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Tutorials as a way of enhancing active participation in university classes

Abstract

Most students from educationally impoverished backgrounds enrol at institutions of higher learning underprepared for academic challenges. Some of the reasons for lack of preparedness are that teachers tend to dominate classroom talk, leaving very little time for students to ask questions. As students always rely on the teacher's instructions, they cannot solve problems independently nor participate freely in group discussions. This article explored the need for tertiary level students, studying through a medium (English) that is not their primary language, to develop their ability to participate actively in tutorials so as to improve both understanding of their subject areas and spoken discourse competence in English. This problem was, however, dealt with indirectly, as the research concerns of the study were to investigate empirically 'participation effectiveness', the quantity of speaker discourse acts and turns, initiative at discourse act and turn-taking levels and the density of discontinuatives and causatives using an integrated analytical framework.

The hypothesis guiding the investigation predicted that third-years would outperform the first-years in all features of participation effectiveness. The overall findings indicated that third-year students participated more effectively than first-year students. It was then concluded that more exposure to the language of learning and teaching and acculturation through studying in English for over two years contributed to the third-years' participation effectiveness than first-years.

Key words: participation effectiveness, initiative, functional-units, causatives, discontinuatives

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1. Introduction

The main purpose of traditional lectures at tertiary institutions is to impart knowledge by way of an essentially monologic discourse, where a lecturer is expected to do all or nearly all the speaking, while the students listen. However, studies have shown that students, especially those from disadvantaged educational backgrounds, do not learn as well as they could by only receiving information passively. They also need to participate actively in discussions in order to think reflectively, especially because "many of them arrive at university not having mastery over the new discourses they are acquiring" (Paxton, 2007 in Van Schalkwyk et al., 2009:190). Studies have also shown that high school education does not adequately prepare students for tertiary education (Tinto, 1993 in Nel et al., 2009; Foxcroft and Stumpf, 2005 in Nel et al., 2009: 975), and when they enrol at institutions of higher learning, they have to make too big a leap from lockstep type of teaching with code-switching to genuine communication in English. This affects their transition from school to university and also the level of academic success achieved at first-year.

The school to university gap, according to Maxakato (1999 in Nel et al., 2009:975), is increased by the school system which tends to produce inadequately prepared students for higher education academic discourse and also by universities that are ill-prepared to accommodate these learners - particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds. One way of curbing students' unpreparedness is to include opportunities for them to engage in meaningful social interaction with users of the second language. This would enable them to discover the linguistic and sociolinguistic rules necessary for second language comprehension and production.

Studies conducted to explore small group discussions have in most cases shown positive results such as opportunities to gather comprehensible input through negotiating meaning (Long, 1983; Pica, 1994) and receiving collective scaffolding from group members (Donato, 1994 in Ellis, 2000). The present study recognised that for second language learners interaction would not only enhance understanding of content, but would also improve the use of the language of instruction. Tutorials were therefore perceived as a learning mode through which students' "participation effectiveness", that is the quantity of speaker discourse acts and turns and speaker initiative at discourse act and turn-taking levels may be measured and assessed using a discourse analytical framework that addresses the theoretical issues of what constitutes interaction.

Tutorials have been shown to contribute to the retention of information, increase self-esteem, stimulate cognitive achievement (Clouston and Kleinman, 1999), promote a liking for the discipline (Gibbs, 1981 in Huddle et al., 1992), clarify material from lectures and help students appropriate the knowledge transmitted in the original lecture (Sawyer and Berson, 2004). Tutorials provide opportunities for students to engage in cohesive and coherent sequences of utterances rather than isolated sentences. They can also function as interventions in courses with either a high failure rate, or where the students' performance is generally poor (Huddle et al., 1992; Davidowitz and Rollnick, 2005; Smythe, 1972). However, in this study tutorials were used to improve participation in

lectures of students' with limited competencies in the language of instruction, which is also not their primary language. They were also conducted to provide opportunities for students to try out new language through negotiating meaning in a relaxed, anxiety free learning environment to improve their language development. As they interacted and produced language, they were also contributing to enhancing communicative competence in the second language (Izumi, 2003; Shehadeh, 2002; Swain, 1997), and this according to Swain and Lapkin (1995) is a prerequisite for successful development of language competency.

2. Background to the research

Different studies have been conducted on students' participation patterns in small group tutorials. For example, De Klerk (1994, 1995a, 1995b) investigated turn-taking in a racially-mixed post-graduate seminar group using an analytical framework with two main categories, external selection and self-selection. White male students participated better than Black males and female students in this study. Webb (1981, 1983), on the other hand, used an analytical instrument with four categories, response, questioning, initiation and silence, to explore differences in participation between first- and third-year students. The findings indicated that third-year students' talk time was more than first-years'. In the present study, however, the analytical framework combined turns and discourse acts to examine students' "participation effectiveness" operationalised as the number of discourse acts and turns, initiative at discourse act and turn-taking levels and the density of discontinuatives and causatives. The integrated analytical framework was informed primarily by ideas about turn-taking initiative categories from Van Lier (1988) and discourse acts drawn from Hubbard (1998), but it went further than either of them by measuring initiative in terms of turn-taking and discourse acts. The density of discontinuatives and causatives was explored in spoken discourse and not in written discourse, as in Hubbard (1998) and Ramasawmy (2004).

Linking turn-taking and discourse acts into an analytical framework made it possible to measure students' participation in quantitative and qualitative terms. Turns were analysed in terms of three of Van Lier's (1988) turn-taking categories, allocations, self-selections and sequences. All three turn categories were initiative-bearing and were construed in similar ways as in Van Lier (1988), except for sequence, which in this study referred to only one intervening turn and not an indefinite number between the initial speaker's turn. This definition recognised the high degree of initiative taken by a speaker who stayed active on the speech floor when he/she took up alternate turns over a certain period. A non-initiative turn occurred when a speaker joined the speech floor through an allocated turn.

The following discourse acts also formed part of the integrated analytical framework: counter-inform (CI), comment (C), inform (I), elicit (E), reply-inform (RI) and acknowledge (A). As tutor elicits in the data were used to encourage students' participation, enhance comprehension of academic content, provide feedback to tutorial discussion questions and sustain interaction in tutorial discussions, it was therefore necessary to subdivide

this act into different types of questions identified in the data, namely close-display, open-referential and closed-referential questions. If the focus had been just on elicit, it would have been very difficult to recognise the different functions performed by the tutor elicits and also the influence these different questions had on students' output in terms of quantity and quality of their discourse performance. For example, open-referential questions produced elaborate responses, while closed-display questions produced short responses such as "Yes/No" and/ or acknowledges such as "Right", "Ok", etc.

Another important aspect of participation effectiveness that the study sought to explore was the relationship between the total number of discourse acts and turns, the degree of initiative at discourse act and turn-taking levels and the density of certain features of cohesion, as possible indicators of quality in spoken discourse. Since the publication of Halliday and Hasan (1976), which indicated how the grammatical and lexical devices make a text hang together, many studies have focused on cohesion and coherence in students' writing, as these were identified as major aspects of textuality (Carrell, 1982; Connor, 1984; Fahnestock, 1983; Johns, 1986; Khalil, 1989; Kuo, 1995; Hubbard, 1998; Ramasawmy, 2004; Witte and Faigley, 1981). In this study, however, the focus was on students' spoken discourse and an attempt was therefore made to establish whether high densities of certain use of discontinuatives and causatives were also characteristics of the spoken language of students whose discourse performance in terms of the other measures used in the study was superior.

The types of conjunctives that were measured were discontinuatives (i.e. Concession-Contraexpectation, e.g. "Although", and Contrast, e.g. "But") and causatives (i.e. Condition-Consequence e.g. "If" and Reason-Result, e.g. "because", "so that", "in order that"). These were selected because discontinuatives in Hubbard (1989) and causatives in Ramasawmy (2004) occurred frequently in high-rated student essays and thus correlated with good academic writing. The present study's attempt was to explore a possible similar relationship between the density of the use of discontinuatives and aspects of quantity and quality of students' spoken discourse in another academic context, the tutorial.

3. Research design

The hypothesis guiding this study was formulated as follows:

Third-year students participate more effectively in tutorials than first-year students.

This hypothesis was operationalised in four phases: the total number of discourse acts and turns produced by students; the quality of discourse acts and turns; the density of discontinuatives and causatives in students' utterances; and interviews with lecturers. A mixed-method research design was used, as the study combined both quantitative and qualitative elements.

3.1 Participants

The participants were first-and third-year students and five tutors who were also their course lecturers. Out of the 15 first-year and 15 third-year tutorials video recorded over a period of two years, 8 first-year and 8 third-year tutorials were selected for this study. In each case, the tutorials with almost an equal gender balance were selected, even though the overall numbers of females in the course were considerably higher (37 females) than those of the males (33 males), and one third-year group had females only. The selected groups had a total of 70 students, 37 first-and third-year females and 33 first-and third-year males. Owing to fluctuations in attendance and the fact that tutorials were not compulsory, the tutorials did not always have the desired composition of at least 6 members. However, having small tutorial groups made it possible for the tutors to ensure that almost all students took part in the discussions. Also, fewer students in a group made the tutorial environment less intimidating and thus students got to know each other quickly. This type of contact situation is ideal for a study of "participation effectiveness".

The decision to use first-and third-year students in this study was justified by the results of the pilot study conducted with first-, second-, and third-year students in the Department of English, which suggested that there was very little difference between first-year and second-year students' participation in tutorials. The other reason for focusing on first-years and third-years was to see what differences might characterise their participation in tutorials towards the beginning and end of their undergraduate studies in the Department of English. The majority of the participants shared the same mother tongue, but the tutorials were conducted in English, the language of teaching and learning at the University.

First-year English normally has a higher enrolment than third-year English because the majority of the students at first-year take it as an elective, which implies that they do it only for a year and drop it as a major course when they proceed to the second- and third-year of study. Although tutorials are mentioned as part of the instructional and learning modes in the Faculty Calendar and in the lecturers' course outlines, large numbers of students, especially at first-year, make it difficult for most lecturers to conduct tutorials at all. The tutors in the present study were specifically requested to conduct tutorials.

The five tutors in charge of the first-year and third-year tutorials are referred to as A, C, D, E and F. Tutor B's two tutorials were excluded from the study because they consisted of more than 10 students each, considerably larger than the others and not a desirable size for an effective tutorial. Tutors A and F were females and Tutors C, D, and E were males. The tutors (except Tutor C, a native speaker of English) were second language speakers of English.

3.2 Analysis of quantity of interaction

The main construct, "participation effectiveness" was first explored quantitatively. As mentioned earlier, I developed an integrated analytical framework informed primarily by ideas about turn-taking drawn from Van Lier (1988) and about discourse acts from Hubbard (1998). I extended their work by measuring initiative in terms of turn-taking and discourse acts.

Data collected from the16 tutorial groups were transcribed verbatim over a period of two months. Then they were coded either as self-selections, allocations, and sequences. After that they were segmented into functional-units (F-unit), using slashes to mark off the unit boundaries, and then labelled either as "counter-informs", "comments", "elicits", "informs", "reply-informs" or "acknowledges". Students' discourse act and turn-taking participation covered the first examination of participation effectiveness.

3.3 Analysis of quality of interaction

The second element of participation effectiveness that was explored was its quality. I analysed initiative taken by students at discourse act and turn-taking levels. Distinguishing the quality of discourse acts and turns involved differentiating between initiative and non-initiative-bearing student turns and also establishing the relative degree of initiative that might be attributed to each discourse act in terms of the cline of initiative (Hubbard 1998). To establish the quality of each of Hubbard's five discourse acts, plus my addition of the sixth, elicit, they were rank ordered from the bottom of the cline to the top. Unlike Hubbard's (1998), which were based on intuition, in this study the cline was empirically assessed by considering the extent to which the intuitions of a number of lecturers about the degree of initiative manifested in students' discourse acts would correlate with the ranking in the cline (Hubbard 1998).

This was done by rank ordering the acts from lowest to highest in the following way:

Acknowledge

Reply-inform

Inform

Elicit

Comment

Counter-inform.

Acknowledge was ranked the lowest act on the cline because it simply recognises a preceding contribution using short phrases such as "OK", "Right", and "Sure". Reply-

inform was perceived as the next lowest because it requires predictable information and is normally a minimal response to a preceding closed-display question. Inform was ranked higher than reply-inform because it provides information beyond the minimum response typical of reply-informs and normally expands on and clarifies a preceding act or turn. Elicit was ranked slightly higher than inform because responses to it do not necessarily have to be informs, as in Crombie (1985:38). In this study, elicits are not only requests for verbal responses, but they could be responded to with any of the six discourse acts because, as explained earlier, they perform a number of different functions in the data. Comment was ranked second highest in terms of initiative because it reveals an evaluative view on the part of the student who makes it and provides unpredictable information that supports the comment made. Counter-inform showed the highest initiative on the cline because when students directly challenged aspects of the content of the preceding act or turn, they demonstrated strong critical engagement that considerably influenced the direction of the discourse that followed.

After ranking the discourse acts in the cline, it was empirically tested by eliciting the responses of lecturers about the degree of initiative manifested in a sample of students' discourse acts. The rating of the different acts was done on an initiative assessment sheet with numbers 1-24 (each number representing a different speech act in the excerpts attached to the assessment sheet). The four columns on the assessment sheet were for rating the speech acts on a scale of 1- 4 as follows: 1- no initiative, 2- very little initiative, 3- a fair degree of initiative and 4- a high degree of initiative. The lecturers in the Department of English had to indicate the degree of initiative they thought each speech act represented by ticking the appropriate column while reading the excerpts. The results indicated a binary structure rather than the cline (as in Hubbard 1998), with counter-informs, comments, elicits and informs clustering together as what was subsequently called high-initiative acts, and reply-informs and acknowledges as low-initiative acts.

3.4 Analysis of conjunctive cohesion

The third aspect of participation effectiveness that this study sought to explore was the density of certain features of cohesion, as possible indicators of quality in spoken discourse. Previous studies focused on conjunctive cohesion in students' written work, but in this study the focus was on students' spoken discourse. An attempt was therefore made to establish whether high densities of certain use of discontinuatives and causatives were also characteristic of the spoken language of students, whose discourse performance in terms of the discourse acts and turns and initiative at both levels study was superior.

Before an analysis was conducted, all 16 tutorial groups' participation effectiveness; the total number of discourse acts and turns and the degree of initiative at discourse act and turn taking level were explored to distinguish the more effective groups from the less effective ones. The clearly more effective third-year and first-year groups were T301, T311, T112 and T117 and the clearly less effective third-year and first-year groups were T305, T306, T105 and T111. Students in the more effective groups used a higher

number of discourse acts and turns and a higher degree of initiative at discourse act and turn-taking level than students in the less effective groups. The total number of discontinuatives and causatives in these groups were counted and the total number of the conjunctives was then divided by the total number of discourse acts in the more effective and less effective groups to provide the density of conjunctives per 100 acts.

3.5 Interviews

Semi-structured interviews with seven lecturers in the Department of English were conducted two days after the lecturers had watched two first-year and two third-year video recorded tutorials, which were between 40 and 45 minutes long. Each lecturer was asked the following two questions:

- What was your overall impression of the first-year and third-year tutorials?
- What roles did the different tutors play in the tutorials?

By posing these questions to the lecturers after watching the video recordings of the first- and third-year tutorials, it was hoped that they would point out the differences in participation between first and third-year students, and would also point out if the differences in participation were influenced by what the tutors did or did not do. All seven lecturers evaluated third-year tutorials more highly in terms of participation than first-year tutorials. Some of their responses are briefly presented in the findings' section below.

4. Findings

4.1 Quantity of interaction

Coding turn categories and segmenting them into functional-units was done to measure students' discourse and turn-taking participation. Thus the results presented here constitute the findings on the frequency of students' participation with regard to discourse acts and turn-taking participation.

Table 1 below shows the overall results for first-year and third-year students' discourse acts. Because the data for both groups were based on the same number of tutorials and therefore on virtually identical amounts of time available for each, for the hypothesis which predicted that third-years would participate better than first-years, a direct comparison of the overall totals of discourse acts indicated that third-year students produced a considerably higher number of acts than the first-years (580 to 458). With respect to the total number of acts, then, the Year of Study hypothesis could be said to have been supported to an extent, although when two totals such as these are compared, requirements for statistical testing are not met and so findings need to be treated with particular caution.

Table 1: Students' discourse acts

Discourse acts	CI	C	E	I	Total: high initiative acts	RI	A	Total: low initiative acts	Total
1st years	8 (1.7%)	21 (4.6%)	4 (0.9%)	357 (78.0%)	390 (85.2%)	50 (10.9%)	18 (3.9%)	68 (14.8%)	458
3rd years	9 (1.6%)	20 (3.4%)	18 (3.1%)	498 (85.9%)	545 (94.0%)	24 (4.1%)	11 (1.9%)	35 (6.0%)	580

The total scores in Table 1 indicate that by far the largest number of discourse acts was inform and that both groups had a similarly high percentage of informs. These occurred as students were providing information in support of their arguments, when discussing literature questions based on *The Crucible* (Miller, 1953). The first- years also used a lot of informs to support their arguments when, for example, discussing the article they had to deal with. Despite informs being by far the most frequent acts in all the tutorials, the third-year students produced a noticeably higher percentage of elicits, while the first-years had more than double the percentage for the low-initiative reply-informs and acknowledges, as shown in Table 1 above. The Year of Study hypothesis was therefore supported in terms of discourse act participation.

In terms of turn participation Table 2 below shows that the third-years had fewer turns than the first-years, however, their mean length of discourse act per turn was considerably higher (3.5) than that of the first-years (2.4), suggesting that overall, they spoke more than the first-years, a supposition that is supported by the discourse act participation overall result above in Table 1. Despite this, however, specifically with regard to the amount of turns, the Year of Study hypothesis was not supported.

Table 2: Student turns

Turns	Self-selection	Allocation	Sequence	Total initiative-bearing acts	Non-initiative bearing turns	Total	Mean length of turn
First-years	68 (35.1%)	4 (2.1%)	99 (51.0%)	171	23 (11.9%)	194	2.4
Third-years	82 (48.8%)	7 (4.2%)	70 (41.7%)	159	9 (5.4%)	168	3.5

4.2 Quality of interaction

In terms of how much initiative the students revealed at discourse act level, the figures in Table 1 above show that the first-years produced 390 high-initiative acts to 68 low-initiative ones, while the third-years produced 545 of the former and 35 of the latter. Statistical testing indicated a very significant difference (Chi-square = 21.26 (df =1); p = 0.0001) between the two groups. Thus in terms of discourse act initiative support was found for the Year of Study hypothesis.

With regard to turn-taking initiative, third-year students had higher percentages for self-selections and allocations and they also had fewer non-initiative turns as shown in Table 2. The higher percentage for self-selection for third-years implies that they got more speech floor and the higher percentage for sequence, on the other hand, shows that first-years were able to hold the floor space more than the third-years.

In the first-year tutorials, there were fewer allocations by students and allocating turns to the next speaker was done mostly by the tutors. Many of these allocations resulted in non-initiative turns, which were more for first-years than third-years. Excerpt 15-T111, turns [28] and [32] are examples of non-initiative turns:

Excerpt 15-T111

		E->
[Sequence, allocation]	[27]Tutor:	Why is he called a simple, primitive brutal soul?/
		I->
		Dorothy wants an explanation, Tsweni.
		I->
	[28]Tsweni:	[…] the accent can really tell, its kind of like, I mean …I'm really stuck.
		E->
[Sequence]	[29]Tutor:	[…]Why do they call him a simple, primitive brutal soul?
		I->
[Self-selection]	[30]Dorothy:	I think according to them he lookelike the way he dressed.

E->

[Sequence, allocation] [31]Tutor: And did they finally get him on their side?/ Because

I->

we are told about him being smart./ And what makes

E-> E->

you say he was smart?/ Was he smart, Baboloki?

RI->

[32]Baboloki: I don't know.

These turns were occasioned by allocated turns and therefore show no student initiative. As can be seen in Table 2, very few (5.4%) third-year turns were non-initiative bearing, while the proportion amongst the first-years was more than twice as high (11.9%). The statistical result also indicated a significant difference (Chi-square = 3.95 (df =1); p = 0.0469) for initiative-bearing as opposed to non-initiative turns in favour of the third-years.

Conjunctive cohesion was explored to determine the number of discontinuatives and causatives in the four more effective and four less effective tutorial groups. The total of these conjunctives was then divided by the total number of discourse acts in both groups to provide the density of conjunctives per 100 acts, as shown by the bracketed figures in Table 3 below:

Table 3: Conjunctive cohesion in more and less effective tutorials

Total acts	Discontinuatives		Causatives		
More effective Groups	Concession-Contra expectation e.g. Although	Contrast e.g. But	Condition-Consequence e.g. If	Reason-Result e.g. because, so that, in order that	Total
T112(=52) T117(=132)	0 0	2 3	1 2	5 6	8 11
T301(100) T311(168)	0 2	11 8	1 7	6 15	18 32
Total=452	2 (0.5%)	24 (5.6%)	11 (2.6%)	32 (7.5%)	69 (16.1%)

Total acts	Discontinuatives		Causatives		
More effective Groups	Concession-Contra expectation e.g. Although	Contrast e.g. But	Condition-Consequence e.g. If	Reason-Result e.g. because, so that, in order that	Total
Less effective Groups					
T105(=24) T111(=32)	0 2	0 0	0 0	3 3	3 5
T305(=45) T306(=13)	0 0	1 2	5 0	4 0	10 2
Total=114	2 (1.7%)	3 (2.6%)	5 (4.3%)	10 (8.6%)	20 (17.2%)

The frequencies of the acts containing the selected cohesion features in each of the groups relative to the number of acts that did not contain such features were compared statistically using Chi-squares. The test revealed that none of the four cohesion features occurred significantly more frequently in the more effective and less effective groups. This result therefore suggests that there is no relationship between participation effectiveness in tutorials and high density of these specific types of conjunctives in the discourse of participants. Although this is somewhat surprising in the light of the written discourse findings in Hubbard (1989:257), where discontinuatives made for more coherent student academic writing and in Ramasawmy (2004:72), where in high rated coherent student narrative texts there was an abundant use of causative conjunctives and in high-rated expository compositions more discontinuatives were found, it is clear enough in Table 3 that the density differences between the two groups are small. The greatest difference is in terms of Contrast (5.6 for the more effective group against 2.6 for the less effective group), but even this is far from being statistically significant (Chi-square = 1.10 (df = 1): p = 0.2943).

In terms of frequencies rather than densities, the more effective group revealed much higher use of the cohesion features, but this was of course largely because they participated more, generating many more acts overall.

4.3 Interviews

Interviews with the seven lecturers provided qualitative support for the quantitative elements in the main construct, participation effectiveness. The responses to the first question varied. Two female and two male lecturers felt that the two tutors in both first- and third-year tutorials introduced the tasks the students had to do, and gave them the guidance they required. Another two lecturers commented that the first- year tutors maximized students' participation through elicits, but also controlled the tutorial talk.

This observation was echoed by a female lecturer who expressed concern that first-year tutors dominated the discussions and conducted tutorials like classroom interaction using the initiation-response-feedback (I-R-F) sequence.

The two female lecturers whose responses are presented below did not conduct any tutorials:

Lecturer 1: The students at first-year did not convince me that they understood exactly what they were talking about. But my impression was that at least they could say something. I saw them volunteer to ask questions.

Lecturer 2: At first-year, there were those students who did not participate very well. But on the whole, the students tried their best to take part in the discussion.

The second interview question posed to the lecturers focused on their perceptions on the tutor roles in tutorials. Five lecturers stated that a tutor should give guidance, especially at first-year level. Some of their responses were as follows:

Lecturer 7: In first-year tutorials, there should be a lot of guidance. There is no need for guidance in a third-year tutorial.

Lecturer 6: First-years need a lot of guidance and obviously they do not know what a tutorial is. So, if the tutor takes them through the process, I think by the time they are in third-year, they will be independent.

The role of facilitation was perceived as important at third year level. Three lecturers felt that tutors should facilitate and allow students to interact without any interference from the tutors.

Lecturer 4: I expect tutors to facilitate more and give students a lot of opportunities to react and respond to their questions and comments.

Lecturer 2: Tutors should guide and facilitate the proceedings so that the whole thing is student- centred and not tutor-centred.

Another female lecturer stated that there should be more facilitation for first-year students than third-years because they appear to be more confident. She based her comment on the videotapes they had watched prior to the interviews.

My observation of first year students' behaviour in tutorials bears testimony to the two responses given above. First-year students expected a lot of guidance in tutorials for two reasons. First, tutorials were new to them and to take full control in discussions was not an easy thing to do. Second, working in small groups with less tutor interruption was also a novel experience for most of them. These students came from educational

backgrounds that were teacher dominated with very limited (if any) free talk opportunities for learners in usually overcrowded classrooms.

Black lecturers who are also products of the same system of education are aware of the linguistic challenges first-year students face at tertiary institutions. That might be the reason why the two lecturers above responded in this way. Only one lecturer mentioned that tutors should encourage students in tutorials.

Lecturer 7: Students need to be encouraged. So, a tutor needs to play a slightly more central role, but only to try and provoke a discussion and not to lead it.

This lecturer also raised an important point of leaving students to participate in the discussion with less tutor interruption. He might have been emphasizing what he said earlier that third-years need very little guidance.

5. Interpreting findings

The present study provided an integrated analytical framework that captured both the quantity and quality of participation in university tutorials. The finding that third-year students participated better than first-years supports Webb (1983) who also observed differences in the amount of participation between first-years and third-year students. However, his study covered only one part of mine, which went beyond the absolute number of discourse acts and turns and also focused on initiative at discourse act and turn-taking levels.

A very important implication of the finding showing that the third-years participated more effectively is that it provides a considerable degree of validation to the analytical framework developed in this study. First, one would expect the third-years to perform better than the first-years for a variety of reasons, including longer exposure to English as the LoLT at tertiary level, more confidence in using this language also in spoken interaction, greater acculturation to the university environment and the fact that they are a more select group, having successfully completed two years in the Department of English. The fact that the analytical findings with respect to this hypothesis align closely with these general expectations indicates that the framework does indeed appear to measure key aspects of discourse performance that in this context can be expected to improve over time.

The validity of the analytical framework also derives support from a second source, namely the Department of English lecturers' impressions of the first-year and third-year tutorials. They consistently evaluated the third-year tutorials more highly than the first-years. Thus the results with respect to the Year of Study Hypothesis are not only of interest in themselves, but as they appear to provide an analytical explication of features that underlie the lecturers' impressionistic evaluations, the results also point to the validity of the analytical framework.

6. Recommendations

Using the analytical framework to describe and evaluate spoken discourse in university tutorials revealed important insights about tutorials for lecturers and university students studying in the second language (i.e. English) that is not their mother tongue. One of these insights is the quantity and quality of interaction when tutors are aware and sensitive to students' passivity and poor participation in lectures. Lecturers can run tutorials that will provide a relaxed, anxiety free learning environment that will enhance students' participation. If this is implemented, tutorial attendance may have to be compulsory.

Another insight is that this study has confirmed the differences in participation effectiveness between first-year and third-year students and this implies that in tutorials tutors should assist first-years more than third-years by providing support and guidance.

The finding of the study with respect to conjunctive cohesion as an indicator of quality in spoken discourse implies that discontinuatives and causatives should be recognized in students' spoken discourse and this may require further investigation.

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