

Turn-Taking in Destination Negotiation among Mixed-Readiness EFL Learners in a Task-Based Group Discussion: A Conversation Analytic Study

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DOI: [10.18326/jopr.v8i3.1127-1148](https://doi.org/10.18326/jopr.v8i3.1127-1148)

Submission Track:

Received: 21-06-2026

Final Revision: 20-10-2026

Available Online: 23-10-2026

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Abstract

This study investigates how mixed-readiness EFL learners organise turn-taking across a task-based group discussion by employing a conversation analytic approach. The participants were four 12th-grade female learners from Indonesia with lower, intermediate, and higher readiness levels. The data consisted of a 3.8-minute audio recording of a destination decision discussion in a task-based itinerary-planning lesson. The learners were given a budget, assigned roles, and asked to decide where they would go before writing and presenting an itinerary. The transcript was examined for the occurrence of sequence organisation, overlap, pause, agreement, disagreement, repair, and role-based participation. The findings showed that the discussion was highly task-oriented, starting from budget confirmation to destination proposal and proceeding to evaluation, then final agreement. The learners used short turns, overlaps, repetition, and clarification to navigate the interaction to achieve closure efficiently. While more assertive learners assisted in sustaining the discussion, the less assertive ones participated

through brief responses and evaluative turns. The facilitator also maintained the task structure and channelled the learners when needed. The study suggests that mixed-readiness learners are able to collaboratively organise interaction in completing a classroom task, and that conversation analysis is effective for uncovering how turn-by-turn practices form decision-making in task-based EFL group work.

Keywords: *task-based language teaching, conversation analysis, turn-taking, mixed-readiness learners, EFL group discussion*

INTRODUCTION

Task-based language teaching (TBLT) has become a renowned approach in second language education as it emphasises meaningful language use through task completion. Tasks are the central units of program design in TBLT (Long, 1985), which implies that curricula are produced around what learners need to achieve through language rather than around a fixed sequence of grammar structures. Its primary goal is to promote communicative competence by engaging learners in meaning-focused communication in the target language, where real learning occurs through negotiating, clarifying, and responding (Branden, 2016). Thus, TBLT places strong emphasis on real-world language use, authenticity, interaction, and learner-centered participation, which are often completed collaboratively, whether in pairs or small groups, to expand opportunities for meaningful exchange (Lam et al., 2021; Basireddi et al., 2025; Anito et al., 2025).

While TBLT emphasises the significance of meaningful learner interaction, conversation analysis provides a detailed framework for studying how that interaction is organised as it develops. Conversation analysis is an approach for examining naturally occurring talk-in-interaction by investigating how people organise turns, sequences, and meaning moment by moment, intending to present how people accomplish actions, repair problems, and build shared understanding in real time (Floyd, 2021; Wu, 2021; Kasper & Wagner, 2014; Raymond, 2018). It was invented in work correlated with Harvey Sacks, Emanuel Schegloff, and Gail

Jefferson, and has developed into a cumulative research program employed across sociology, linguistics, anthropology, communication, and related fields (Wu & Wen, 2015; Kasper & Wagner, 2014).

CA handles interaction as sequentially organised, which means that each turn presents an understanding of the former turn and assists in shaping what comes next (Wu, 2021; Floyd, 2021; Peräkylä, 2019). Its key analysis tools include turn-taking, sequence organisation, repair, and larger episode structure (Floyd, 2021; Schegloff, 1999; Meredith, 2019). The present discussion depicted a naturally occurring talk within a classroom task (Kunitz et al., 2022), as the learners generated their turns spontaneously while negotiating the task in real time, albeit directed by teacher-assigned roles and a task framework. The teacher's involvement did not eliminate the naturalness of the interaction; rather, it formed the interactional context by initiating participation rights, task boundaries, and a clear communicative goal (Howe et al., 2019; Kunitz et al., 2022). Therefore, the teacher's position presumably influenced the turn-taking pattern by making the discussion more organized, more task-focused, and more evenly directed toward task completion.

Previous studies found that classroom interaction was shaped in significant ways through the influence of task design, learner proficiency, and role assignment. Open-ended, problem-based tasks proved to encourage more collaborative and collectively constructed talk, while lower-proficiency EFL learners generally focus on task completion through short turns and minimal negotiation (Kunitz et al., 2022; Konzett-Firth & Balaman, 2025; Park, 2021). At the same time, mixed-proficiency pairing produced better possibilities for negotiation of meaning, and role-based discussion has been proven to enhance learners' participation and social communication (Tian & Jiang, 2021; Wang et al., 2023).

However, these studies still do not provide a detailed view of how mixed-readiness EFL learners manage turn-taking in a short role-based task when they negotiate a destination and work toward a shared decision. Therefore, utilising CA as the analytical framework, this study aims to answer the following research question: How do mixed-readiness EFL learners organize turn-taking during a task-based group discussion of destination choice?

RESEARCH METHODS

Research design

This study employs a qualitative research design, specifically drawing on a conversation analytic approach. Conversation analysis is suitable for investigating this study since it is designed to examine audio- or video-recorded of naturally occurring interaction and operates around detailed transcription through close inspection of frequent practices of verbal and non-verbal conduct (Tietbohl & White, 2022; Wu & Wen, 2015). The study also employs participant observation in a classroom setting, with the researcher participating in the interaction as a teacher and occasionally providing facilitation or guidance (Vinten, 1994; Horrill et al., 2024). In this study, the approaches are utilised to examine how mixed-readiness EFL learners organize turn-taking during a task-based group discussion.

Participants

The participants were four 12th-grade female EFL learners from an Indonesian senior high school, with heterogeneous English levels consisting of two lower-readiness learners (AJ and HH), one intermediate-readiness learner (YP), and one higher-readiness learner (NH). Participants were chosen through purposive sampling (Campbell et al., 2020; Palinkas et al., 2013) based on diagnostic observation of two weeks period of their formative performance throughout listening, speaking, reading, and writing during daily communicative tasks, (which

then classified according to their participation, responsiveness, interactional confidence, and ability to engage in classroom activities to determine the readiness level.)

Participants were then categorised by their readiness level. Lower-readiness learners were those who constantly required teacher scaffolding (Li & Zhang, 2020), displayed long delays before responding (Wang et al., 2025), and highly relied on peer translation or L1 to understand tasks (Xu et al., 2021). Intermediate-readiness learners were those who could undertake tasks unassisted and sustain basic conversational flow (Young, 1995) but frequently experienced lexical gaps and relied on basic grammar structures (Cox, 2017). Higher-readiness learners were those who naturally initiated interaction (Little, 2020), generated more complex sentence structures, and extended the task without teacher prompting (Kim, 2012). This arrangement was meant as a pedagogical classification to indicate learners' relative readiness for interaction in the classroom context, and not as a formal standardized measure of English proficiency.

Data source and analysis

The data consisted of a 3.8-minute audio recording of a group discussion during a task-based activity. The recording depicted the destination discussion stage performed by the learners before they progressed to itinerary writing and presentation. The full transcript was prepared using conversation analysis conventions (Robinson et al., 2024), but only the final episode or a representative excerpt was analysed in detail. The analysis focused on turn-taking, sequence organization, overlap, pause, agreement, disagreement, repair, and role-based participation to investigate how the destination decision was achieved turn by turn. The findings are not intended to be statistically generalisable, but to offer an in-depth conversation-analytic description of how mixed-readiness learners organised turn-taking in this particular task. The results may be transferable to

similar EFL classroom contexts, but the small dataset imposes clear limitations on conclusions about mixed-readiness learners in general. The study should be understood as an illustrative case that provides context-specific insights into turn-taking organisation.

Table 1. Analysis conventions

Symbol	Function
[	marks the beginning of an overlap
]	marks the end of an overlap
=	latching
(0.5)	measured silence in tenths of a second
(.)	micropause under one-tenth of a second
.	falling intonation
,	continuing intonation
?	rising intonation
↑, ↓	rise or fall pitch
:	sound stretch
-	self-interruption or cut-off
WORD	increased vocal volume
°word°	decreased vocal volume
> <	accelerated speech
hh	audible exhalation
.hh	audible inhalation
(h)	laugh particles
(())	specific voice quality, transcriber's commentary

Task and procedure

The learning process commenced with the teacher introducing the topic of itinerary planning. In this stage, the teacher provided the learners with key vocabulary and sentence starters associated with travel and planning. Afterwards, the teacher assigned the group composition, the learners' roles, and the budget that they had to consider in the task. The teacher then instructed the group to discuss and decide what destination they would visit within five minutes. Upon reaching the

decision, the learners were given the primary assignment to write the itinerary plan based on their discussion. Ultimately, each group presented their itinerary plan, which then received direct feedback on their performance and output from the teacher.

Table 2. TBLT procedure

Lesson plan	Description	Time duration (minutes)
Tasks	Destination discussion and itinerary planning	
Topic	Itinerary planning	
Teaching objectives	1. To enable learners to discuss and agree on a destination 2. To enable learners to write and present an itinerary plan	
Teaching procedures	Pre-task: The teacher introduces the topic of itinerary planning and provides key vocabulary and sentence starters, such as <i>ticket</i> , <i>passport</i> , <i>transportation</i> , <i>We decided that we will ...</i> , and <i>First, we will arrive at ...</i> . The teacher then assigns the group, roles, and budget.	15
	Task-cycle: The learners discuss in groups for 5 minutes to decide what destination they will visit. After that, they write the itinerary plan based on their discussion.	25
	Post-task: The learners present their itinerary plan, then the teacher gives direct feedback.	10

RESULTS & DISCUSSION

The most noticeable feature in the learners' interaction throughout the destination-choice discussion was their intention to reach agreement under the budget restraint, with sequence organization, overlap, clarification, and role-based participation all working closely to move the discussion toward closure. The

participants repeatedly oriented to the task goal by evaluating destinations regarding the available budget, instead of expanding the talk into continued argument, which led them to check several options before deciding on a final choice. In the final episode of the discussion, the interaction demonstrates a coherent progression from budget confirmation to destination proposals and finally to agreement, as shown on line 192, where YP stated the chosen destination (Yes, Bandung). This intention into task completion is particularly apparent in the way the learners frequently repeat, confirm, and evaluate candidate destinations, while the facilitator's mediation manage the discussion locked to the task requirement (Park, 2021; Shimamoto, 2025). To illustrate, the following excerpt from the final episode presents how the participants move from budget checking to destination evaluation and final agreement, with overlapping turns and repeated confirmations assisting to organize the sequence toward closure.

Excerpt: Destination-choice group discussion (02.53-03.39)

- 147 FAC Look at your budget, guys=
 148 YP =Ye::s
 149 FAC The budget is (0.9) [three million.]
 150 YP [Three million.]
 151 (0.3)
 152 HH Only three million=
 153 FAC =Yeah↑ Yeah↑
 154 HH You-
 155 FAC Think about it.
 156 HH You must na::w↑ ((know))
 157 (0.4)
 158 NH What?
 159 (0.4)
 160 HH The::
 161 (1.0)
 162 YP Price? Price?=
 163 HH =Ye::s:
 164 YP The [pri:ce?]
 165 HH [And, and,] Place, place. (0.5) [Bali↑]
 166 YP [Bali] Bali

- 167 (0.7)
 168 NH Bali:↑ There's↑ so a lot of things↑ in Bali
 169 actually but (0.7) price:y. Yes.=
 170 YP =Iya::: ((whining))
 171 (0.7)
 172 NH Lom:bok=
 173 HH =Kuningan
 174 (0.3)
 175 YP Lombok (0.3) Lombok is pricey too.=
 176 HH =Ahh↑ (2.0) >Majalengka<↑=
 177 NH =Whoa↑
 178 YP Fix >Majalengka<?=
 179 NH =Ma↓ja↑lengka↑ ((delivered in a playful tone))
 180 YP (h)
 181 (2.0)
 182 NH Bandung, Bandung=
 183 HH =[Bandung↑]
 184 YP =[YES↑] Yes↑ Nah. Yes, Bandung.
 185 (1.0)
 186 FAC Okay? Finished? Where do you wanna go?
 187 (0.6)
 188 YP Ba[n:]
 189 NH [(h)hh]
 190 FAC Bandung?=
 191 HH =Bandung.
 192 YP Yes, Bandung.

Sequence organization

In this particular, final episode, the occurrence of sequential organization is distinct, with the participants moving from budget confirmation to destination evaluation and eventually to destination closure. The sequence commences when the facilitator asks the group to contemplate the budget, saying, “Look at your budget, guys” (line 147), followed by the explicit reminder that the budget is three million. The students directly respond by echoing the budget amount (lines 150 and 152), which indicates that they align to the facilitator’s turn and treat it as an important case for the next phase of the discussion. This opening builds the

framework for the sequence, for the destination choices that follow are all evaluated in regard to the budget.

The participants initiate proposing and testing different destinations after the budget is confirmed. HH announces the issue of price and place, then together with YP, proposes Bali (lines 152-166), NH responds with an evaluation, noting that it has many things but is costly. The sequence then moves to Lombok, Kuningan, Majalengka, and ultimately Bandung, which indicates that the discussion is not accidental but established turn by turn through a chain of proposals and assessments. This progressive movement is a distinct example of sequence organization as each speaker's turn initiates the basis for the next turn (Mondada & Meguerditchian, 2022; Mondémé, 2021; Melefa et al., 2024).

The sequence reaches its closure when Bandung is repeated and accepted by HH, who says "Bandung", and YP, who confirms it with "Yes, Bandung" (lines 191-192). This final confirmation indicates that the participants have moved from examination to agreement and task completion. Therefore, the episode demonstrates how turn-taking is organized in a task-based discussion through a structured sequence of evaluation, repetition, and closure.

Overlap and pause

The episode consists of several distinct instances of overlap and pause, which present how the participants manage the floor while negotiating the destination choice. One apparent overlap occurs when the facilitator says, "Look at your budget, guys," (line 147) and YP directly overlaps with "Yes", (line 148) then restates "three million" (line 150). This rapid response indicates that the participants are firmly aligned with the facilitator's turn and are apt to open the discussion without delay. The overlap here is not disruptive; instead, it supports the shared understanding of the task condition (Franceschi, 2024; Takeda, 2022).

Another significant pattern is the appearance of short pauses between turns, specifically after destination proposals. For instance, after the budget is confirmed, there is a pause before HH announces “Only three million” (line 152), and later pauses emerge between the proposals of Bali (line 167), Lombok and Kuningan (line 174), and Majalengka (line 181). These pauses initiate time for thinking, evaluation, and anticipation of the next move. In such a task, the pauses are meaningful as they present the speakers' consideration of whether a destination fits the budget before responding (Seuren et al., 2020).

Overlap also occurs when speakers restate or conclude the same idea at nearly the same time, such as when Bali is repeated by HH and YP (lines 165-166), and later when Bandung is repeated by the same speakers (lines 191-192). This type of overlap presents collaborative participation, for the speakers are not contesting for the floor in an adverse way but are rather collectively building the decision (D'Angelo & Rajarathinam, 2024). The repeated overlaps also indicate that the sequence is lively and cooperative, which adds to the rhythm of the interaction. In general, the pauses and overlaps in this episode imply that the turn-taking process is dynamic and shared. The pauses afford the participants moments to evaluate the available options, while the overlaps depict their active engagement in the decision-making process. Thus, these features promote the smooth transition of the discussion toward the final agreement.

Agreement and disagreement

This episode presents a distinct move from an unsettled decision to agreement, with some prior resistance to various destination options. At the opening of the excerpt, the facilitator asks the group to look at the budget, and the participants directly align with that case by repeating the amount (lines 150 and 152). This mutual understanding indicates early agreement on the decision-making criteria (McCabe, 2021). Subsequently, the group assesses destinations according to

whether they fit the budget, which manages the interaction moving toward general agreement.

Some disagreement occurs in the decision on the proposed places. During Bali's suggestion, NH remarks that there are many things in the place but that it is costly (lines 168-169). This does not dismiss the destination directly, but it certainly identifies it as less suitable. A similar arrangement occurs with Lombok, which YP again defines as costly (line 175). These replies imply that disagreement in this episode is not conveyed as strong elimination but as evaluative resistance established by cost. In other words, the participants are trying to explain and reason about why some places may not work.

The most apparent agreement appears near the end, when Bandung becomes the favoured destination, which NH proposes (line 182). Afterwards, HH and YP directly repeat (lines 183-184) before subsequently closing the proposal by agreeing and concluding the chosen place (lines 191-192). This echoed approval indicates resolute alignment across participants and demonstrates the transition from discussion to closure (Guardiola & Bertrand, 2013; Leung & Lam, 2018). At this point, the group is no longer debating the alternatives; instead, they perform shared acceptance of the final decision.

Largely, the excerpt presents that agreement is established constantly through evaluation and repeated confirmation, while disagreement occurs primarily in the resistance of the assigned cost to incompatible destinations. The interaction therefore determines how the group negotiates consent step by step rather than attaining it directly.

Repair or clarification

There are limited, but still visible repair and clarification moves in this episode. These appear specifically when the participants confirm which criterion they are discussing. After the facilitator mentions the group about the budget, HH struggles

to finish the line, saying, “The:,” (line 160) with an elongated vowel. With the intention to help HH overcome the struggle, YP responds with “Price? Price?” (line 162) before HH confirms, “Yes,” (line 163) then continues with “And, and. Place, place.” (line 165). This sequence indicates that the speakers ensure the appropriate decision factors are certain before moving forward. They reformulate the issue in a more explicit way, instead of allowing the discussion to remain vague.

The clarification is also apparent in the frequent reference to the budget and naming of destinations. For instance, the participants keep reiterating “three million” (lines 150 and 152), and later they echo the destination names such as Bali (lines 165-169) and Bandung (lines 182-184, 191-192). These repetitions aid in verifying that everyone is working with the same information. In CA terms, this type of repetition operates as a moderate repair mechanism as it maintains the talk aligned and lessens the chance of misunderstanding (Robinson & Kevoe-Feldman, 2010).

Although no significant repair sequence, such as a full alteration of a misunderstood turn, is present, the excerpt still contains small clarification moves that support the task. The speakers are not adjusting a breakdown in conversation so much as clarifying the terms of the decision. This is specifically important as the group must determine a destination based on two criteria, which are the budget and the place itself. Therefore, the clarification encourages the participants to narrow their options and move toward agreement.

In general, repair and clarification in this episode are minimal but convenient. They support the group in confirming the decision criteria and manage shared understanding during the destination-selection process. This establishes a more precise interaction and supports the discussion to move efficiently toward closure.

Role-based participation

In this episode, participation distribution is uneven and heavily shaped by the roles and interactional positions of the speakers. The facilitator evidently takes control of the task by reminding them and asking them to consider the budget, then confirming whether they have finished. This implies that the facilitator is not only organising the classroom but also guiding the discussion toward an outcome. In other words, the facilitator's turns shaped the activity and maintained the group's focus on the task goal.

Among the students, YP evidently takes a relatively strong organizing role in this episode by frequently confirming the budget, repeating destination names, and helping maintain the sequence moving. NH also actively strengthens the idea of the proposed options by evaluating destinations and commenting on whether they are expensive or suitable. HH acts as the main proposer who offers places such as Bali, Lombok, and Majalengka. While most of the participants take their turns, AJ does not take any in this excerpt, which indicates that not all roles are equally active in every part of the discussion. These patterns imply that the higher and intermediate readiness level students are taking on more of the interactive work in the decision-making process than the other students, while the facilitator takes the strongest participation.

In summary, this episode demonstrates that role-based participation is not resolved in a mechanical way, but emerges through the way speakers contribute to the task (Dowell et al., 2018). Some participants initiate more responsibility for guiding the discussion, evaluating options, and confirming the final choice, while others remain less active. This uneven participation holds significance in presenting how the assigned roles influence the turn-taking pattern in the group discussion (Park, 2021b; Le, 2021).

CONCLUSION

The findings and discussion prove that the learners organized their turn-taking in an eminently task-oriented way, with the major priority being to reach a shared decision within the budget limit rather than to maintain prolonged debate. Throughout the final episode of the discussion, the interaction advanced from budget confirmation to the proposal and evaluation of destination options, then to the continuous closure of the decision-making sequence, specifically through short turns, overlaps, repetitions, clarifications, and brief confirmations. This pattern indicates that turn-taking was neither accidental nor merely reactive, but firmly built by the task structure, the pressure of completing the activity, and the need to manage participation among mixed-readiness speakers. More assertive participants appeared to help keep the discussion moving, while less assertive ones gave support through short evaluative turns, agreement expressions, and responses that promoted the collective decision. The facilitator also performed an important role in maintaining the task frame and guiding the discussion back to the intended goal when needed. In conclusion, the episode establishes an image of how mixed-readiness EFL learners can successfully organize turn-taking to achieve task completion, and how their interaction is characterized less by open-ended negotiation and more by collaborative decision-making that leads to sequence closure.

These findings should be interpreted as context-specific and not generalisable to all EFL classrooms, task types, or proficiency levels, given the limited sample size and single-task context. The findings suggest that in this specific setting, mixed-readiness learners collaboratively organised interaction and completed the task through coordinated turn-taking. The researchers did not attribute participation patterns to any single factor such as proficiency, personality, or assigned roles, but based their interpretation on interactional evidence and the teacher-researcher's familiarity with the learners. Since the study fell short of proficiency tests,

personality measures, or post-task interviews, these factors cannot be assuredly separated, although assigned roles probably shaped participation distribution, with proficiency and individual speaking manner as possible additional influences.

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