System 44 (2014) 34–44

Contents lists available at ScienceDirect

System

journal homepage: www.elsevier.com/locate/system

# English co-teaching and teacher collaboration: A micro-interactional perspective

Jae-Eun Park*

*Kangnam University, Department of English Literature, 40 Gangnam-ro, Giheung-gu, Yongin-si, Gyeonggi-do, 446-702, Republic of Korea*

ARTICLE INFO

*Article history:*
Received 26 December 2012
Received in revised form 7 February 2014
Accepted 10 February 2014
Available online 4 March 2014

*Keywords:*
English co-teaching
Teacher roles
Participation patterns
Teacher collaboration
Conversation analysis

ABSTRACT

English co-teaching by a native English-speaking teacher (NE) and a non-native English-speaking teacher (NN) is a common instructional practice in many English as a Foreign Language (EFL) contexts. This paper explores how two co-teachers collaborate during teacher-fronted interactions from a micro-interactional perspective, focusing on a Korean elementary school English classroom. Five video-taped lessons were analyzed to identify the participation patterns in which teacher collaboration occurs as the non-leading teacher intervenes in the ongoing talk. Teacher collaboration is realized in following two patterns: three-party interactions between the leading teacher, the non-leading teacher, and students in which the teachers jointly manage teacher talk or the floor, and two-party interactions between the leading and the non-leading teachers in which they offer and receive help in the face of trouble or to achieve an instructional goal. The sequential analysis of these diversions from the typical teacher-student, two-party interactional structure shows how the presence of two co-teachers is made salient and utilized in the work of teaching and learning. The findings indicate that teacher collaboration is not necessarily planned but rather occurs to meet unforeseen interactional and instructional needs.



## 1. Introduction

English co-teaching by a native English-speaking teacher (NE) and a non-native English-speaking teacher (NN) is a common instructional practice in many EFL contexts. In Korea, for instance, through the government-sponsored EPIK (English Program in Korea), NEs have been deployed at elementary and secondary schools since 1996, teaching with Korean NNs in the same classroom. The rationale is that an NE and an NN have different attributes and that their complementarity can enrich English lessons when they teach in collaboration (Carless, 2006; Carless & Walker, 2006). However, research has shown that co-teachers experience difficulty working as a team for many different reasons, such as insufficient preparation (Choi, 2001; Chung, Min, & Park, 1999; Park, 1996; Park & Kim, 2000), an exam-oriented school culture that marginalizes NEs (Jeon, 2010; Niederhauser, 1995; Walker, 2001), NEs' lack of training and understanding of the local students and the school culture (Choi, 2001; Park & Kim, 2000), differences in teaching philosophies and experiences (Boyle, 1997; Lai, 1999; Trent, 2012), and unclear or limited role definitions (Chung et al., 1999; Kim, 2010; Mahoney, 2004; Park, 1996, 2010; Park & Kim, 2000; Tajino & Tajino, 2000; Tajino & Walker, 1998). Previous research has primarily used surveys and interviews to uncover how co-teaching

* Tel.: +82 31 280 3675.
*E-mail address:* kulingua@gmail.com.

http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.system.2014.02.003
0346-251X/

is practiced and perceived, and there is a lack of discourse-based classroom research examining how teacher collaboration occurs (see Aline & Hosoda, 2006; Creese, 2006; Park & Yim, 2009 for exceptions).

In this paper, I explore how teachers collaborate during teacher-fronted interactions from a micro-interactional perspective, focusing on a Korean elementary school English classroom. I show how teacher collaboration is initiated and accomplished in the middle of an instructional sequence, engendering the participation patterns in which the participants make salient and utilize the co-presence of two teachers.

## 2. Approaches to teacher collaboration

Much of the existing research asserts that NEs and NNs have different attributes that can complement each other (Carless, 2006; Carless & Walker, 2006). The common understanding is that NEs can facilitate communication in English and serve as a linguistic and cultural reference and resource (Barratt & Kontra, 2000). NNs can explain grammar and teach learning strategies, understand students' needs and difficulties, and know the local curriculum, exams, and textbooks (Tang, 1997). In the existing literature discussing their characteristics, NEs and NNs are often portrayed in contrast to each other (e.g., Árva & Medgyes, 2000; Medgyes, 1992, 1994). According to Medgyes (1994), for example, NEs prefer free activities, whereas NNs prefer controlled activities. Similarly, where the former focuses on fluency, the latter focuses on accuracy. Many of these characteristics, however, may better be explained by teachers' cultural backgrounds, institutional memberships, professional experience, and personal beliefs as educators, rather than their status as a native or non-native speaker. Nevertheless, the native/non-native dichotomy is often assumed in discussions of teacher collaboration, implicitly or explicitly suggesting that each co-teacher should play a particular role by virtue of their being an NE or an NN (Mahoney, 2004; Tajino & Tajino, 2000).

This study rejects the idea that what teachers do is intrinsically connected to and constrained by their NE/NN statuses. From a conversation analytic (CA) perspective that objects to imposing, a priori, external social categories (e.g., male/female, teacher/student, NE/NN) on participants (Schegloff, 1997, 2001), I examine how the presence of two teachers is oriented to and utilized in the work of teaching and learning rather than how their NE/NN identities explain their actions in the classroom. The chief aim is to illuminate the participation patterns in which co-teachers interact with students and with each other.

Under a CA lens, teacher collaboration can be viewed as a social activity that is accomplished by all of the parties involved (teachers and students alike) in and through temporally unfolding interaction. Through the sequential analysis of interactions, I observe how the participants work together toward their common institutional goal of teaching and learning; I particularly focus on how the teachers behave relative to each other in terms of the various ways that one assists the other (initiating an elicitation sequence and joining in for its progression, requesting and providing a confirmation, etc.) and consider the roles that they play in this collaborative endeavor (leading teacher/non-leading teacher, provider/recipient of assistance, etc.).

## 3. Data and method

The data examined for this study are five 40-min video-taped English co-teaching classes in a Korean elementary school. The classes, recorded during regular class meetings, represent typical textbook lessons in which teachers rely heavily on the textbook and follow its activities in a routine fashion (Beaumont & Chang, 2011).

In all five classes, the same group of approximately 28 students in the fifth grade were taught by the same teachers, Ms. Kim and Mr. Adams. Ms. Kim was a local English teacher and Mr. Adams was a native-speaking English teacher who regularly joined her to co-teach the class. As he was not allowed to teach alone due to his employment status as a native-speaking 'assistant' teacher, he taught with Ms. Kim, who had control of the class. The data were collected by Ms. Kim in 2008 and made available to the researcher for research purposes.

The recordings were made by a third party at the back of the classroom, facing the teachers. The students sat in small groups of four with their backs or sides shown given the video-taped angle. Ms. Kim and Mr. Adams primarily stood in front of the class during the teacher-fronted instruction, although one occasionally walked around the classroom when the other was leading an activity.

The video-taped data were transcribed and examined from a CA perspective (see Appendix for Transcription Symbols). Starting with "unmotivated looking" (Psathas, 1995, p. 45), I repeatedly examined both the videos and the transcriptions and identified notable patterns of teacher collaboration. The excerpts below represent telling instances of the participants initiating and accomplishing teacher collaboration, dealing with unforeseen instructional and interactional issues. Before proceeding to a detailed analysis of teacher collaboration, I first discuss how teacher-fronted interaction is generally organized in the analyzed lessons.

## 4. Findings

Classroom interaction in the observed co-taught lessons is organized around a teacher–student, two-party interactional structure, similar to a regular classroom (Lerner, 1993; Sahlström, 2002). While Ms. Kim dominates the overall management of the lesson, such as starting and wrapping up, Mr. Adams occasionally takes a lead in certain activities, such as listening comprehension checks and drills. The two teachers alternate taking the floor and leading an activity in its entirety. When one