

Power, Coordination & Talking Shop: An Analysis of Communication Among EFL Instructors

Sharif Mebed

Ryūkoku University, Fukakusa Campus

This paper discusses a study of teachers working in a coordinated English program at a private university in central Japan. The researcher recorded conversations of various teachers discussing problems and concerns in the day-to-day management of their coordinated program. The data of this paper is the transcription of those verbal interactions as well as e-mail interviews. The objective of the present study is to ascertain how the unequal power relations within a university department play out in the operation of a program where multiple teachers are under the constraint of having to teach the same content simultaneously in a number of classrooms in order to prepare students for the same conversation and writing test. The writer aims to discover how full-time teachers communicate with part-time teachers to implement the coordinated program. A second aim of this paper is to discover how part-time teachers react to the constraints placed upon them from above. The results of the study show that teachers in this program do not oppose the intrusion of authority but generally welcome the guidelines incorporated into their courses from outside. The researcher found that the reasons for this include a desire among the part-time teachers to have more concrete course objectives that do not exist in non-coordinated language programs, a desire to have opportunities for improvement as teachers within a coordinated program, and the fact that their own ideas may also be incorporated within the course guidelines under which they are operating. The implications of these findings are taken up in the discussion section.

本稿は、日本の中部地区にある私立大学の英語教育プログラムにおける教員の仕事上の会話を分析する質的研究である。これらの教員は、共同語学教育コース(coordinated language education)で授業を行なっている。著者は教員達の授業運営や教室の問題などについて会話を録音、文字化し本研究のデータとして使っている。本研究の目的は大学の英語教育の現場で、専任教員

と非常勤講師の力関係において、仕事に関する会話はどのように展開するのかについて調べることである。特に関心の的は、まず専任教員はどのように非常勤講師の協力を得ることが出来るのかということである。次に、非常勤講師の教室内の活動が専任教員からの指示によって少なからず制限されるのであり、非常勤講師はどのように対応するのかに注目する。この研究の結果として、非常勤講師はデータの中で、教育の自由を少なからず制限する専任教員の指示を歓迎することが分かった。その理由の一つとして、非常勤講師は、他の英語プログラムには存在しないその共同語学教育プログラムの具体的な授業目標を役立つと考えていることがある。その理由の二には、本研究で取り上げる共同語学教育プログラムでは、教育能力を高める機会があると非常勤講師が指摘していることがある。その三として、非常勤講師の教育方針をコースのガイドラインに組み込む機会があると述べていることである。これらの結果をディスカッションの中で考察する。

This is a short qualitative research study of work-related interaction between instructors teaching English courses to non-English majors at a private university in central Japan. This analysis seeks to clarify the process through which program coordination is realized on a daily basis through negotiation of course content (class activities), discussion of evaluation (grading and testing) and an ongoing dialogue concerning course goals. That process occurs during teacher meetings, e-mail exchange, and informal chats before and after class. Looking at transcriptions of teacher interaction, the researcher aims to present a part of the process through which coordination of an English program is negotiated among the teachers participating.

In this article I analyze discourse between people on two different sides of the power continuum. In a position of power are the full-time professors who enjoy a range of benefits, including relatively high salaries, health insurance, housing benefits, research budgets, expenses-paid study trips abroad, and private offices. These instructors are the English program coordinators. In contrast, the part-time teachers are paid much less, receive no benefits, and are charged with teaching only specific courses on yearly contracts. Moreover, full-time teachers control the educational program. Although officially a power held by the administration, at the university where the present research was conducted, full-time teachers effectively hire and dismiss the part-time staff: a fact that makes

clear the hierarchical dynamics.

The present research analyzes four examples of discourse between members of these two groups as they discuss work-related topics. The goal of the study is to allow the reader to perceive how varying ranks of teachers negotiate the power relationship within a language program at a Japanese university. The researcher hopes to present a vivid picture of the dynamics of human interaction in a context that would normally be closed to the outside. Transcripts of teacher interaction have been included because basing this study on explication without examples of discourse would deprive it of its vivid nature and deny the reader a clear picture of how problems are dealt with on-site. Examples of discourse provide clarity concerning how full-time teachers assert their power to direct the program on a day-to-day basis, and how part-time teachers attempt to counter-assert their own power from inferior positions to meet goals that they feel are appropriate.

Literature review

There exists literature on staffroom interaction and staffroom ethnography pertinent to the present study. Kainan (1994) investigates how the staffroom is used in an Israeli secondary school. She reports on how the use of space and the patterns of interaction function to establish and sustain power relations, and how that space is used to help teachers achieve their professional goals.

Another study related to the present research is Holmes, Stubbe, and Vine (1999). Holmes and her colleagues investigated interaction occurring in government offices in New Zealand. They recorded interaction between superiors and subordinates to discover how professional identity is constructed within conversations. According to their findings, participants used different kinds of pragmatic orientations in their speech to achieve different goals. For example, superiors sometimes used polite language forms when addressing subordinates in order to create alliances and build trust. However, at other times, even in the same conversation, superiors were found to use rather straightforward orders, or remind workers of their own positions of authority to elicit action. Holmes et al. argued that these adjustments were made in order to meet specific, ever-changing communicative goals. They also noted that the subordinates themselves often

shored up their superiors' positions of authority in conversations by agreeing with the superiors' discourse, or cooperating to finish sentences. The ambivalent relationship among participants resulting in cooperative speech-acts appearing in close proximity with coercive and resistive moves will also be found in the data from the present study.

Richards (2006) reported on research he conducted at two educational institutions and one research facility, where he recorded staffroom interaction. He found that setting agendas and turn taking in more formal meetings were strictly controlled by unwritten rules of interaction, and transgressors of the rules were often ignored or chastised. Turn taking and its role in spoken communication among teachers will be of interest in this paper as well.

Context

As stated earlier, the present research was conducted at a private university in central Japan. Prichard (2006) pointed out that university teachers at every level (from part-time teachers to full-time professors) in Japan enjoy a great deal of independence to design, teach, and grade their classes. Many English teachers in Japanese universities work free of constraints and often have little more than a course title like "English Conversation I" to guide them (Cowie, 2003). In informal observation, the researcher notes that at Japanese universities where coordinated programs have not been implemented, English classes are taught in isolation, with little influence or stimulation from other language teachers in the same institution. Full-time teachers are often busy in their offices or elsewhere, and in many cases part-time teachers have little time or motivation to discuss their classes in the staffroom. However, Venema (2008) describes a movement in some Japanese universities in which English instructors are endeavoring to move away from that kind of isolation and work in tandem with one another. According to Venema, instructors at his Japanese university coordinate courses to ensure the acquisition of specific knowledge and skills. Similarly, the department examined in the present paper went through a transformation from a *laissez-faire* environment with almost no guidelines or course goals, to a highly coordinated English program during the two years leading up to the beginning of this study.

Coordination there was realized through the creation of stated course goals for each of the three courses, unification of course materials (textbooks and handouts), and a unification of all student evaluation (grading) for the four required English courses students take in the first and second years of their university education. Although both full-time and part-time teachers retained the right to design class activities and control the class on a day-to-day basis, both full- and part-time teachers entered upon an obligation to prepare their students for a high-stakes interview test and essay exam, conducted by an outside examiner (another teacher on the same team) who marked the students' performance based on a predefined rubric. The purpose of having outside examiners was to maintain accountability. The amount of work-related discussion among teachers between classes increased immeasurably as compared with before the institution of coordination, as teachers found they had common goals and problems. Both full-time and part-time teachers found it necessary to remain "on the same page" as one teacher described it. The bulk of the interaction discussed below was a natural result of the coordination system and not planned or foreseen before the program had begun.

Each course in the program was designed in part through the cooperation of all participant instructors during a series of meetings held over the year preceding the beginning of coordination. In the planning meetings all teachers, regardless of status, were encouraged to contribute freely in discussions about the educational process and testing activities. However, some key components, including textbooks, testing procedures, and many of the course goals, were decided beforehand by the full-time teachers, referred to in this article as Wilcox and Philips (pseudonyms). As will be seen below, they function as the coordinators and motivating forces for close coordination in this teaching context.

Research questions

The following research questions have been formulated in order to focus the present research:

1. How do full-time teachers (coordinators) interact with subordinate part-time teachers in discussions to fulfill their educational goals in a highly

coordinated English program?

2. What discursive acts do teachers in subordinate positions use within formal and informal meetings to institute educational activities that they want to carry out? Finally in the process of the research, a third question arose:
3. Why do part-time teachers seem to cooperate in a system that institutes their subordination, when they had previously enjoyed great freedom and equality?

Methodology

The data for this research was obtained by recording conversations between university instructors during short casual interactions and formal meetings, which occurred after the new coordinated program was begun. There were a total of nine instructors teaching three different courses. The teaching staff included seven native English speakers and two Japanese nationals who had near-native fluency in English. The three courses taught were a reading course for first-year students meeting once a week, an oral communication and writing course for first-year students meeting twice a week, and one four-skills course for second-year students, which also met twice a week. Some teachers do not appear in any of the transcripts that were used in this paper. The researcher was a participant in the two latter courses. The digital recorder used for data collection was in view of the participants at all times (emerging from the shirt pocket when standing or on the table when sitting). Before any recordings were made all teacher-participants agreed to have their voices recorded and were informed that the researcher hoped to do research concerning coordination, and that the ultimate goal was to present the findings in an academic paper. However, the exact nature of the research, reflected in the research questions above, was not revealed to the participant-teachers.

In order to transcribe the recordings the researcher relied on concepts originating in conversation analysis (CA), developed primarily by Sacks (1992). CA calls for data collection that is limited to recordings of *authentic interactions* and was influenced by ethnomethodology, a kind of anthropology that analyzes everyday verbal interactions to discover how people in groups view their world through commonsense knowledge (Hutchby & Wooffitt, 1998). CA researchers attempt to grasp the context they are studying through explanation of the kind

of turn taking that goes on, studying pre-sequences and looking at repair moves (Hutchby & Wooffitt, 1998).

However, the present research does not follow a purely CA methodology. This study is also concerned with pragmatics, or the study of how language is used to create meaning within the context of human interaction (Yule, 1996). Pragmatics developed out of Austin's (1962) work on the philosophy of speech acts. There are many concepts that fall within the parameters of pragmatics. This study is primarily concerned with conversational implicature and theories of politeness, focusing on how teachers in superior positions use language to encourage cooperation among subordinates (Thomas, 1995). In addition to CA and pragmatics, the researcher interviewed teachers via e-mail, described in detail later, to clarify points raised in the recordings. This eclectic approach is encouraged by Silverman (1999), who suggested that it may be necessary to mix methodologies to produce valuable research outcomes.

Data and analysis of informal interaction

Below, four transcripts are analyzed. Each transcription presented is an excerpt from longer transcripts, the details of which will be indicated below. The transcriptions were made following practices developed by Jefferson (2004). Her transcription system attempts to realize the nature of human communication beyond just the particular words spoken. Figure 1 shows the transcription

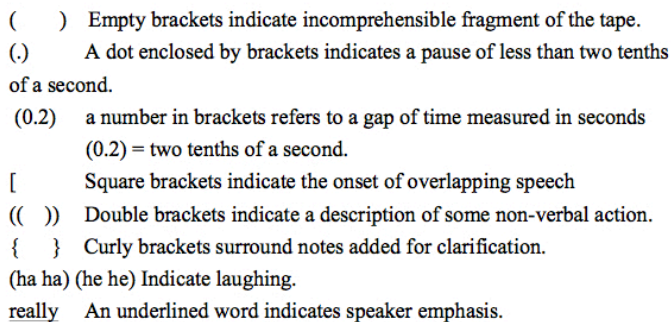
- 
- () Empty brackets indicate incomprehensible fragment of the tape.
 - (.) A dot enclosed by brackets indicates a pause of less than two tenths of a second.
 - (0.2) a number in brackets refers to a gap of time measured in seconds
(0.2) = two tenths of a second.
 - [Square brackets indicate the onset of overlapping speech
 - (()) Double brackets indicate a description of some non-verbal action.
 - { } Curly brackets surround notes added for clarification.
 - (ha ha) (he he) Indicate laughing.
 - really An underlined word indicates speaker emphasis.

Figure 1. Transcript conventions

conventions used in this paper, which were adapted from Jefferson's.

The first transcript comes from an informal meeting between classes.

Transcript 1

(Original recording: approx. 3 minutes 30 seconds; 65 lines)

001 Stewart: Today we did the speaking a bit and () we put nine of the
002 sentences jumbled up, and then they got tested. Basically they had to
003 remember the nine sentences and then in the other class they had to
004 talk about the picture using that sentence plus two others as they are
005 speaking now, and [that the that...
006 Wilcox: [That sounds reasonable.
007 Stewart: That's giving them things to remember plus some that they
008 make on their own. I was just wondering what you think about that.
009 Wilcox: The only issue (0.1) the only issue, I mean I am in favor of that, the
010 only issue is that you make sure it's not the case that one teacher is
011 doing it and the others aren't. Because if you have a kid saying,
012 "well, that teacher gave the answers but our teacher makes us come up
013 with it...so..." What you need to do is to talk to the other writing
014 teachers and maybe e-mail them and say, "this is what I'm doing. And
015 it's fine for everybody to do that I suppose...
016 Stewart: Well...I...I want to try it out and see [if it works,
017 Wilcox: [But it's natural that the
018 speaking is () because they haven't panicked yet and they
019 haven't gone away and do a
020 () or practice which they need to...it's funny, I just did a
021 wonderful class. I did nothing basically. I was just ... I was just
022 the supporter. I did nothing but run around
023 and answer questions. I said you have 30 minutes, start on "The
024 Tourist," and off they go.
025 Stewart: But we're not...we haven't talked about any (.1.) like...
026 techniques of memory training or things like that that we could
027 teach them, 'cause that might be ...
028 Wilcox: Yeah interesting there are different ways of doing it aren't there. They
029 could learn it backwards for a start...definitely want them learning
030 chunks, so "how long have you been..." should be a chunk.

The above exchange was initiated by Stewart (pseudonym), a part-time teacher, but the turn-taking structure shows that Wilcox held the floor for as long as he wanted it. He was almost never interrupted in the recordings made for this research, and after an initial explanation, Stewart's contribution was limited. Once Wilcox had made his statements, he often determined who would get the next turn as can be seen below. It appears that Wilcox is not only in control of the program, but also in control of the discourse about the program.

At the outset, Wilcox gave support to Stewart by saying that he "favors" the action. However his position of power was clear when he used two types of expressions to exert control over the situation. The first of those ("the only issue is you make sure..." (line 009-012)) was in effect a directive for Stewart to get the cooperation of the other teachers who were not present. The second example of Wilcox's use of language to control the situation was: "what you need to do is" + *verb* (line 013) which is basically a direct order. However, Wilcox was not just an authoritarian in this situation; he was careful to clarify his reasons. The long clarification in the transcription above can be interpreted as expressing Wilcox's desire for consensus and cooperation to get things done. This kind of half ordering, half negotiating may be characteristic of a power structure appropriate to a context where as recently as one year prior, all instructors (full-time and part-time) were not only free to make all educational decisions about their own classes, but held it as a prerogative.

Stewart's response to Wilcox's directive to get the permission of his peers ("Well...I...I want to try it out and see if it works...") represents an attempt at resisting the order. However, Wilcox made no response to that statement, choosing to return to a previous topic. This displays Wilcox's ability to control the topic. Moreover, Stewart did not push his point, and his decision to give up his protest is symbolized by his participation in the new topic a few lines later.

Transcript 2 features Wilcox, a part-time teacher referred to as McPherson (pseudonym), and O'Neill (pseudonym), who is also a part-time teacher. During an informal meeting in the hall between classes, O'Neill proposes a multi-week task for inclusion in the following year. This excerpt shows a struggle, albeit on a small scale, for power between a full-time teacher and two part-time teachers

who share similar opinions on a particular issue.

Transcript 2

(Original recording: approx. 2 minutes 30 seconds; 51 lines)

- 050 Wilcox : One of the things I want to do more than anything is pronunciation,
051 just really really () on pronunciation, do the recording test
052 and a listening test.
053 O'Neill: Right.
054 Wilcox: ...so we'll do a longer recording test and again "limited range"
055 we're gonna say, "it'll be one of these."
056 O'Neill: So what do you think about the students doing a poster presentation?
057 Wilcox: What students?
058 O'Neill: Sophomores.
059 Wilcox: (.2.) No. We () gotta, gotta keep it simple.
060 O'Neill: But last time ... two years ago, it went pretty well.
061 Wilcox: Did you think?
062 O'Neill: ... and the students tend to get into it.
063 Wilcox: It wasn't bad.
064 O'Neill: ...and it's something the students have to do in the future...might
065 have to do in the future, I mean I taught at...
066 Wilcox: I am just trying to avoid work with these sophomores.
067 McPherson: I don't, I don't think a poster presentation is very labor intensive
068 for us.
069 Wilcox: You wanna do it then?
070 McPherson: I think it's a good idea.
071 Wilcox: How do you want to grade it?
072 O'Neill: I think we should consider it. We could draw up a rubric pretty
073 easily.

In line 053 O'Neill strengthens Wilcox's position with "right." However, O'Neill's next move was to suggest that poster presentations should be brought in as a key activity in the second-year program during the next school year, which was in contrast to Wilcox's vision. Wilcox countered with "what students?" but based on the context this move could be interpreted as feigned ignorance. Despite

that, O'Neill continued to argue for the activity's inclusion. This time, Wilcox responds with a more straightforward rejection (059). After the rejection, he did state his reason, but O'Neill took that opportunity to continue debate. O'Neill was able to quickly argue the perceived success of poster presentations in previous years across three turns. In addition to O'Neill's argumentation, the intervention of McPherson, and his willingness to teach the poster presentation (lines 067-068) may have helped to carry the argument to a successful conclusion for the part-time teachers.

In the above situation, we see part-time teachers participating in the formation of the program they are working in, while holding less power within the system. It is clearly not impossible for a part-time teacher to press an argument and have his idea adopted into the program. Moreover, in the second transcript, we see that collaboration among part-time teachers may strengthen arguments. However, cooperation among part-time teachers does not always succeed in persuading the full-time professors, as will be seen in the following informal conversation.

Transcript 3

(Original recording: approx. 2 minutes 10 seconds; 46 lines)

- 100 Stewart: Um, when Paul Nation was here, he suggested that ... at the
101 beginning of each class students should study vocabulary for 10
102 minutes.
103 Wilcox: Well they can do it if you have time.
104 O'Neill: "if you have time? The...the first thing to go is always the
105 vocabulary study,
106 Wilcox: ...Because they don't need us to do it. They could absolutely be doing
107 it on their own time.
108 Stewart: Well you see they COULD be doing it, but...
109 O'Neill: If we do it in class...
110 Stewart: If we do it in class we might get better results...
111 O'Neill: The students would know, "oh, vocabulary is important!"
112 Wilcox: The only downside of it is that they think "Oh I have done [it."
113 O'Neill: [You're right.
114 Stewart: That's speculation. You don't know that.

-
-
- 115 O'Neill: Another thing...Another... {O'Neill's speech is ignored}
 116 Wilcox: {to Stewart, incredulously} You want to give them 10 minutes to
 117 study in each class?
 118 {No response}
 119 O'Neill: At { name deleted } University, they get 5 minutes at the beginning
 120 of each class... {O'Neill ignored}
 121 Wilcox: But they could be doing it ... doing it on their own. [2.0] So...what
 122 are we doing today?

The “strength in numbers” which was successful in Transcript 2 proves less than effective in Transcript 3. Part-time teacher Stewart brought up the topic, and initially Wilcox did not appear to be strongly opposed to it. However, at the suggestion that it should be institutionalized, the coordinator put up strong resistance (106-107, 112). Stewart called Wilcox’s argument against in-class vocabulary study time “speculation,” but Wilcox used an incredulous tone in line 116 connoting that 10 minutes at the beginning of a 90-minute class was not a good use of time. That tone may be what prevents any response to the question from Stewart. In addition to his use of tone, Wilcox also chose to ignore O’Neill in line 118 and in 120, bypassing a possible face-threatening situation (Thomas, 1995). Again, Wilcox was able to ignore his subordinates because of his stronger professional position. Finally, Wilcox quashes the proposal by changing the subject. Wilcox uses tone, turn allotments, and finally a topic change to retain control of the discussion. It is also interesting to note that O’Neill argued strongly for the institutionalization of vocabulary study at the beginning of the discussion but then agreed with and shored up Wilcox’s argument in line 113, strengthening Wilcox’s position as leader within the hierarchy. This shows the willingness of a less empowered teacher to go along with the rule of the empowered group in this context, and could possibly be representative of other teachers in similar situations.

In Transcript 1, Wilcox attempted to decentralize authority, placing the decision to allow any “reasonable” teaching activity in the hands of all the teachers. As he relinquishes some of his authority to subordinates, he may

be subtly strengthening his power by creating stronger ties with the part-time teachers. However, he still made requests and attempted to shape the modifications part-time teachers make in terms of how they affect the program as whole. Wilcox avoided giving orders and used pragmatic speech that could be described as gentle persuasion. In Transcript 2, Wilcox accepted a proposal to include a major alteration in the program, after a part-time teacher argued his point effectively and received backup from another part-time teacher. Thus Wilcox was willing to accept ideas that originated from part-time teachers even if they initially went against his own course planning. Finally, in the Transcript 3, where the topic of fixing time for vocabulary practice at the beginning of lessons was discussed, Wilcox dismissed the idea despite strong arguments from the part-time staff. The third transcript makes it clear that although any topic is open to debate, the coordinator indeed exercises disproportionate power. It is, therefore, clear here that in this context coordination does not imply a one-teacher one-vote democracy.

Data and analysis of formal interaction

Unlike the transcripts above, the fourth and final transcript is from a formal meeting centering on the materials that are to be covered before a mid-term test. Formal meetings are distinguished from the informal interactions seen above in three major ways. They are called in advance, often occurring during holidays, or after students have departed. Teachers sit down at a table, and there is an agenda from which they discuss administrative matters, course goals, activities across the semester (as opposed to particular lesson activities), and testing. Finally, formal meetings in this program take place with all team members present, whereas informal talks, like the ones above, are often held between only two or three teachers. The transcript below features a different team than seen above, made up of different teachers: Philips a full-time professor, Conrad (pseudonym) a part-time teacher, and a full-time teacher on limited-term contract referred to here as Kondo (pseudonym). Kondo's standing in the current context is much weaker than Philips who is the designated team coordinator. A fourth part-time teacher is present but says nothing during the quoted exchange and therefore does not

appear on the transcript.

Transcript 4

(Original recording: approx. 25 minutes; 480 lines)

- 150 Philips: Tomorrow they're doing {chapter} seven and then next week they're
151 doing eleven too...
- 152 Conrad: So nine will be next month.
- 153 Philips: Because it makes sense to put them all together.... Um so we are all
154 OK for that. (0.2) And then the yellow book, how are we going with
155 that?
- 156 Kondo: I just finished section uh (0.2) topic two.
- 157 Philips: Today
- 158 Kondo: Today.
- 159 Philips: You're one ahead of me.
- 160 Kondo: Including the questions page.
- 161 Philips: I'm just finishing section seven today, so I'm going to start section
162 two tomorrow.
- 163 Conrad: Me too, I haven't started two. (0.2) So tomorrow.
- 164 Philips: I don't know how you guys do it, but I usually start a section on
165 Friday and then continue – review it with it on the following
166 Thursday (0.3)
- 167 Do you, you think you can finish through to eight then?
- 168 Kondo: I think definitely yes.

Since four groups of approximately 35 students each would be taking the same exam, it was necessary to confirm that all of the students had covered the same material. In lines 150-151 Philips used the present progressive to indicate that there is an existing plan of action. Using the present progressive carries with it the connotation that no debate is necessary. Conrad's statement (152) worked to express the logical outcome of Philips' statement. Although the speech in the first four lines was composed of only one sentence, it was expressed by two different speakers across three turns. The reason for such cooperative communication may be related to the fact that unlike the previous examples, the discussion transcribed here was non-contentious. No teacher in this group appears to have

had an opinion about the order in which the sections of the textbook were to be introduced, provided that all students got the same material before the test. Thus, making quick decisions and avoiding disagreement was one goal of this interaction, and having a hierarchy in which Philips was in control is expedient and functional for all involved. Teachers cooperated in the dialogue to a high degree, not just agreeing with each other but also finishing their coworkers' sentences. The speakers strengthened the hierarchy as they dealt with their business. The reason for this high level of cooperation, or even collusion with the powers that be, will be further considered in the next section.

Teachers' voices in e-mail feedback

At the university where this research was conducted, the advent of the coordinated program signaled a loss in the degree of freedom part-time teachers enjoyed. Previously part-time teachers were at their discretion to choose class materials and course goals. Under coordination, many of the actions of part-time teachers are all but dictated by full-time professors, or by group decisions that particular members are obligated to follow even if they disagree. From the transcripts, it is clear how full-time teachers use language to achieve teaching goals within other teachers' classrooms, but it is not clear why the part-time teachers are so cooperative in a system that has reduced their freedom. Are teachers genuinely hoping to be controlled, do they feel that they have no other choice, or are there other factors involved?

Since this question could not be resolved through the transcripts alone, five part-time teachers were asked to write freely on their experiences teaching in the newly coordinated program. The researcher requested participants to write their "...opinion concerning positive and negative experiences of working at [name deleted] university both before and after the introduction of the coordinated program." Four teachers responded. The four responses were made via e-mail, and sections of two pertinent examples have been quoted below. The responses that were not included here did not contradict those provided below. All responses were written after the first year of the new program. The first response is from Conrad, who appears in Transcript 4. The original e-mail was 225 words

(capitalization has not been changed from the original). Conrad works at a number of universities on a part-time basis.

First of all, it makes work easier for part-time teachers, because we are running from school to school and don't have enough time to prepare classes, but with the coordination, most of the materials are made FOR you, and the quality of the class goes up.

With the work well defined, it helps the students. They are divided into 4 groups of 35 students each and expected to have the same results, but each teacher is different. In a program that is not coordinated it is not fair, because they are judged in the same way with different materials. Another good point of a coordinated program is that since the objectives and materials are laid out, you can improve as a teacher, because you have to make an effort to try new things. There is pressure (I don't know if that's the right word) but if there is no connection with the outside, it is easy to just do almost nothing in the class. It's human nature.

The Negative point is that it kills the creativity of the individual teacher. He might do something creative, but he can't because he needs to stay with the plan.

Another response was provided by Sato (pseudonym), a Japanese part-time teacher in the program, who did not appear in any of the transcriptions above. She indicated the following two points in an e-mail addressed to the researcher, quoted almost in its entirety here. The original e-mail was 152 words.

Before this coordinated program had been introduced, the most serious difficulty I was facing was that I did not know what my students had studied the previous year with what kind of textbooks. It could have happened that I would have chosen the same textbook that they had used. Also I wasn't aware of the school or department expectation of their English classes. Now with this coordinated program, I feel comfortable and confident about what we are doing because there are people I can always ask concerning how to

teach. Since we are doing the same thing most of the time, we have quite similar problems to deal with, so we can help each other and make our lessons interesting.

Both Conrad and Sato share the opinion that classes in a coordinated program are more effective, by which I mean that students are *perceived* by the teachers to be improving more. Conrad and Sato indicate that they are able to use their time more efficiently and have better teaching materials, as they trade and share their resources. As course goals are predefined, teachers can feel more comfortable that what they are teaching is in line with what the department is expecting. Sato appreciates the systematization that prevents redundancy in teaching and materials.

However, more interesting is her comment about multiple teachers teaching similar skills at the same time. According to Sato, she has the opportunity to learn about new teaching techniques and activities. This suggests that within the coordinated program, part-time teachers enjoy a higher level of job satisfaction related to an improved ability to do their work.

Based on the data collected on the voice recorder and feedback from part-time teachers via e-mail, it appears that the coordinated program has relieved one problem of university teaching mentioned earlier in this paper, which is isolation. Teachers can expect that as other teachers are introducing the same topics to their students at the same time, they will encounter many of the same problems, and that they will be able to assist peers.

In his e-mail, Conrad also discusses the concept of “improving as a teacher,” and he writes that teachers are forced to “make an effort to try new things” that he may have otherwise avoided if all teaching decisions had been left to him. However, this could link back to Sato’s comment, since teachers can feel more at ease teaching new or different language skills when there are others teaching the same items close by.

Discussion

I would like to point out that there are a number of limitations to the present study. Firstly, there were only four interactive discourses and two e-mails presented. Additionally, it may be the case that the instructor-participants appearing in the transcripts are not representative of part-time English teachers at other universities in Japan, and the findings may not necessarily be extrapolated to universities elsewhere. However, despite the limits in scale, the present study does provide insight into how power is negotiated within a coordinated language program at one particular Japanese university, and other universities may have some degree of similarity.

If we revisit the first research question, it appears that some light has been thrown on the issue of how full-time teachers fulfill educational goals in classrooms where they are not actually present by interacting with the part-time teachers who actually teach the courses. In the present study, it was shown that full-time instructors used a variety of strategies to build consensus, most notably a range of pragmatic language patterns that allowed full-time teachers to avoid dictating actions, while still encouraging desired outcomes. In the transcripts, full-time teachers tended to rely on highlighting specific goals in order to ally part-time teachers who were then left to take independent action in line with the full-time teacher's wishes.

On the other hand, the transcripts indicated that part-time teachers were able to input their own ideas and shape the English program as a whole from below, in a limited way, through negotiation in informal meetings. However, the full-time teachers retained the right to quash ideas within the discourse by ignoring teachers, or even direct verbal rejection. This, in part, answers the second research question, which queried, "What discursive acts do teachers in subordinate positions use within formal and informal meetings to institute educational activities that they want to carry out?" The coordinated teaching environment examined in this article allowed part-time teachers to cooperate (on a limited basis) in course planning and test planning on an ongoing basis.

Additionally, within the data, there was evidence of bottom-up transmission of teaching ideas and educational activities from the part-time teachers. Those

teachers backed up arguments with reference to EFL scholarship and their own teaching experience. They also looked for assistance within the negotiation from other part-time teachers.

Finally, the data showed that part-time teachers were eager to cooperate with the newly imposed coordinated program, despite the fact that it had truncated many of the freedoms that they had hitherto enjoyed. This led to the third research question, which asked why part-time teachers appeared very cooperative within the coordination program. Although coordination of English classes in this context meant that the former *laissez-faire* teaching culture had been lost, teachers indicated that they appreciated what they received in return. The e-mail feedback indicated that it is not the abridgement of freedom that they were embracing, but the opportunity to be more effective, and to improve as teachers.

It appears that, at this university, coordination has led to teacher-to-teacher communication, which in turn has led to (perceived) opportunities for professional growth and edification, opportunities which may not have existed prior to coordination or existed only to a limited degree. In other words, based on the comments about coordination from Sato and Conrad, we can conclude that although the part-time teachers have sacrificed some freedom in terms of course planning and classroom activities, they have gained a place in what could be called a *community of language educators*, rather than merely language educators in close proximity.

The present research suggests a number of further research themes. Firstly, is this positive view of coordination common at other universities where coordination has been instituted? If not, what are the factors contributing to its acceptance in the context studied here? Another topic for further study is whether or not the perceived improvements in education are verifiable in measurements of the students' English skills. Also, this research focused on the opinions of part-time instructors, but what are the perceptions of the full-time teachers? What is their motivation for building consensus rather than merely giving orders? Finally, in the future a deeper analysis of longer interactions may be necessary to ascertain the nature in which goals are met in coordinated teaching programs that aim to emphasize cooperation over mandated top-down control.

References

- Austin, J. L. (1962). *How to do things with words*. Oxford, England: Oxford University Press.
- Cowie, N. (2003). Strawberry picking in Japan: Management, leadership, and change in a national university. In A. Mackenzie & T. Newfields (Eds.), *Curriculum, innovation, testing, and evaluation* (pp. 41-52). Tokyo, Japan: Association for Language Teaching College and University Educators Special Interest Group, Testing and Evaluation Special Interest Group.
- Holmes, J., Stubbe, M., & Vine, B. (1999). Constructing professional identity: "Doing power" in policy units. In S. Sarangi (Ed.), *Talk, work and institutional order: Discourse in medical, mediation and management settings* (pp. 351-383). New York, NY: Mouton de Gruyter.
- Hutchby, I., & Wooffitt, R. (1998). *Conversation analysis*. Cambridge, England: Polity.
- Kainan, A. (1994). *The staffroom: Observing the professional culture of teachers*. Aldershot, England: Avebury.
- Jefferson, G. (2004). Glossary of transcript symbols with an introduction. In G. H. Lerner (Ed.), *Conversation analysis* (pp. 13-23). Philadelphia, PA: John Benjamins.
- Prichard, C. (2006). Determining the balance between teacher autonomy and curriculum coordination. *The Language Teacher*, 30(6), 9-14.
- Richards, K. (2006). *Language and professional identity: Aspects of collaborative interaction*. Hampshire, England: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Sacks, H. (1992). *Lectures on conversation* (Vol. 2). In G. Jefferson (Ed.), Oxford, England: Blackwell.
- Silverman, D. (1999). Warriors or collaborators: Reworking methodological controversies in the study of institutional interaction. In S. Sarangi (Ed.), *Talk, work and institutional order: Discourse in medical mediation and management settings* (pp. 401-425). Berlin, Germany: Mouton de Gruyter.
- Thomas, J. (1995). *Meaning in interaction: An introduction to pragmatics*. Essex, England: Longman.
- Venema, J. (2008). Negotiating objectives in a language program. *The Language*

Teacher, 32(3), 9-13.

Yule, G. (1996). *Pragmatics*. Oxford, England: Oxford University Press.

Author's bio

Sharif Mebed *has taught English in Japan since 1992. He is currently teaching language and literature at Ryūkoku University in Kyoto, Japan. His fields of research include cooperative teaching and technology in university education. In addition to EFL, Sharif is pursuing a PhD in Modern Japanese literature. shmebed@gmail.com*

Received: November 24, 2011

Accepted: March 14, 2014