eh opinions and some sources
13			to:: supported our: (.)↓view
14	15:53		(10.0)
15	16:03	X:	↓Yeah=
16	16:05	D:	=So wha-?
17	16:07	X:	It's ↓true::
18	16:09	D:	It's true? (2.0) Pan, what [do you think?
19	16:12	X:	[you don't need to give

Excerpt from Item 9, Group B

The relevance of transactivity to CKC

The findings of the study demonstrate that higher levels of transactivity affect CKC in the recorded interaction, because the items which showed higher levels of transactivity also evidenced more contribution of idea and idea development. For example, Item 2, Group b had 10 instances of new idea and 9 instances of follow up to others' ideas.

The necessary components for effective CKC are found to be the emergence of new idea as suggested by Schwartz (1999), and the meaningful follow-up of idea in subsequent turns during the interaction. This leads to the conclusion that whilst transactivity is necessary for CKC to take place, it does not ensure that CKC will occur in learner interaction. The findings support the notion that CKC is dependent on intersubjectivity, which occurs when people in groups connect to make sense of situations and of each other (Suthers, 2006) in the creative space (Wegerif, 2007).

In other words CKC is to some extent reliant on what Webb (2013, p. 21) calls "knowledge creation discourse", through which speakers test, add to, or counter another speaker's idea. The first step towards that in the EAP classroom can be established by promoting and encouraging transactive speaking styles among students. Indeed transactive features in the interaction provide a mechanism which facilitates participants' awareness and curiosity about the views of their peers (Ness & Riese, 2015). The resultant dynamic implies that participants will be more likely to connect to each other and maintain that connection for

prolonged periods of time through the dialogue, paving the way for collective knowledge construction to emerge.

Fostering transactivity in the EAP Classroom

Mercer et al. (2019), recommend that all participants vocalise views during a task. They also advocate that the activity should be designed to encourage co-operation rather than competition between partners. Furthermore, students should have a solid, shared understanding of the point and purpose of the activity as well as some meta-awareness of how talk can be used for sharing ideas and solving problems. Given the need for students to actively engage when working in small groups, instructors should aim both to raise awareness about the main principles of transactive interaction and to increase proficiency in the use of specific linguistic features which facilitate this. For second language learning settings, including EAP, this leads to the proposal that the use of such language should be incorporated into the curriculum, practised and even assessed within the evaluation of group discussion. Speaking in front of others can be daunting in all learning settings, especially if speakers are using a second language. For this reason, if a rubric is to be offered to students, it should be a simple one which they can get used to quickly and remember easily. The three-part rubric shown in Figure 6 aims to raise students' awareness of transactivity and increase their practice of its three aspects. It consists of a self-evaluation of how one explains one's rationale, of how effective one has been in asking others the reasons for their views, as well as of how effectively one has contributed ideas to the discussion. For the purposes of student accessibility and ease, the terms used in the rubric are simplified to comprise a student-facing model. The rubric is labelled 'EFI' which stands for explicitness, follow-up and idea. It could be used periodically by students for self-reflection purposes or for peer feedback with the aim of supporting participation in group task-based interaction. Completed templates could be used as a shared object for students to help them report back to the instructor verbally or in e-learning forums.

EFI rubric to complete: EXPLICITNESS, FOLLOW UP, IDEA	
Date	Group members' names
How did you make your points explicit and clear to others in the group?	
Describe how you connected to others during the task by following up on an idea or challenging them	
Did you contribute any new ideas to the discussion today? If so, please explain briefly	

Figure 6, A template to use to focus on transactivity during task-based group work

The task format also merits careful consideration by instructors if interaction is to be prolonged by second language learners during group tasks and therefore allow for ideas to develop. It could be argued that a true/false or multiple choice exercise, by dint of the straightforward nature of the task itself, encourages participants to take a stance and creates the scope for them to develop group talk. According to Baker (1999), group participants may thus draw on different types of knowledge, determine and differentiate concepts, negotiate meaning, and find new ways of combining elements to produce solutions. Task selection and the devising of materials conducive to transactive discussion is a topic befitting another research study, and one which I intend to pursue in future work.

This article has endeavored to demonstrate the nature, use and value of transactivity in small-group learner discussion in an EAP setting. I have explored how and when speakers show explicit reasoning when presenting their opinions, relate effectively to others, and show openness to alternative views, the extension of dialogue and the development of ideas is invoked thus contributing to collective knowledge construction. The identification of linguistic features which facilitate a more transactive style of speaking for learner task-based work, provides useful data for practitioners to incorporate into the tool box of language to promote for the purposes of small group interaction in settings which prioritize learner participation, autonomy and process.

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