‘I think’ as an Interactional Resource during Discussions in Collaborative Writing Tasks

Use of group works for discussions and collaborative writing is a common pedagogic practice in university classrooms. In such joint works, students are to express their perspectives, assessments and opinions, and take stance on the topic they are discussing. This study is about the development of interactional competence in taking stance by using ‘I think’ during discussions and writings in an academic writing course by one international student identified with a pseudonym Raman. I am using conversation analysis as an analytical framework to study this phenomenon. In what follows, I will first give a brief background of conversation analysis tradition in second language acquisition field, followed by a review of some literature on group works on writing classes. And then I will discuss my study.

Conversation Analysis and Second Language Acquisition

Originally started in sociology by Harvy Sacks and Emanuel Schegloff to study social actions and behavior, conversational analysis, henceforth CA, has also been used to analyze second language conversations (e.g. Gardner and Wagner, 2004), including second language learning behaviors (e.g., He, 2004; Young and Miller, 2004; Hellermann, 2008; Markee, 2008). Because traditional mainstream second language acquisition (SLA) viewed the second language learning process as gradually approximating toward the monolingual native speaker norm via the continuum of interlanguage, new theories primarily drawing insights from the epistemology of social-constructivism have emerged as alternatives to see SLA from pragmatic, discoursal and interactional perspectives (Brouwer and Wagner, 2004). Conversational analytic approach is a recent vibrant paradigm of research that sees second language learning as a form of interactional accomplishment by the language users. Conversation analysis-for-second language acquisition (CA-for-SLA) views second language learning process from emic perspective (Markee and Kasper,
how the participants in conversation orient to and accomplish the action including language learning behaviors via their naturally occurring talk-in-interaction (Markee, 2008). Data-driven CA research does not use *apriori* analyst-imposed, theory-laden interpretative categories. Language learning behavior from the CA perspective is viewed as locally managed, party-administered instance of language use (ten Have, 2007). Language errors and disfluencies, for example, are treated as interactional resources for the participants in talk-in-interaction (Carroll, 2004); actions and roles are interactionally achieved and co-constructed.

Although a number of studies show that second language speakers are capable of accomplishing social actions by using the linguistic and communicative resources they have, some researchers working in the CA-for-SLA tradition (e.g. He 2004; Markee, 2008) realize the potential challenge that this new research paradigm is facing. He (2004), for example, points out that the CA-for-SLA tradition cannot take account of the traditional notion of cognition to view the process of SLA, nor does it “address the process of learning over an extended period of time” (p. 578). Markee (2008) echoes a similar voice and acknowledges the fact that research studies still have not “succeeded in providing a clear-cut CA-for-SLA-based analysis of how participants achieve successful language learning behaviour over a period of several months” (p. 421), but argues that cognition is socially distributed and shared and the CA studies on second language learning can explain this phenomenon.

In order to address the limitations inherent in the CA-for-SLA research paradigm and to study and understand the process of second language learning longitudinally, Brouwer and Wagner’s (2004) call for combining CA with other social learning theories sounds appealing and justifiable for studies that investigate how a particular interactional resource develops over a period of time in language learners. Situated learning theory (Lave and Wegner, 1991) combined with CA provides insights on how the participants in talk-in- interaction expand their interactional
resources to accomplish social actions, providing an evidence of more interactional competence and fuller participation in the community of practice (Brower and Wagner, 2004). This study, will, therefore, use the community of practice notion of situated learning theory because blending CA-for-SLA with other theories of learning will better inform the process of second language learning (Ortega, 2009).

**Language Learning in a Community of Practice**

Some researchers working in CA-for-SLA tradition see that CA has a lot to offer to SLA research when it is combined with other social-constructivist theories that study the process of second language acquisition. Brouwer and Wagner (2004) use Lave and Wegner’s (1991) situated learning theory to take account of learning process where novice members gradually move from peripheral participation to fully-fledged legitimate members of the community of practice. They argue that to contribute better understanding of language learning CA studies have “to demonstrate how language learning as a social accomplishment takes place over time” (p. 31). Language learning from this perspective has to take account of interactional resources and subjectivities that the participants draw upon and bring into the local setting of talk-in-interaction.

There have been several studies that have combined situated learning theory of community of practice and CA’s orientation to emic perspective. Hellermann (2008), for example, collected interaction corpus of 40000 hours of video recordings for five years in a community college in the United States. His studies show how adult immigrant learners of English co-construct social order and produce talk to accomplish a ‘beginning’, a ‘closing’ or a ‘telling’ sequences through mutually oriented talk. Hellermann and Cole (2008) in one of such studies show how one English as a Second Language (ESL) adult learner, Jose, gradually moves from peripheral legitimate participant to a fully-fledged member of his classroom community to use ‘disengagement’ sequences in his
talk during 16 week’s of study period. The researchers argue that Jose gradually became ‘fluent language user’ at the end of the term. In a similar study, Young and Miller (2004) used situated learning or legitimate peripheral participation approach to study a series of four weekly writing conferences between a tutor and a student in a university writing center. They carefully studied the sequential organization of the talk focusing on how the participants orient ‘openings’ and ‘closings’ of the interaction and how they bring their interactional resources. Their study shows that in the initial phase of talk-in-interaction between the tutor and the student, the interactions were more teacher-centered, the student’s role being to listen to the teacher and revise the essay according to the teacher’s suggestion. However, in the later conferences, both the teacher and the student changed the way of their discursive practice and the student played more agentive role by identifying the problem by himself, and by providing explanations for revision of the writing. The teacher’s role, on the other hand, also changed during this period; his role was just not to give suggestion to the student but to listen to the student and give ownership to the student of his own writing. These two studies show that combining CA’s practice to local orientation with situated learning theory of peripheral to fuller participation provides a robust ground to track the developmental nature of second language acquisition.

ESL classrooms, therefore, are a site where learners with different language and cultural backgrounds co-construct social orientation through their talk-in-interaction. The learners who use English as a second language in the classroom by jointly drawing the resources from their repertoire share their membership in the classroom community of practice (Hellermann, 2008). In the context of the present study, the learners show their being as graduate students through their talk-in-interaction during group discussions and writing tasks.
Collaborative Writing Tasks and Taking Epistemic Stance in Interactions

The second language writing field today is much influenced by social-constructivist approach based on writing for academic communities (Warschawer, 2002). Learners as academic writers gradually move from peripheral participation to fuller participation through exposure and involvement in their new academic discourse community. Arranging the students in pairs (Storch, 2001, 2002, 2005, 2008) and small groups (Frazier, 2007a, 2007b), and allowing them to interact among their peers for collaborative writing tasks is one but major way that helps learners to co-construct meaning through talk-in-interaction in social-constructivist view of learning (Storch, 2005). Storch reports that previous studies investigating the use of collaborative writing in pair and small group works have mainly focused on the beginning stage of writing like brain storming or the final stage where students exchange peer feedback on their writing. Such collaborative writing tasks give unique opportunities to the students to co-produce the texts that provide ownership and responsibility to the members of the group (Storch, 2005). Such pair and small group collaborative writing tasks among peers either focus on the product of writing (e.g. Storch, 2005; Sotillo, 2000) or they look at the interaction to trace grammatical development through ‘recast’ and scaffolding (e.g. Kitade, 2008; Storch, 2008; Zeng & Takatsuka, 2009) by analyzing language related episodes (Swain and Lapkin, 1995). Such studies, however, have rarely looked into the interactional details and behavior of the participants that are displayed in their talk and embodied actions. Drawing on Goodwin’s (1984) approach to study storytelling through talk and embodied action. Frazier (2007) studied how the participants in talk draw upon their interactional resources to co-construct and ‘touched-off remembrances’ and how the members in interaction orient to the talk with their mates. He reports that the interaction patterns in the data were similar to ‘story-telling’ patterns found in mundane conversations and the students working in small groups were able to make a connection between their talk and broader cultural literacy in their communities.
It is necessary that graduate students express their personal beliefs, attitudes and evaluations, and perspectives during interactions with their peers in university classrooms. Expressing such “(inter-) subjective and discourse pragmatic meanings” using personal epistemic markers using subject-predicate combinations (e.g. I think, I guess, I believe, etc.) is a common feature of interactional practices by both first language speakers as well as lingua franca speakers of the English language (Baumgarten and House, 2009). Previous studies on stance taking have mainly focused on epistemic stance taking and expression of subjectivity either in first language conversations (e.g. Karkkinen, 2003) or in academic writing by second language writers (e.g. Hyland, 2004; Biber, 2004) or on comparisons of native and non-native discourses on stance taking (e.g. Baumgarten and House, 2009). Investing second language conversations in academic writing courses in a university classroom context is relatively a new area of investigation.

Scope of the Present Study

The present study involves videorecording students’ interaction during their small group discussion regarding academic writing issues in their discipline study. It focuses on how the interaction among the peers unfolds and how the participants orient to the talk and the task. This is a relatively new area of inquiry in SLA tradition. Rather than simple teacher observations or student-reported opinions regarding how group work works during collaborative writing tasks, conversation analytic approach is useful to study how a group interaction usually works and how the participants draw multiple subjectivities through their talk and embodied action to co-construct meaning. Frazier (2007b) convincingly argues that studying group interaction is rewarding for language learning and teaching purposes because “something quite profound is happening inside the interactions of writing students during group work” (p. 207). Obviously, more research is necessary to study how lingua franca English speakers orient to and build on academic discussions and collaborative writing tasks, and how they express their subjectivity and stance while
interacting with peers in the group and with the artifact being produced (e.g. online texts or papers) through their talk and embodied actions. The proposed study has two objectives: firstly, it makes an attempt to understand what type of the interactional patterns that the second language speakers of English employ during group discussions in an ESL writing class in general; and secondly it addresses how one particular ESL student, develops his interactional competence in using ‘stance taking token’ ‘I think’ over a period of one semester. My interest and motivation behind this study is driven by both theoretical and practical concerns. Firstly, it will contribute to the body of knowledge in SLA regarding how situated learning theory combined with CA can provide insights to understand the process and practice of using a particular interactional resource (I think in this case) by an ESL student. Secondly, it will provide some insight to writing teachers for implementing small groups in collaborative writing tasks.

**Participants, Data and Methods**

The participants in this study were seven international graduate students who were taking a course ‘academic writing for international graduate students’ in an intensive English program in one North American university. The students belonged to varied academic disciplines including Public Health, Urban and Regional Planning, and Civil Engineering. These students earlier were the members of online communities of practice where they had been interacting with one another through e-mails, chats, threaded discussions on discussion boards, but were novice to face-to-face interaction in this classroom community. I focus on the analysis of stance taking ‘I think’ sequences by one particular student (Raman) in peer interactions. Raman came to the United States in August, 2009 from Nepal, and is currently a graduate student in his first semester of an economics major.

The data for this study came from approximately twelve hours of audio and video-recorded student interactions that the students engage in before and during academic writing tasks. These
data were collected in five installments spreading throughout the Fall semester of 2009, and each class session lasted for one hour and fifteen minutes. Students were divided into two small groups consisting of three or four members and they worked to discuss crucial academic writing issues. Five topics for discussion and collaborative writing were assigned in advance, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Five group sessions by topic and date

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Workshop</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Avoiding plagiarism in academic writing</td>
<td>Sept. 10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Data commentary</td>
<td>Sept. 24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>E-mail writing in university setting</td>
<td>Oct. 29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Writing grant/award/fellowship applications</td>
<td>Nov. 12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Genre analysis of scholarly publications</td>
<td>Nov. 19</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

After the discussion, students collaboratively composed texts on the computer screen and posted them on a university’s online course management site called Laulima (www.laulima.hawaii.edu).

Using the system developed by Jefferson (2004), which is standard to CA research studies, I first transcribed three complete episodes of group interaction where Raman was involved. I first transcribed the audio files and later watched video to add non-verbal features evident in participants’ interaction with the available artifacts (e.g. handout, computer screen, etc.) using gaze, body posture and gesture, and also to identity speakers in case of ambiguity. Using CA’s practice of ‘unmotivated looking’ (ten Have, 2007), I analyzed the transcribed data line by line, from which the candidate phenomena- stance taking in peer interaction- emerged for this study. I decided to track the interactional development of stance taking feature by this particular student due to two reasons: first, stance taking in academic discourse in university settings by ESL students is a
phenomenon of interest among researchers in applied linguistics field (e.g. Hyland, 2004), though relatively new in peer interactions, and secondly, I could notice a traceable change in interactional practice of stance taking token ‘I think’ by Raman, which was different from his peers. After that I watched the video episodes of the remaining two sessions where Raman was involved in interaction. I again carefully paid attention to those interactional moments where Raman was actively involved in interaction. I transcribed all the interactions where Raman was using ‘I think’ with his peers. Based on this observation, I decided to track how Raman appropriated “complex learning object into his interactional repertoires over the course of multiple speech events” (Markee, 2008: 422) in the classroom community of practice (Lave and Wegner, 2001; Wegner, 1998). I have included those interaction excerpts that best illustrate the candidate phenomenon in this study report.

Analysis

I approach the analysis of my data first by giving a typical example of an interactional practice that took place in the context of the present study. And then in several successive stages I will explain how Raman’s behavior changed in using epistemic stance token ‘I think’ in interactional practices over the period of one semester in the US university classroom setting.

**Interactional architecture of peer interaction in groups**

In small groups students usually discuss academic writing issues with their peers. Following is a typical example of student interaction in a graduate level academic writing class in the context of the present study. In excerpt (1), the teacher has just distributed a handout to the students, and the students are supposed to discuss what is and is not appropriate in writing e-mails to their professors. The handout contains several components of an email (e.g. e-mail address,
subject line, attachment, salutation, etc.) and students are supposed to discuss moving from one point to the next and then report their outcome of the discussion to the class.

Excerpt (1): “writing e-mails in university setting”

01 Te: You can always ask me. There are no rules as such.
02 (2.0)
03 Te: Why don’t you go then from the first one?
04 (2.0)
05 HZ: Okay.
06 AR: Yeah.
07 (.)
08 HZ: I think it does not have answer
09 You can use any- any email address to
10 contact
11 (1.2)
12 AR: Ah (.). I think if (0.2) say we’re given web
13 mail- web mail address here in the
14 university, whe[re the
15 HZ: [Mm mm
16 AR: I think it means possibly we could use our
17 personal account- email account. if we are-
18 we could not access our web mail
19 SR: Um um
20 AR: but as long as we- they have given us the
21 web mail I think (.).since it’s within the
22 context of our conversation- our discussion
23 So I think it’s better to use the webmail=
24 HZ: Mm [mm
25 AR: =([From the school
26 (2.0)
27 YT: I agree with yo[u=
28 AR: [Yeah
29 YT: =if you can not access to [ah
30 AR: [Yeah
31 YT: UH webs[ite
32 AR: [Website yeah
33 YT: Then you- you have to [use
34 AR: [Yeah the
35 (2.0)
36 HZ: Okay↑
The teacher first provides the floor for the students to work in groups (lines 01–04). The rising intonation at the end of the turn (line 04) shows that this is the transition relevance place (TRP) where students can possibly take turns to ask questions or to start working in groups. There is lack of an immediate uptake or reaction for the next turn by the students. After 2.0 second pause in line 5, HZ uses an acknowledgement token ‘okay’ and AR uses another token ‘yeah’. This shows that these students are acknowledging the teacher’s instruction and are ready to work in groups. After a micropause in line 08, HZ (lines 09–11) uses the epistemic stance token ‘I think’, and expresses his opinion that any type of e-mail address can be used to write to the professors. AR self-selects herself as the next speaker after a pause of 1.2 seconds in line 12, and her turn is prefaced by the discourse marker ‘ah’, and two micro pauses. This is a typical feature of English conversation where the next speaker in a sequence prepares to show disagreement to the previous speaker (Pomerantz, 1984a). AR continues to expresses her opinion until line 29, and explains the reason why they need to use web emails in university contexts. Other participants show orientation to what AR is saying in several places during the conversation: HZ’s use of continuer tokens in lines 16 and 28 and SR’s use of similar token in line 23. After a pause of 2.0 in line 30, YT, aligns with AR and shows her agreement that until line 37. YT’s turn is acknowledged with a continuer token ‘yeah’ at several places (lines 32, 34, 36, 38) by AR with partial overlap in every turn sequence. After a pause of 2.0 seconds in line 39, HZ, who initially thought that any e-mail addresses would work to contact professors, shows an agreement (line 40) with the opinions expressed by AR and later acknowledged and supported by SR and YT.

As can be seen from the excerpt (1), the participants are discursively displaying their institutional roles and identities as members of group work in a university classroom and are demonstrably oriented to the completion of the task assigned by the instructor. It is also possible to see how these participants demonstrably display and make use of interactional resources as
required by the local contingencies of the particular context. Expressing epistemic stance using the token ‘I think’ is a very common interactional resource in group work activities as shown by HZ in line 09, and AR in lines 13, 17 and 27.

In the following sections, I will show how Raman, the subject of the present study, acquires interactional competence to use ‘I think’ as a resource during discussion tasks in collaborative writing in a classroom community of practice.

**Legitimate Peripheral Participation**

In this excerpt (2), Raman (identified with RN) is working in a group with other group members HZ and YT and they are sharing their experiences about the nature and consequence of plagiarism in the university context. The purpose of including this segment is to show Raman’s typical interactional behavior during group discussions in the first workshop. It is to be noted that in his interaction, the use of ‘I think’ was zero.

Excerpt (2): “Plagiarism in academic writing” - September: 10, 2009

01 RN: ((gazes at the handout)) So what do you think about four- The question number four?
02
03 ((YT and HZ gaze at the handout))
04 RN: Why do you think prag- plagiarism is Considered such a serious issue in US universities? ((reads from the handout))
05 HZ: Which? ((gestures and gazes at RN’s handout?)
06 RN: Number four ((turns gaze toward HZ))
07 HZ: Number four?
08 ((gazes at the handout again))
09 RN: Yeah
10 (1.0)
11 HZ: Have someone to write a paper (.)for you ((reads from the handout))
12 (2.0)
13 HZ: I think ah: (1.0) it is a (1.4)
14 It also is a plagiarism. It was- it is a:
15 RN: Of course it is plagiarism
16 But if you ask about the
17 HZ: Perspective
22  RN:  Perspective of the professor

((22 lines deleted))

45  YT:  Why do you think plagiarism is considered such a serious issue in US universities?
46  ((reads from the handout))
47  What do you think? ((turns gazes to RN))
48  HZ:  Plagiarism? ((gestures toward RN))
49  (.)
50  RN:  Ah: of course it is serious issue
51  Because ah (0.3)ah (0.2) you need to know the
52  (   )something from the field work

In the excerpt above Raman takes a turn and asks a question to his peers (line 1-2). After the lack of an immediate uptake by the recipients, Raman reads the question out for other participants (lines 5-7). HZ then shows the trouble in his candidate understanding of Raman’s point (lines 08 and 10). This is followed by RN’s immediate repair to HZ’s confusions and confirmation to HZ’s understanding in line 12¹. HZ in line 14 instead reads a different point from the handout ‘Have someone to write a paper for you’ followed by his opinion token ‘I think’. Raman then in line 19 expresses his agreement with an upgrade evaluation token ‘of course’ (Pomerantz, 1984a) and aligns with the opinion of the previous speaker. Though seemingly Raman and HZ orient to different points (lines 05 and 17 respectively), the sequence organization shows that they are able to orient to the same point of discussion later (lines 14-22). Discussion on the same point continues until line 44, but I have reduced the length due to the limitation of the space in this paper. In the second half of the excerpt, YT reads the same question out to the group. She selects Raman with her gaze as the next speaker, and explicitly asks Raman’s opinion using ‘what do you think’ as the turn constructional unit (lines 45-49). HZ offers unsolicited addition to YT’s

¹ Raman in fact switched to a different sub-topic of discussion without the previous point sufficiently treated. HZ is sequentially following the handout for discussion. HZ is demonstrably confused.
question and gestures toward Raman for the next turn. Raman after a micropause in line 51 takes his turn responds to the question with an account (lines 52—54).

In excerpt (3) below, Raman is working with his peers in data commentary task. Using the guidelines and statistical data table, the participants are preparing a draft to finally produce a text and share with the class via the online course management site.

Excerpt (3): “Data commentary”- September 24, 2009

01 RN: Do not exactly repeat the data in words
02 (0.6)what the data has $(     )
03 ((reads from the handout))
04 AR:     Yeah ((nods))
05 RN: So you know what it means? ((gazes toward peers)) 06 AR: Yeah yeah ((nods))
07 RN: In number 3 it means if you say that
08 90% [will not
09 XY: [I think that’s very important
10 I think- I think I- we must
11 exactly repeat the data in words
12 (.)
13 XY: Not not
14 (.)
15 RN: Not i- it means like that can I- can I
16 ((gestures to ask for a pen))
17 AR: Yeah yeah ((smiles))
18 () hehe yah
19 RN: Its means like that (0.3)suppose So There is
20 a 90% okay? So you need not to write like this
21 <Nai:[ntee: percent>] ((writes))
22 AR: [Ninety heheh
23 XY: [Ah;:
24 RN: And at the same time bracket ((writes))
25 Okay you can just write this. That’s enough.

Raman (lines 1—3) reads a point from the handout. AR acknowledges using the token ‘yeah’ with a simultaneous nod. Before moving to further discussion, Raman wants to confirm if his peers know the meaning of the point by asking a question. While XY does not respond to the
question, AR displays her candidate understanding of Raman’s point with a positive answer (line 06). Though there is no apparent request for Raman to explain the meaning of the point from his peers, he offers the explanation with an example. With a partial overlap with Raman, XY offers her opinion (lines 09—11) which in fact contradicts with the point provided in the handout. RN in lines 15—26 offers a repair for XY’s misunderstanding by illustrating with an example on a sheet of paper. Both AR and XY simultaneously use the lengthened change of state token (Heritage, 1984a) with a complete overlap with each other while continuously showing orientation to RN’s explanation of the issue.

Excerpts (2) and excerpt (3) were taken from the peer interactions during first and second workshops that took place on September 10 and 24 respectively. Participants in both the discussion excerpts are successfully oriented to the institutional goal of peer interaction, i.e. to express opinions and perspectives on plagiarism and data commentary respectively. In excerpt (2) for example, the questions ‘why do you think..’ (line 05 and line 45) prompts the participants to express their opinions on the issue. Raman in lines 19 and 52 expresses his strong epistemic stance using the expression ‘of course’. Although we cannot claim that Raman could have used ‘I think’ in situations similar to this (which is beyond CA’s analytic claim), we can at least say that the first pair part of the sequence organization each time Raman expresses his opinion possibly makes it conditionally relevant for an epistemic expression like ‘I think’ to appear. Similarly in excerpt (3), Raman demonstrably seems to be attempting to explain the issues in handout to his peers for their candidate understanding (lines 05, 06, 15, 16, 18—25). AR and XY are very attentively orienting to Raman’s explanation, and also are able to show their candidate understanding by overlappingly

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2 Raman is in fact misinterpreting the guidelines. The handout had the point ‘Do not exactly repeat the data in words’. It meant writers are required to interpret and comment on the data, but not to reiterate the same details in words. RN gives a wrong example of using brackets, etc.
using the change of state token ‘ah::’ in line 22 and 23. Use of epistemic stance ‘I think’ by Raman is zero in the first two workshops, and the excerpts analyzed above are typical examples where he is actively taking part, expressing his stance, and fulfilling the institutional goal of completing the task. Raman’s peers are treating him as a legitimate member of their group by orienting to him when he speaks in the group. Raman’s participation is full and active, but as far as his competence to use epistemic stance ‘I think’ is concerned, it is minimal or zero.

Change in Participation in Interactional Practice

In the excerpts (4), (5) and (6), I will illustrate how Raman was able to use the interactional resource ‘I think’ to take stance in small group discussions and collaborative writing tasks. This will explain the changing participation in Raman’s interactional behavior in using ‘I think’. Because most of his use of ‘I think’ was triggered by interactional situations when he had to use it for expressing disagreement, I am going to include those sequences.

In excerpt (4), the students are having a group discussion to collaboratively compose an e-mail for the following prompt: “Write an email to the ESL institute Director asking for a leave of absence for one week because you are attending your sister’s marriage”.

Excerpt (4): “Writing e-mails to professors”- October 29, 2009

01 MH: And request your permission
02 along with [the subject like that
03 HZ: [yeah
04 AR: Yeah reason yeah ((nods))
05 HZ: Mm mm ((nods))
06 ((everybody looks at the handout))
07 RN: [So I am going to join wedding next week
08 ((looking at the handout))
09 AR: [So thank you and looking forward to your
10 ((looking at the handout))
11 HZ: And then
12 AR: Looking forward granting of [my (leave)
13 RN: [Just that
14 HZ: I’ll appreciate for you (.) if you (.)Ah:: um
15 RN: No I think it’s not ((looks at HZ))
16 you can’t app- appreciate the professor
17 ((looks at AR))
18 AR: Yeah
19 HZ: [Why? ((looks at RN))]
20 AR: [Just say [you can permis-
21 RN: [You are seeking permission
22 ((looks at HZ))
23 AR: Just say thank you

In the excerpt above, MH submits that they need to write ‘request your permission’ to ask for a leave of absence, and that needs to go along with the subject line (lines 1 and 2). Overlapping with MH, HZ in line 3 provides a continuer for MH’s point in discussion. AR in line 04 further expands that they need to provide a reason for requesting permission, which is acknowledged by HZ in line 05 with a token ‘um um’ simultaneously with a nod. Raman and AR co-incidentally provide a reason statement and pre-closing statement with a full overlap in lines 07 and 09 at the same time. HZ in line 11 invites a further addition to what Raman and AR say in previous turns, and further adds another closing remark in the e-mail as ‘I’ll appreciate for you…’ in line 14. This is immediately responded to by Raman with strong disagreement with no pause or hedging in his turn design and also provides an account for that in lines 15 and 16. HZ in line 19 asks for a valid reason why he cannot write ‘I’ll appreciate’ to his professor. While Raman is attempting to provide further reason for that, AR delivers her turn partially overlapping with Raman (line 20) and suggests the group that they write only ‘thank you’ (line 23).

Raman’s use of ‘I think’ in line 15 is a display of his opinion that disagrees with HZ’s previous sequence on writing an email to the ELI Director. He also draws the attention of his recipients through his gaze; and this seems to be an invitation to his peers to agree on his remark. Though Raman’s expression of disagreement comes to be a direct use of language to express his epistemic stance, he is able to negotiate his opinion and offer his candidate view which is attended by another peer AR in the sequences that follow.
The following excerpt (5) is from a group discussion when the students were in a writing workshop for writing grant and fellowship applications. Raman is discussing with his peers about whether they need to mention ‘ethnic membership’ and ‘family background’ in the letter of application. They need to choose either ‘yes’ or ‘no’ and discuss that in the group.

Excerpt (5): “Writing fellowship/grant applications”- November 12, 2009

01 RN: For the first question, ethnic membership
02 (. ) so: I think it’s important,
03 HZ: What? ((turns gaze to RN))
04 (2.0)
05 SR: ((reading the handout))
06 RN: I think yes, it’s yes.
07 ((turns gaze to HZ, raises eyebrows and gestures))

((9 lines deleted))

18 RN: The second thing family background
19 ((reads from the handout))
20 I think it’s not necessary
21 HZ: Um um [((nods))
22 SR: [((nods))

Holding the handout in hands, Raman shares his opinion with his peers that mentioning ‘ethnic membership’ in fellowship applications is necessary (lines 1-2). His use of ‘I think’ is prefaced with one micro pause and a lengthened ‘so’ token. Prefacing of his stance using ‘so’ is comparable with his stance taking practices in initial interactional episodes in the third workshop. Due to limited length in the paper, I have not been able to include the previous examples where Raman used ‘I think’ prefaced with ‘so’. In the third workshop, Raman used ‘so’ in order to summarize his previous opinions, but in this particular excerpt, Raman is launching a new point of discussion and taking a stance for that point. After HZ’s request for a repair (line 03) and a pause of 2.0 seconds, Raman reconfirms his stance by using the word ‘yes’ twice, with an amplified pitch each time. It is notable that his use of ‘I think’ goes simultaneously with his other embodied
actions: gaze, eyebrows, and gesture. Because his expression is directly addressed to HZ, NZ has a right as well has an obligation to take a new turn. Because it was not necessary to include the lines form 09-17 to explain Raman’s stance taking practice, I have intentionally excluded these lines. It is explicitly displayed in the sequences that Raman is playing a lead role to change the topic of discussion for his peers. Here again, Raman reads a line from the handout and takes his stance for the family background as ‘yes’ (lines 18-20). This time his use of ‘I think’ is not prefaced with any pauses or other tokens like ‘so’. As soon as Raman submits his opinion, this is promptly acknowledged by his two interlocutors HZ and SR. HZ responds with both verbal (um um) and non-verbal (nod) tokens, SR responds only with a nod. This shows that both HZ and SR are interactionally oriented to Raman’s stance and are also agreeing with that stance.

In the following excerpt (6), the students are discussing how journal articles are structured into different sections according to academic genre conventions. Students have been provided with a handout by the teacher, and they are basically required to share with their group members regarding how scholarly papers are organized in different sub-headings.

Excerpt (6): “Genre analysis of scholarly publications”- November 19, 2009

01 MH That means in general we should follow structure
02 ((writes down))
03 AR: [Yeah.
04 RN: [Ah: actually here organization I think it means
05 that (0.2) you will put which section after which
06 section and how it will be arranged, it will be
07 organized, ((gestures))=
08 MH: ((continues writing))
09 AR: Um
In the excerpt (6) above, MH makes a point and writes that down that journal articles should follow structure (lines 1-2). This is immediately acknowledged with a token ‘yeah’ by AR (line 3). Raman, however, overlapped with AR, prepares to disagree with MH by using the word ‘actually’ in the turn initial position (line 4). His use of the token ‘ah:’ can be interpretable as his attempt to claim the floor for speaking due to an overlap with AR, and his use of ‘actually’ implies that he is going to take an alternative stance different from the previous speaker. Raman’s use of ‘I think’ in this context is different from the previous ones in the sense that he is using this expression in the middle of the sentence. ‘I think’ is followed by 0.2 pause which provides a space for him to plan for the next speech action. This can be comparable with Kaikkonen’s (2003) data where speakers use ‘I think’ as an interactional resource for planning what to speak next. Raman here also prefaxes ‘I think’ and ‘it means’ as resources to launch the meaning of ‘organization’ (line 5). He then expresses his opinion that organization refers to the section-wise arrangement of a paper. Both MH and AR orient to Raman’s opinion in line 8 (by writing) and 9 (with a continuer token ‘um’). Raman continues in lines 10 and 11 expressing his opinion that organization is always sequential. AR aligns with Raman’s opinion (line 12).

It is evident from the excerpt (6) above that Raman is using ‘I think’ in the middle of the turn sequence for multiple purposes: to prepare for disagreement and to plan the next action. This is, nevertheless, oriented to by his peers in the classroom community of practice. His is able to use this interactional resource for multiple purposes. His increasing use of this stance taking expression shows that he is becoming a fully-fledged member in his community.
Summary and Conclusion

In this section, I will explain different interactional functions that Raman used ‘I think’ for.

Table 2 gives the summary of overall use of stance-taken token by him:

Table 2. Summary of Raman’s interactional use of ‘I think’

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Session</th>
<th>frequency</th>
<th>Functions of ‘I think’</th>
<th>Date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>WW-1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>Not found</td>
<td>Sept. 10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WW-2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>Not found</td>
<td>Sept. 24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WW-3</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>a. to disagree with the previous speaker</td>
<td>Oct. 29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>b. to summarize his opinion, prefaced with ‘so’</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>c. to interrupt an ongoing flow of discourse</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WW-4</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>a. to disagree with the previous speaker</td>
<td>Nov. 12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>b. as a separate intonation unit at the end of sentence</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>c. with an opinion statement</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>d. to elaborate on his own opinion</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WW-5</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>a. to disagree with the previous speaker</td>
<td>Nov. 19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>b. to elaborate on his own opinion</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>c. as a separate intonation unit at the end of sentence</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>d. as a separate intonation unit in the middle of sentence</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>e. as a negative stance ‘I don’t think’</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>f. with an opinion statement</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

WW= Writing workshop

Table 2 shows that Raman’s use of ‘I think’ is increasing not only in terms of the frequency of its occurrence but also in terms of the variety of purposes it has been used for. I am aware that it is not easy to draw an inventory of different types of functions that ‘I think’ serves and a lot of functions overlap with each other. The table, nonetheless, shows that Raman is using this stance taking expression for more functions each time he participates in the discussion. In other words, Raman shows an evidence of developing interactional competence in using ‘I think’ token. I think the use of this stance taking marker is one of the very frequent expressions in academic discourse in university classrooms. This also is evident in other students’ interactions in this particular
classroom context (see excerpt 1). Conversation analysis, thus, as an analytical framework allows moment to moment analysis of sequences and proves a means for robust analysis of the interactional data. This study also shows that combining conversation analysis with other language learning theories, for example situated learning theory, is a useful way to track the developmental nature of some interactional object (Markee, 2008).

Some limitations of the study have to be noted, however. Frequency increase in using stance taking marker ‘I think’ is not necessarily a phenomenon that can be treated in step-by-step developmental phases; a lot depends on the interactional contexts that make a certain interactional resource relevant to appear. It is very surprising for me that Raman’s use of ‘I think’ was zero in first two workshops, but it suddenly increased to 11 in the third workshop. My interpretation of the term community of practice needs to be understood in this particular research context: here Raman’s becoming a fully legitimate member of his community has not been interpreted in terms of the quality and quantity of his participation and contribution in discussions, but in terms of his interactional competence to take stance using ‘I think’ in discussions while engaged in academic writing tasks. There are, of course, several other ways to express one’s stance. As I reflect on the analysis of the data, there are some alternative, yet better ways I could have made my analysis stronger. The table in the conclusion section shows that Raman’s use of ‘I think’ is expanding not in terms of its frequency of occurrence, but in terms of the range of functions it serves. I could have analyzed my data focusing on that and could have included those excerpts. But I had this idea in the last hour and it was too late to restart the analysis. For the future research, it is also worthwhile to mention the details of Raman’s speaking time in each session, and the proportionate use of ‘I think’ in those interaction moments.
References


