Creating Obstacles to Progressivity: Task Expansion in Second Language Role-Plays

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Creating Obstacles to Progressivity:

Task Expansion in Second Language Role-Plays

There is widespread agreement among educators and researchers that interaction plays a substantial role in second language (L2) development (e.g., Lantolf, 2000, Long, 1985). Consequently, pedagogical tasks that encourage language use in 'authentic' or "close to real-life" interactional contexts (Mori, 2002, p. 323) have become a thriving focus of inquiry in applied linguistics (see Skehan, 2003 for an extensive overview of task-based instruction). Proponents of task-based language teaching (TBLT) argue that tasks provide learners with opportunities for "free and meaningful use of the target language" (Nunan, 1989, p. 30) and allow learners to take risks through which they can challenge and improve their linguistic competence (Ellis, 2006). However, the vast majority of studies exploring how tasks unfold in practice, i.e., task-as-process (Breen, 1989), have done so within cognitivist ontological frameworks (Seedhouse, 2005), in which data is commonly gathered quasi-experimentally and social interaction is obscured behind codified statistical data (Hauser, 2005; Jenks, 2009).

In contrast, a growing number of studies have used Conversation Analysis (CA) to examine naturallly occurring episodes of task-as-process (e.g., Hellerman & Pekarek Doehler, 2010; Jenks, 2009; Lee & Burch, 2017; Markee, 2005; Markee, & Kunitz, 2013; Mondada & Doehler, 2005; Seedhouse, 1999, 2005, among others) in a way "that preserves the participants' voices and actions as the principal object of enquiry" (Markee, 2005, p. 211). These studies highlight the importance of considering the moment-to-moment ways in

which participants interpret and co-construct tasks using multimodal interactional practices that are sensitive to local contingencies. As one such study by Seedhouse (1999) observes, learners can at times prioritize reaching the end of the task as quickly as possible, resulting in minimized turn constructions that do not involve significant language use. What can teachers do when a learner appears to be bringing a task to completion without having substantially used their L2?

Using a conversation analytic approach, in this study we document two interactional practices employed by language educators to extend role-play tasks *in situ* and thus create additional spaces for L2 use (Eskildsen & Theodórsdóttir, 2017). The first practice involves the treatment of learner turns as problematic, but not due to issues of understanding. Instead, the expert speakers utilize the flexibility of the role-play format by introducing a complication (Ross & O'Connell, 2013; Ross, 2017) that retroactively frames the learner's response as misaligned with the task. Learners in a fast-food restaurant role-play, for example, might place an order for a hamburger only to be told that the restaurant does not have any bread. Such blocking moves occasion further post-expansive talk (Schegloff, 2007) from the learner in which they attempt to reformulate their request to conform to the newly imposed constraints, and thus provide more opportunities to spontaneously interact in the target language. The second practice we document involves an expert speaker feigning a misunderstanding in order to highlight a linguistic issue within a learner's prior turn and therefore occasion self-repair. Feigned displays of misunderstanding help draw the learners' attention to inconsistencies in their earlier talk and postpone the progression of the sequence while the learners identify and correct the issue. Both practices constitute ways in which expansion sequences delay task completion and thus promote language

practice and tailor the emergent task to the local contingencies of each unique role-play interaction. In that they delay task completion, we view these interactional practices as obstacles to progressivity.

Purpose of the Study

The aim of our study then is to emically account for methods that educators use to encourage novice language users to contribute more to the role-play talk. In line with the inductive nature of the CA approach, we formulated the following research question only after extensive observation of role-play interaction recorded in a TBLT context:

> How do language educators expand interactional sequences *in situ* during unscripted role-play tasks to provide learners with more extensive opportunities for L2 use?

After a selective literature review of interactional research on role-play tasks and the notion of progressivity, we outline the context of the study and give a brief overview of the multimodal CA approach. Our analysis then explores the interactional practices for creating obstacles to progressivity, particularly in relation to role-play settings.

Interactional research on role-play tasks

While CA has been increasingly used to examine how participants perform tasks, few of these studies explore *role-play* tasks specifically. Instead, the focus has been on L1 contexts in which role-play is used for communication training (e.g., Stokoe, 2014) or on L2 contexts where researchers document the affordances of role-play tasks for evaluating learners' oral

proficiency (e.g., Kasper & Ross, 2007; Okada & Greer, 2013), interactional competence (Roever & Dai, 2021) or pragmatic competence (Kasper & Youn, 2018; Youn, 2020).

Although these latter studies are based in oral testing contexts, such research has important implications for L2 role-play interaction in general. Kasper and Youn's (2018) study, for example, details the way in which interactants mobilize generic and context-specific resources to jointly accomplish role-play interactions. Of particular relevance to the current study is Ross' work on service encounter role-plays that involve the deployment of *complications* (Ross & O'Connell, 2013; Ross, 2017), which are used to determine how competently an L2 speaker can solve common transactional issues. Such complications are designed to elicit specific speech acts so that candidates' pragmatic competence is displayed for rater assessment. It seems fair to assume that these kinds of sequences could have implications for L2 pedagogy as well.

Prioritizing progressivity

Like all talk, task completion is a locally contingent process (Lee & Burch, 2017) brought about through a myriad of coordinated actions. The notion of progressivity refers to the efficient temporal advancement of a turn or sequence of turns, with pragmalinguistic trajectories emerging in a step-by-step manner and projecting possible next items (Mushin & Pekarek Doehler, 2021). Schegloff (2007) suggests that "moving from some element to a hearably-next-one with nothing intervening is the embodiment of, and the measure of, progressivity" (p. 15). If something comes between an action and its anticipated response, however, participants examine that violation of contiguity for its interactional import, treating it as consequential for the progressivity of the talk. From the perspective of task-

oriented interaction, progressivity can also be understood in terms of moving the task-in-process towards completion.

Although interactants typically attempt to achieve balance between progressivity and other relevant conversational preferences, a number of exceptions have been documented where progressivity takes priority. Stivers and Robinson (2006), for example, argue that participants in multi-party interaction orient to a preference for answers that sometimes overrides the preference for a response from the selected next speaker, i.e., if someone other than the recipient to a question has the answer, they will often provide it. Stivers and Robinson argue: "this ordering of preferences suggests that interactants are concerned with advancing in-progress activities through sequences" (2006, p. 386). It has also been shown that interactants can prioritize progressivity over intersubjectivity, when referring to persons or places (Heritage, 2007) or when communicating with individuals with limited communicative resources. For instance, non-impaired individuals often avoid repair initiation when speaking with aphasics (Perkins, 2003) and the hearing impaired (Skelt, 2012) in order to preserve progressivity.

Studies of novice language users' conversations have yielded similar conclusions. Analyzing data from conversations-for-learning between novice speakers of Japanese, Ikeda (2008) found that participants prioritized progressivity by self-selecting and taking a turn after a selected speaker had displayed difficulty doing so. Likewise the prioritization of progressivity over intersubjectivity can be seen in the so-called "let it pass" strategy (Firth, 1996), in which expert language users refrain from initiating repair when interacting with

novice speakers.[1] The L1 user avoids correction despite the learner's displayed misunderstanding and instead continues on the trajectory set by the L2 user in order to progress the talk (Hauser, 2017). Prioritizing progressivity can therefore limit potential opportunities for language learning by circumventing moments when L2 learners must negotiate understanding.

While these studies all highlight how participants prioritize progressivity, our investigation instead documents moments in conversation where speakers privilege language use over progressivity i.e., they prolong and expand the talk, giving learners more opportunities to interact. In such cases, an expert speaker ad-libs interactional obstacles that a learner must address in order to restore sequential progression, thus creating spaces for the potential development of L2 interactional competence through increased forms of social participation (For a comprehensive coverage of interactional competence, see Hall, 2018).

Method and Background to the Data

The data we will analyze were collected at an innovative educational facility in Tokyo, Japan known as Tokyo Global Gateway (TGG). As a partnership between the Tokyo Metropolitan Board of Education and five private-sector companies, TGG is envisaged as a place where learners can use English in an experiential and entertaining way (Mori & Takizawa, 2019). Somewhat akin to a so-called English Village (Trottier, 2008), students from all over Japan

[1] See also Liberman (1980) on "gratuitous concurrence", the phenomenon in which interactants pass over ambiguities and misunderstandings on the assumption they will become comprehensible later.

visit the facility for a brief period (1 to 3 days), often as part of their annual school excursion. TGG aims to provide learners with opportunities to use English as a foreign language in realistically simulated contexts, although there is clearly also an element of edutainment involved. Known institutionally as *attractions*, the role-play classrooms are designed to approximate real-world settings, including a fast-food restaurant, a pharmacy, and even an airplane cabin.

TGG employs over 250 English-speaking educators from a wide variety of linguistic and cultural backgrounds (Mori & Takizawa, 2019). Small groups of learners are guided through these settings by staff known as *AGENTs* (an acronym for “Assistant Guide ENtertainer Teacher”). The agents are extensively trained in the institution’s educational approach and usually occupy a supportive role, somewhat akin to a teaching assistant (TA) or an assistant language teacher (ALT). When it comes to role-play tasks, the agents take on the role of "the imagined local", such as by donning a white coat to become a pharmacist or standing behind the counter as a server in the restaurant setting. During these tasks, the agents are trained to see themselves as actors/entertainers rather than as language teachers (Gibson, 2019).

The role-play data we will examine here involves three such agents who we call Kim, Tom, and Fay. Kim and Fay were from the Philippines and Tom was Australian, and they were all in their 20s. They received three months of intensive training in the TGG approach prior to the facility’s opening in September, 2018. This training included administration modules on policy and educational philosophy, linguistic theory modules, and also practical training modules in which the agents workshopped and rehearsed the role-play tasks. Therefore, by the time the data were recorded in July, 2019, the agents had over a year’s

experience performing these role-plays with a range of Japanese learners of English. In addition, some of the agents had teaching experience prior to working at TGG: For example, Kim was a qualified teacher in the Philippines and Fay had worked in a Japanese kindergarten as a teacher aide.

The other participants were second-year students from a Japanese junior high school (aged 13-14). The footage was recorded in July 2019 on their final day at the facility. We do not have access to any specific data on the learners' language level, but they were using the lowest level of mission cards available at the facility, which is considered pre-A1 on the Common European Framework of Reference-Japan (CEFR-J) scale (Fukue, 2019).

The full dataset consists of 4.5 hours of experiential L2 use within the facility, including approximately 3 hours of CLIL instruction and 90 minutes in three role-play classrooms: the travel agency, the fast-food restaurant and the pharmacy. The current analysis will focus on interaction from these last two contexts. The second author and another researcher video-recorded the participants' conversations throughout one complete day at the TGG facility. The agent wore a pin microphone and another microphone was routinely placed on the learners' desk. During the role-play sessions, one agent would adopt a role and another would prepare students for the activity. For example, during the restaurant data, Fay stood behind the counter to act as a server. The students were each given a "mission card" with a simple task written on it, such as "You can customize your pizza". Kim prepared the learners for their role-play by discussing the sort of expressions that they might need and then they approached Fay at the counter in pairs to order their food. Each learner had a separate mission card involving an an opportunity to order something (See Figures 1 and 2). Having completed the role-plays many times, the

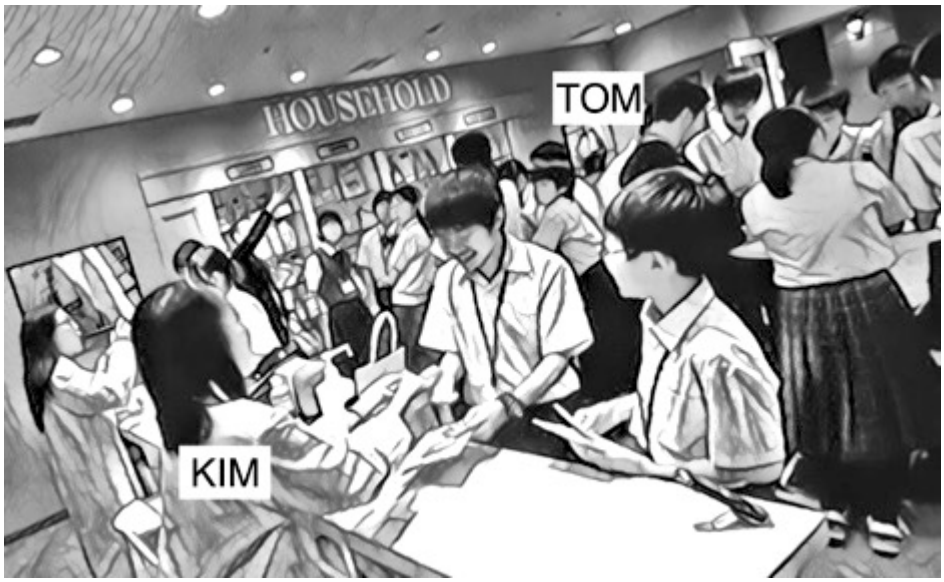
agents were all very familiar with the content of each mission card, but they did not seem to look at the cards during the role-plays to any great extent. The mission cards were designed by the partner education companies in consultation with the Board of Education, but the agents had considerable leeway to interpret how to implement the task in practice. They were instructed to encourage learners to use as much English as possible within each one-minute role-play. The goal was to make the learners feel they had successfully accomplished the mission task without placing any pressure on them. The emphasis was on language use for fun rather than for learning.

Figure 1

The fast-food setting: Tom and Fay are role-playing as servers with two pairs of learners.

Figure 2

The pharmacy setting: Kim and another agent are role-playing as pharmacists. Students approach the counter in pairs but they each have a separate task to complete. Tom and another agent are preparing learners for the task at the standing tables behind.



We then analyzed these data using a multimodal CA approach (see Sidnell & Stivers, 2012 for an overview) in which the recordings were subjected to repeated viewings and the talk was transcribed according to Jeffersonian conventions (Jefferson, 2004). Embodied aspects of the talk are indicated in gray font below the talk tier, and each tier is identified with the participant's initial and a code indicating the locus of embodiment (e.g., -gz for gaze, -px for proximity, -bh for both hands, and so on). The onset of the embodied action is located relative to the talk tier via a vertical bar (|). See the appendix for further details. Where relevant, anonymized framegrabs have also been included below the embodied tiers to help illustrate multimodal conduct. The callouts in each framegrab locate the image relative to the talk.

Findings

In this section, we will document several interactional practices used by the agents to delay progressivity during the role-play activities. We analyze five exemplary cases from our

collection to highlight recurrent sequential features of such episodes and suggest how they are used to challenge the learners to contribute further to the conversation.

Disaligning with a learner contribution via complication

We begin by accounting for how agents delay task completion during the fast-food role-play by introducing a transactional *complication* (Ross, 2017). Unlike a real restaurant, it is important to note that the simulated restaurant at TGG does not have a written menu: since the food is imaginary, it is entirely up to the learners and agents to ad-lib the content of the orders. This means that when the agents reject a learner's order, it is not due to an actual problem of availability, but rather a contrived issue made up on the spot. Considering that complications were an uncommon occurrence in our dataset, our analysis will attempt to inductively account for their emergence using publicly available interactional resources, in line with the CA principle of 'why that now?' (see Schegloff & Sacks, 1973). We will argue that crafting these emergently constructed hurdles on the fly can occasion sequential expansion, provide tacit correction, and (re)align learners' contributions with the explicit task.

An initial example can be seen in Excerpt 1, where the agent (Tom) and the learner (Rin) are negotiating the size of a pizza.

Excerpt 1*: Jumbo Size (Mission card: You can customize your pizza)*

```
01 TOM    and ↑what size pizza.
02        (.)
03        would you [like.]
```

04 RIN [giant] size.

05 |(0.4)

t-hd |leans in eyebrows raised->to line 7

06 RIN GIant SIze.=

07 TOM =[GIant] SIze!=

08 MEI [eheh]

09 RIN =yes.

10 TOM |we have (.) uh |large, (0.4)

t-bh |on counter,,,,,|moves outwards

11 |fa:mily size,

t-bh |increases palm distance

12 or |(0.4) jumbo (.) [°size°]

t-bh |arms fully outstretched

13 RIN [>jumbo<] jumbo size.

14 TOM |jumbo size?

r-hd |nodding

15 okay.

16 |no: problem.

t-gz |down at counter

Prior to this excerpt, there was a base sequence in which Tom solicits a pizza order from Rin (not shown). In line 1, Tom initiates a post-expansion sequence concerning the pizza's size and, after a micro-pause, deploys the increment "would you like” (line 3) to recomplete his turn constructional unit (TCU) and refresh response relevancy (Nanbu, 2021). Rin's response, "giant size” (line 4), occurs in partial overlap with this increment, perhaps occasioning the embodied repair initiation that occurs in line 5, in which Tom leans forward and raises his eyebrows in silence while gazing at Rin. Rin's hearably louder repetition of "giant size," in the next turn treats this as evidence of a hearing issue, and after Tom gives a repetition receipt in line 7, Rin closes the repair sequence with a confirming "yes," in line 9.

Considering that this repair sequence has already disrupted progressivity, it is worth noting that Tom does not simply accept Rin’s order and move forward with the task. Instead, he provides a 3-part list of other sizes that the restaurant has on its menu, implicitly rejecting her order by treating "giant size" as something they do not have. Immediately adapting to this newly occasioned constraint, Rin chooses "jumbo size" and after Tom provides confirmation they move on to the next part of the task.

Tom's obstacle to task progressivity has thus had two immediate and apparent impacts on the interaction: (1) It expanded the sequence at a moment of potential closure, thus providing another opportunity for Rin to use her L2 and; (2) it drew her attention to the formulation of her order (“giant size”) while providing three alternative formulations for

pizza sizes, which tacitly encouraged her to use one of those candidate items instead. Tom therefore treats Rin's word choice as contextually misaligned with his impromptu enactment of the restaurant menu. He gives her additional opportunities to encounter the sort of sub-activities that are found in real-world service encounters, i.e., respecifying one's order using the local menu terms.

However, such obstacles are not always aimed at lexical choice: they can also be used to ensure alignment with the task as specified, namely the customization of a particular food. For example, in Excerpt 2 below, Fay presents Sho with an interactional obstacle, which both occasions expansion and better aligns his order with the task.

Excerpt 2: *No sushi (Mission Card: You can customize your pizza)*

```
01 SHO    [  uh:  I  want  to   ] order:
02        pizza¿
03 FAY    PIZZA [okay.]
04 SHO          [a:nd ] sushi¿
05 FAY    pizza:, and sushi (.) for-
06        oh: we are not >uh< we are no:t uh:m:
07        (1.1) uh:: preparing sushi.
08        (0.5)
09 FAY    we don't have sushi in our menu.
10 SHO    ah: okay=
```

11 FAY =yeah. s-sorry

12 SHO uh:: pizza: wi:z natto,

fermented soybeans

In lines 1-2, Sho begins the sequence by ordering a pizza, but after a repetition receipt and confirmation from Fay in the next turn, Sho then recompletes his order using the increment "and sushi." Rather than simply accepting this order and moving forward, Fay instead offers an account, saying "we are not preparing sushi" before claiming that the store does not have sushi on its menu. In line 10, Sho receipts this account and Fay produces an apology. Keeping in mind that it is fully within Fay's power to treat sushi as acceptable, why does she instead reject it? As in the previous excerpt, the delay to progressivity constitutes a means of preparing the learner for the possibility of such an occurence in a real-world restaurant setting, where certain orders are not always possible. It also seems clear that the rejection of sushi focuses Sho's subsequent turns back on the set task of customizing his pizza, which he immediately begins in line 12 saying “pizza with natto” and continues for the remainder of the sequence (not shown).

Tom and Jun deal with a similar situation in Excerpt 3, as they negotiate a pizza order that occasions multiple obstacles to task/sequence progressivity.

Excerpt 3: *No Margherita Pizza (Mission Card: You can customize your pizza)*

01 TOM [and for you?]

02 JUN [uh:: may I:] (0.2) have.u

03 a piza please?

04 (0.5)

05 TOM a pizza

06 |(.)

j-hd |nods

07 okay=

08 JUN =uh:m (1.6)

09 |(sa- sa- auh:::)

j-gz |to RYU

j-rh |shakes card

10 |(2.0)

t-rh |scratching head

j-rh |rolling-->

11 JUN uh |marugheri:ta.

j-rh ---|beat

12 (0.2)

13 TOM margherita pizza?=

14 JUN |=°piza°

j-hd |nod

15 TOM |I'm |sorry, we have

t-bh |form an X -> line 17

t-fc |wincing expression

16 <no: mo:re>

17 JUN |ahoho

j-gz |to RYU

t-bh |rests on counter

18 TOM margherita pizza °today.°

19 JUN uh >chee- cheese< pizza

20 TOM °ch°eese |((teeth sucking))

t-fc |wince-->line 22

t-hd |to side -->line 22

21 (1.0)

22 TOM we have [no cheese either.]

23 JUN [ohohohoho]

24 RYU oh:

25 TOM can you |pick some toppings?


```
26          (.)
27          for your pizza?
28 JUN      oh: (0.4) uh:: tabasco.
29 TOM      |tabasco?
   t-rh     |holds up thumb
```


```
30 JUN      |tabasco,
   j-rh     |raises thumb
```

Excerpt 3 begins just after Jun's partner, Ryu, has finished ordering his food. Tom then selects Jun by asking "and for you?" occasioning Jun’s pizza order, which is receipted and confirmed in lines 5-7. In the next turn, Jun begins to say something, but displays formulation trouble as he pauses for 1.6 seconds before briefly turning to Ryu while shaking

his card and producing several non-lexical perturbations. This is followed by another 2-sec silence where Jun is still embodily displaying his attempt to formulate the turn while moving his right hand in a rolling motion. In line 11, Jun finally says the word "marugherita", which is treated as repairable by Tom, who clarifies it with the candidate "margherita pizza".

With the progressivity of the order sequence having already been delayed by both this repair work and Jun's lengthy word search, it is again notable that Tom does not attempt to get the sequence back on track by accepting Jun's order and moving on. Instead, in lines 15-18, Tom rejects the order by producing an account ("I'm sorry, we have no more margherita pizza today), drawing out the syllables on "no more" and forming his arms into an X shape. Jun treats this exaggerated delivery as humorous by laughing in next turn. Attempting to bypass this newly positioned obstacle to task progressivity, Jun tries to order a cheese pizza instead (line 19). However, rather than immediately accepting this alternative, Tom quietly repeats the word cheese, cocks his head to the side and sucks his teeth while wincing. Along with the silence in line 21 this projects a dispreffered response, in this case a refusal. In line 22, Tom then gives another account for rejection, "we have no cheese either." A pizza restaurant without cheese is certainly a surprising turn of events, and both Jun and Ryu treat it as such via overlapped laughter and a next-turn surprise token (lines 23-24).

Why does Tom reject both of Jun's attempts to order? As in Excerpt 1, it seems that Tom deploys obstacles to progressivity in second position (i.e., as a responsive action) in order to prompt Jun to properly address the task of customizing his pizza. Tom seems to orient to the ordering of a "margherita pizza" as a subversion of the task, in that it is already a pre-customized variation. By rejecting it, Tom delays progressivity to give Jun another

chance to address the task. However, Jun instead chooses to order a "cheese pizza", which would be commonly interpreted as not having any toppings or customizations. While implausible in the real world, Tom's second account for rejecting Jun's order (that they are out of cheese) does eliminate the possibility of other common pizza types and thus constrains Jun's subsequent orders to more unique alternatives. On the other hand, accepting the order would work to close the task, thereby making it shorter and allowing for fewer opportunities for Jun to practice speaking English. Inserting the obstacle in the second position provides the learner with a chance to (re)initiate a sequence.

In the next turn, Tom pursues Jun's order by asking him to pick some toppings for his pizza. This request further displays Tom's orientation to the task by reformulating what is meant by the word 'customize,' displaying an expectation that Jun's pizza should have multiple components. However, Jun's response in line 28 appears misaligned, in that he only lists one topping, "tabasco", using falling intonation that suggests turn closure. Addressing both the insufficiency and misalignment of Jun's response, Tom repeats "tabasco" but laminates it with upward intonation while raising his thumb, co-operatively transforming (Goodwin, 2018) it into a listing in progress. Jun then realigns his response by reformulating it as a 3-part order consisting of tabasco (line 30) and two other toppings (not shown).

As our analysis of these excerpts has illustrated, the agents' deployment of obstacles to progressivity directed learners towards responses that were better fitted to the agents' task interpretations, while also extending the task sequence and providing further opportunities for the learners to interact in their L2. Obstacles to progressivity thus served as affordances for the participants to display and adapt their emergent interpretations of

the task as it unfolded and were therefore central to the co-constructed achievement of each distinct task-as-process.[2]

"Feigning" misunderstanding in third position repair

Role-play can offer learners opportunities to gauge whether they will be understood in actual situations "in the wild". One way the agents give tacit interactional feedback on the learners' English is by formulating their next-turn response as misaligned in order to highlight trouble in earlier talk. By doing so, they coax the learner to self-repair a just-prior formulation while still maintaining rapport with a light-hearted or joking stance.

This "feigned" misunderstanding took the form of a particular kind of third-position repair which Schegloff (1987) terms a *joke-first*. Third-position repair is "an attempt to fix [a] trouble-source by its speaker based on the next speaker's response, which displays a possible misunderstanding of the trouble-source turn" (Wong & Waring, 2010, p. 224). In other words, a recipient's publicly available misinterpretation triggers the prior speaker to reformulate what they just said.

Third-position repair generally deals with two kinds of problems: incorrect reference and incorrect relevant next action (Schegloff, 1987; 1992), and in most cases the misunderstanding is genuine. On occasion, however, a recipient may choose to claim misunderstanding, such as to do a joke. The initiator of a "joke first", for example, can

[2] Remarking on a study by Skekan and Foster (1997), Ellis (2006) posits that the introduction of surprising information into a task has pedagogic value in that it serves as "an obvious way of extending the time learners spend on a task and thus increases the amount of talk. It may also help to enhance students' intrinsic interest in a task" (pp. 86-87). By documenting the features of such unexpected task trajectories in actual episodes of interaction, our analysis has lent support to this claim.

provide next-turn uptake in a deadpan manner that is disaligned with the prior turn, thereby luring the prior speaker into believing there was something wrong with what was just said. Excerpt 4 (taken from Schegloff, 1987) provides an example of a joke-first in line 2. Two anthropology students are talking.

Excerpt 4: (from Schegloff, 1987, p. 213)

```
01 J      you study the Tiwi?
02 R      Tea Wee (leafs) [Tell people (forture)
03 J                      [No, the Tiwi (0.2) The Tiwi of
04        North Australia.
05 R      I've heard of them.
```

In line 2, R receipts the referent "Tiwi" in a way that is misaligned with J's question, in that it is hearably non-serious. In line 3, J rejects R's response and enacts self-repair on his own turn in line 1 by further specifying the referent, which leads R to align more seriously in line 5. Frequently, after the third-position self-repair has been delivered, the joking stance is revealed through laugh tokens and the speaker may then transition to more serious talk with a turn-initial "no" followed by a more genuine response (Schegloff, 2001). This sort of teasing has also been specified as claims to non-serious intent (Haugh, 2016) or playfulness (Holt, 2016).

In this section, we will examine cases from our dataset in which the agent jokingly claims misunderstanding in order to provide a sequential slot where the learner can enact self-repair on their own prior talk. We argue that the jocular nature in which the agent's

display of trouble is delivered points to its "intentional misunderstanding" (Schegloff, 1987, p. 212) and works to maintain rapport instead of initiating the dispreferred act of other-correction. In our data, there are often multiple claims to feigned misunderstanding, each escalating the absurdity of the displayed misunderstanding and providing a new slot for the learner to self-repair the original ambiguity. As an initial case, consider Excerpt 5, taken from the pharmacy role-play. Kim invites the learner to self-repair by displaying feigned misunderstanding, treating the ailment with more seriousness than is due.

Excerpt 5: *Motion sickness (Mission card: You are going on a long car trip. Buy some medicine for motion sickness.)*

```
01 KIM    how about |you sir.
   k-rh             |palm-selects nao

02 NAO    now |I have a |s- (0.3) shickness.
   n-rh       |palm to chest
                        |points to card

03         |(0.7)
   n-fc    |smile drops
   k-fc    |no visible reaction

04 KIM    |↓o↑ka::y ((mock worried tone))
   k-hd    |nods
```

05 KIM |what kind of sickness do you ha:ve.

k-px |leans in

06 NAO |eh, |may i- (.) |areh? ˚donna ( )˚

huh? what kind of ( )

n-rh |taps chest

n-gz |card----------|~~aki------

07 KIM |is it a |hea::rt |(0.3) |sickness?

k-px |leans back |bends knees

k-bh |heart shape

n-gz |card----|~~kim--------- |~~left

n-bh |vague heart shape

08 NAO |ah:, no: >no no no.<

n-gz |~~card----|~~kim------ |~~left

09 |(1.0)

n-hd |up/back

n-rh |touches throat

10 NAO ah|(h):

n-gz |~~aki~~down

11 |(2.3) (it's) |(0.9) all |(0.9) |my body. hih

n-gz |down---------|~~kim

n-rh |circles head, torso

n-hd |nods

n-bh |taps chest

12 KIM |>OH NO!=WE |NEED TO |GO TO THE (CLIN[IC])<

k-rh |points up

|points left------->

k-px |moves left

k-gz |nao----------

13 NAO [NO]!=

14 NAO =|no(h) [nuh n(h)o]

n-gz |kim----------

n-hd |shakes head

n-rh |lifts, shakes

15 AKI? |[hn hn hn] n(h)o:
a-hd |shakes head

16 KIM |hooh hooh hooh hooh (.)
17 hih hih hih hih .hhh .hhh .hh
18 [.hh]

19 NAO =|[here]
n-gz |~~kim
n-rh |taps chest

20 NAO |(ah) |(e:to/a:nd) |↑so:
n-gz |~~card---------->
n-rh |taps chest |~~down,,, |~~down

21 NAO |ah |may I |have a |medicine (for/of)
n-gz |--- |~cam,,|~card---------->
n-rh |card |chest |taps card

22 NAO |(0.7) |motion |sick[ness].

n-gz |----------|kim------>

n-rh |pt up |pts down|grasps card

k-bh |home |~~claps silently

23 KIM |[YAy:]:::::=

k-bh |claps audibly

24 KIM =|$YES you can have a motion sickness medicine.$

k-bh |thumbs up

In line 2, Nao uses the word “sickness” instead of “motion sickness”, the ailment listed on his mission card. The resultant formulation, “I have a sickness”, sounds far more serious than “I have motion sickness”, perhaps due to its vagueness and the intra-turn pause. After giving Nao time to continue (line 3), Kim produces a continuer (“okay”) that prompts him to explain further, but does so with a mock worried tone of voice (line 4). In short, Kim aligns to the prior turn in a way that is consistent with a face-value interpretation of Nao's turn, therefore approximating a real-world reaction to (projectably) bad news. Kim then initiates a specification that recycles the learner’s formulation (line 5, “what kind of sickness”), thereby making the issue more explicit. Initially Nao continues his request-in-progress (line 6 “may I …”), but then abruptly aborts it as he appears to register Kim’s displayed understanding. Nao turns to his partner to confirm Kim’s inquiry in Japanese, and therefore displays his first recognition of some potential trouble with his original formulation of the pre-request. In line 7, Kim pursues an answer from Nao by proffering a candidate response (“Is it a heart sickness?”). On the surface this aligns with the potentially serious way in which Nao’s pre-request was formulated, but through laminated embodiment, Kim actually formulates this as an absurd candidate formulation (Amar *et al*., 2021), by leaning back as she produces an exaggerated heart-shaped gesture and elongating the vowel on “heart”.

Therefore, Kim's joke-first points to the missing modifier in Nao's request and affords him an opportunity to repair the utterance himself. Nao's next-turn response in line 8 correctly treats Kim's candidate as designed to be rejected and replaced with a more fitting response (Amar *et al*., 2021).

However, it appears that at this point Nao has still not realized that the missing word is "motion", or perhaps even that there is a missing word, so in line 11 he attempts to deal with the trouble by explaining his understanding of "motion sickness", i.e., that the sickness is all over his body. This leads Kim to give an upgraded non-serious uptake, pointing in the direction of another classroom and shouting "Oh no, we have to go to the clinic!" The participants treat this suggestion as humorous through an array of subsequent laugh tokens during which Nao rejects Kim's proposal (lines 13-16). Although inter-turn gaps of silence are common in this dataset, here Nao's rejection is delivered quickly (with an appropriately overlapped turn), so it is possible these sorts of non-serious contributions from the agent can contribute to timely recipient uptake.

With Kim's misunderstanding of his original request clearly established as light-hearted, Nao returns to his original turn (line 2) to make a second attempt at repair. He refers to the prompt card as he embeds the repair proper in his revised first-pair part (FPP) request (lines 20-22). Kim initially receipts the correct version with jubilant positive assessment (i.e., praise) in line 23 before formulating the second-pair part (SPP) in line 24 with a more serious stance. That is, Kim's "yay!" is addressed to the repair sequence and invokes her real-life identity as a language educator while her acquiescence to Nao's request (line 24) returns the talk to the task and is nominally voiced in her role-play persona of the pharmacist, even though it is also teacher-like in that it repeats the whole target

form. In responding to Nao's original formulation with mock seriousness (lines 4, 5, 12), Kim's enactment demonstrates how such a turn formulation might be heard outside the classroom and therefore delays task progressivity in order to give him a chance to repair it.

A similar case can be seen in Excerpt 6, when Kim enacts a feigned misunderstanding of Mio's contribution to highlight the contradiction between Mio's spoken and embodied depictions of a medical condition: Mio says *headache* but holds her stomach to depict pain.

Excerpt 6: *Stomachache (Mission card: You have a stomachache. Buy a box of 30 indigestion tablets)*

```
01 MIO    |may I have.u |(0.2) eh(t-) |(0.4)
   m-gz   |card---------|~~up/rt------|~~left-->
   m-bh   |>>----------|~~raises---------->

02        |headic- (.) |headick.u? |uh?
   m-gz   |left--------|~~KIM------|~~left/behind
   m-bh   |circles stomach x2
   k-gz                           |to waist-->
   k-bh                           |to stomach-->
```

03 KIM |headache?=

k-gz |to waist-->

k-bh |to stomach

04 =|oh no! |my hea(h)d heh heh

k-gz |-------|~~MIO

k-bh |cradles "head" near stomach

k-px |torques rt / steps back

05 MIO |u(g)h?

m-gz |~~up/right-->

06 KIM what happ|ened to your head ('ay)?

m-bh |to head------------>

07 MIO |heddick|.u?

m-gz |~~CHO--->

c-gz |~~MIO

08 CHO u(h)n(h)n

09 MIO |(areh) |chi|gatta kke?

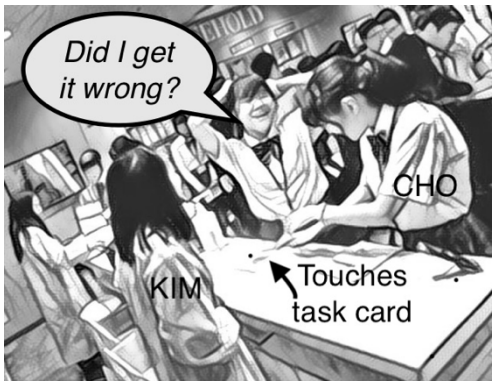
HM different-PST Q

huh? Did I get it wrong?

m-gz |~~CHO--->

c-gz |~~down to card

c-bh |~~touch card



10 KIM? |.heh h'h'

m-gz |~~down to card

11 CHO |kore kore kore

this this this

c-lh |points to card-->

12 CHO? (eh [su]) (("s"))

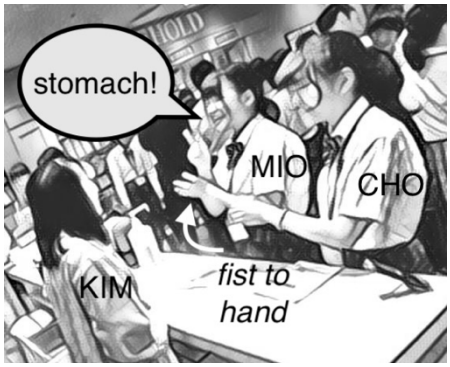
13 MIO? |[s]tomachache

m-bh |to card

14 MIO |sto[ma:(ch)

m-gz |to KIM

m-rh |fist to LH



15 KIM |[ya(h)|a(h) y↓ [heh heh heh]

k-lh |points to MIO

k-bh |claps----------

16 MIO? [medicine]

17 KIM [.hh |so-]

k-bh |to stomach

18 MIO? [medicine] medicine.

19 KIM so |this is your stomach. okay?

k-bh |touch stomach

20 MIO yes

21 KIM stomachache >medicine.<=|what did you ea::t.

k-bh |rolls hands

Mio's FPP in lines 1-2 is incomplete, but within the context of the task it projects a request for headache medicine. The issue that Kim orients to is one of meaning: As Mio says headache, she circles her stomach. Rather than directly pointing out this lexical inconsistency, Kim's SPP response in line 4 playfully takes Mio's request at face value by exclaiming "Oh no my head!". At the same time, she gestures to indicate a head where her stomach is, steps back to show Mio the "head", and laughs through her turn. It is clear that Kim's understanding of the "head" should not be taken seriously, but instead points to a problem with something Mio just did: Mio's turn in line 5 ("uh?") treats it this way by orienting to possible trouble, even though she is not able to fully repair it at this point. In line 6, Kim then upgrades her feigned misunderstanding, to invite repair more directly. What Kim is doing here is reenacting Mio's request with the mismatched elements (the spoken *head* and the embodied stomach) left intact for Mio to re-examine.

In line 7, Mio turns to her partner (Cho) and repeats *headache* with upward intonation, thereby recruiting her assistance in addressing the repair. At this point Cho and Mio orient to the repair as a party, initiating an insertion sequence in which Cho points to

the task card (lines 9-11) and in particular to the key word “stomachache” which is written on it. Cho begins with just the first letter (“s”, line 12), and Mio reads the word aloud (line 13, “stomachache”). In other words, Cho’s participation in the third-person repair is focused on pointing to the solution, and she orients to Mio as holding the responsibility for delivering the repair solution to Kim. Mio does this in line 14 by saying “stomach” (as a replacement for “headache” in line 2) and then concluding the turn with “medicine” (line 16). In short, the progressivity of the turn has been put on hold while the participants dealt with the repair sequence occasioned by Kim’s jocular display of misunderstanding.

Kim’s receipt of the correct referent in line 15 (a laughed-through celebratory “yay” reminiscent of the one in Excerpt 5 line 23) reveals that she has also been aligning to this spate of talk as one in which she was prompting Mio to come up with the proper word. This turn displays Kim's orientation to Mio as finally overcoming the obstacle after protracted difficulty: it is not just a "yes" or a "good", but a "yay." This closing assessment leads to a more direct explanation in lines 19 and 21, where Kim reviews the correct word without any humorous stance before continuing the role-play. Her identity as a teacher is therefore omnirelevant and her persona as a pharmacist is mapped on to that within the institutional business of the role-play task.

As in Excerpt 5, Kim’s claim of misunderstanding works as a momentary obstacle to progressivity in that it delays the learner’s turn-in-progress to invite self-repair of a key element. It does so not by overtly initiating repair, but by proposing an absurd candidate understanding of how the turn-in-progress might be (mis)interpreted in the wild. We also witness Mio’s orientation to progressivity in that she completes her request as soon as the obstacle has been addressed (line 16). Both excerpts also involve the playful escalation of

the imagined stakes ("Oh no we have to go to the clinic!", Excerpt 5; "Oh no your head!", Excerpt 6) encouraging the learners to speak more and adding a sense of entertainment to the task. As Bushnell (2008) notes, this sort of language play can be a resource for socially organizing the task, in this case delaying its progressivity to provide an opportunity for self-reflection.

Discussion

Language learning is a co-participatory process in which novice speakers develop socio-interactional practices by interacting with other competent members. Encountering problems that need to be collaboratively resolved is an integral part of that process (Wagner, 2015) and learners do this by "dealing with the competing principles of progressivity and intersubjectivity" (Pekarek Doehler & Berger, 2019, p. 65). As our analysis has shown, in order to engage learners during a role-play task, expert speakers can create interactional obstacles that challenge learners to expand on their contributions. Whether by proffering a complication or by making a non-serious display of misunderstanding, the experts momentarily delay the progress of the role-play task and tacitly hold the learners responsible for coming up with solutions to restore it.

In one sense, the sequential practice of creating obstactles to progressivity might also be seen as a form of resistance, which typically involves disaffiliation and/or disagreement (Muntigl, 2013; Stivers, 2008), but the excerpts from our collection are ultimately collaborative. They may momentarily create delays, but they do so for pedagogical purposes, helping to make the task more fun (as evidenced by participants' laughter) and ensuring the institutional goals are met.

Crucially, such obstacles also provide interactionally-embedded opportunities for learner noticing (Schmidt, 1990). This can be seen in Excerpt 5, where Nao is on the verge of progressing the task by requesting his medicine, but Kim's obstacle leads him to produce a display of noticing ("may I- huh?", line 6) followed by a lengthy insertion sequence regarding the nature of his 'sickness'. Kim could have simply waited until Nao said the name of the medicine, obviating the need for negotiation. However, doing so would have deprived Nao of the chance to notice and resolve the issue himself. Creating obstacles to progressivity is therefore one way educators can encourage learner agency while still aligning with task goals. In the TBLT approach, information-gap tasks (and the like) are designed to lead to occasional communication breakdowns in order to promote opportunities for increased language use and learning (Pica, 2005). Our study has suggested that even when obstacles are not explicitly written into the task, the expert speaker may choose to instigate such moments on the fly, leading to potential opportunities for language learning.

In addition, in TBLT the notion of task difficulty/complexity is often considered to be a fixed property inherent to the task itself (Robinson, 2001). However, our observations in this study have shown that expert speakers often tweak tasks to recalibrate their difficulty *in situ*, according to a myriad of possible contingencies. As such, our analysis serves to respecify complexity as at least partially determined by the participants themselves in real time. For example, we have seen that ad-libbed complications can be initiated by the agent in order to extend the task and encourage the learner to say more.

Pedagogical Implications

While these obstacles are sometimes presented in an exagerrated or humorous way, they also plausibly mirror interactional challenges that L2 users face beyond the classroom, and therefore exhibit some of TBLT's core principles of authenticity and real-world relevance (Ellis, 2006). Studies of L2 learning "in the wild" have shown that service encounters often necessitate participants' *in situ* adaptation to similar emergent problems (Piirainen-Marsh & Lilja, 2019; Wagner, 2015), making them fertile ground for language practice and learning (Eskildsen & Theodórsdóttir, 2017; Theodórsdóttir, 2011). By initiating these unforseen interactional trajectories during service encounter role-plays, the agents provide opportunities for learners to practice dealing with such issues on the fly without the pressure of facing significant real-world consequences. Negotiating obstacles to progressivity thus provides vital experiences that can afford the development of both context-specific and generic interactional resources for learners to draw upon in subsequent interactions.

Our research is centrally concerned with how the agents expand the role-play tasks *in situ*, and how that provides learners with more opportunities to talk. It could be that this project somehow impacts the authenticity of the interaction. A real pharmacist is likely to initiate repair only on matters that clearly impede understanding, while in our data the agent is doing so in part to prompt self-repair and thereby encourage the learner to talk more. In a busy store or restaurant, that would be inefficient. The complications also vary in their plausibility, with some seeming particularly unrealistic (e.g., having to order a pizza with no cheese). However, the participants are not treating this as genuine talk: they know that the scenarios are not 'real'. That said, we do see this as genuine *role-play* interaction, as do the participants themselves (Okada & Greer, 2013). In one sense, the practices of

expanding the talk that we have outlined also serve to demonstrate the “role-playness” of this talk and differentiate it in some ways from instances of talk in the wild.

That is not to say, however, that such talk is not of educational value. For one thing, these practices were commonly oriented to by the participants as fun (displayed via smiles and laughter) and thus helped to fulfill the agents' institutional role as not only teachers but as entertainers as well. The practices also clearly provide learners with opportunities to practice dealing with unexpected situations in their L2 and to imagine themselves doing so in the real world. It is also at least as authentic as comparable role-play tasks in conventional language classrooms, which form the bulk of TBLT settings.

However, it is important to note that the agents did not place obstacles to task progressivity in front of every learner. Instead, it seems they drew on both their brief interactional history with the learners and real-time displays of interactional competence to decide when (and to what extent) they should delay progressivity. This lends support to the findings of Al-Gahtani and Roever (2012), who suggest that interlocutors in role-played request sequences tend to simplify their interaction for lower-level learners by avoiding insertion sequences. Creating obstacles is thus a very practical way for teachers to tailor unscripted role-play to the ability of each participant and provide opportunities to challenge and develop their interactional competence.

As a middle ground between the traditional language classroom and the real world, “simulated wild” contexts are particularly suited to generating these kinds of interactional opportunities. Rather than simply mimicking a model dialogue, such open-ended role-play tasks provide opportunities to deal with emergent difficulties. While the simulated wild may shelter learners from real-world consequences, the interactional resources participants

deploy to maintain intersubjectivity are anything but artificial: Ideally, over time such practices will become part of the learners' expanding interactional repertoires (Hall, 2018). Creating obstacles to progressivity is one way that language educators can ensure that such interactional opportunities arise.

Conclusion

As an initial investigation into L2 role-play interaction in this innovative educational setting, this study has accounted for some of the ways that English educators encourage novice learners to engage further in the task by creating interactional barriers to task completion and by giving learners opportunities to discover how their language could be interpreted. By adjusting the task to the local contingencies of the emergent interaction, such practices therefore provide learners with unexpected twists that extend the task in ways that simulate the wild. In addition, moments of repair do more than just emulate a perceived conversation—they deploy generic resources to deal with genuine interactional projects. To that extent, the task involves realistic interaction in a simulated setting.

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***Appendix*. Transcription conventions**

The transcripts follow standard Jeffersonian conventions (Jefferson, 2004), with embodiment depicted via a simplified version of the conventions developed by Mondada (2018). The embodied elements are positioned in a series of tiers relative to the talk and rendered in gray.

`|`	The onset of an embodied action is marked with a vertical bar
`|--->`	The action described continues across subsequent lines
`---->|`	The action reaches its conclusion
`.....`	Preparation of the action
`----`	The apex of the action is reached and maintained
`,,,,,`	Retraction of the action
`~~~~~`	The action moves or transforms in some way.
`NAO`	The current speaker is identified with capital letters

Participants carrying out embodied action are identified relative to the talk in subsequent tiers by their initial in lower case, along with one of the following codes for the locus of embodiment:

`-gz`	gaze
`-lh`	left hand
`-rh`	right hand
`-bh`	both hands
`-px`	proximity
`-hd`	head

Framegrabs are positioned within the transcript relative to the moment at which they were taken.