

# A Study of Interviews: The Roles of Interviewer and Interviewee

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## 1. Introduction

The purpose of this study is to investigate the conducting of interviews as a method of instruction for oral communication in English education and to examine the roles of interviewer and interviewee.

## 2. Previous Studies

An interview in language teaching is usually used as the testing method of spoken ability. We will argue that the method of evaluation itself can be used as an instructive teaching method. We would like to try to explain some characteristic features of the interview by comparing other methods of evaluation. Then, we will look at some examples of interviews in order to make clear the point of this paper.

### 2.1. Definition of the interview in language teaching

According to *Dictionary of Language Teaching and Applied Linguistics*, an interview is defined as “a directed conversation between an investigator and an individual or group of individuals in order to gather information. Interviews are used to gather data for linguistic analysis and may be used in news analysis”. (1992:189)

Underhill (1987) states that the interview is the most common of all oral tests. According to him, it is a direct, face-to-face exchange between a teacher and a learner.

There is a more detailed comment in *Observing and Analysing Natural Language*, by Milroy(1987). We should note that an interviewer is a dominant participant who controls the discourse. His characterization made me decide that a learner takes the role of interviewer rather than interviewee.

### 2.2. Interview as a testing method of evaluation

Weir(1990), Oka(1984) and Higuchi(1996) classified interview as one of the methods of oral tests.

Table 1

	Pronunciation	Vocabulary	Grammar	The knowledge of social linguistics	The strategy of communication
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(a) Reading aloud	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>		
(b) Information transfer	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>		<input type="radio"/>
(c) Role play	<input type="radio"/>				
<b>(d) Interview</b>	<input type="radio"/>				
(e) Speech	<input type="radio"/>				

“Considering the level of learners and physical and time limits, (d)interview is most acceptable.”  
Higuchi(1995:214)

### 2.3. Interview as a method of English language teaching

Klippel(1984) reports in *Keep Talking* four kinds of activities for English language teaching: self-directed interviews, group interviews, opinion polls and guided interviews.

Table 2

Activity	Topic type	Level	Organis- ation	Prepara- tion	Time in minutes
13 Self-directed interviews	pers./fact.	int.	pairs	no	10-30
14 Group interview	pers./fact.	int.	groups	no	5-15
15 Opinion poll	fact./pers.	int.	groups	Part2	30-45
16 Guided interviews	fact./pers.	int./adv.	pairs/groups	Part2	15-25

pers.=personal; fact. =factual; int.=intermediate; adv.=advanced; groups. =small groups; pairs. =two people working together; Part2=material for the exercise is to be found in Part2. (Material is not attached in thesis; Author)  
Klippel (1984:24-27)

### 2.4. Category of Interview

Underhill (1987) categorizes the direct interview into three types: discussion/conversation, interview, and question and answers.

#### A. Discussion/Conversation

The interviewer keeps overall control but is willing and able to yield the initiative to the learner to steer the conversation or bring up a new topic. More accurately, the topics discussed and the directions taken by the conversation are the result of the interaction between the people involved in a kind of negotiation below the surface level of the words.

#### B. Interview

Compared with A. Discussion/Conversation, an interview is structured. The interviewer sets

out to find out certain things about the learner and to get answers to certain questions. She maintains firm control and keeps the initiative as well; whatever the learner says is in more or less direct response to her questions or statements. However, the learner still has the freedom to answer as he likes or to develop his comments and opinions. When he has finished his answer or his comment it is then up to the interviewer to make the next move - to develop the topic further or raise a new one.

### C. Question and answer

This typically consists of a series of disconnected questions which are graded in order of increasing difficulty starting with short simple questions such as "What's your name?" and "Where do you live?" then working up to long and complex sentences such as "If you hadn't been taking this test this morning, what would you have been doing instead?"

Underhill (1987:31-61)

## **3. Experiment**

### **3.1. Purpose**

The purpose of this experiment is to investigate whether there are any educational effects by comparing Interview I which learners act as interviewer with ton conventional interview in which learners are interviewees( Interview II ). These experiments have three sections: Interview I , Interview II , and Questionnaire. Interview I is mainly discussed by comparison to Interview II , and the questionnaire is distributed in order to search for some factors behind two interviews.

### **3.2. Procedures**

#### **3.2.1. Participants**

10 Japanese female students attending the same university in Japan. All first-year students who major in business management. None of the students has resided in an English-speaking country. English proficiency of all participants is not very high(TOEIC score D level---470-220).

### 3.2.2. Procedures for Interview I

In Interview I , each participant interviews a teacher one-on-one only in English for five minutes. Two weeks before the interview, all participants are indicated that they are the interviewers and that the teacher is the interviewee. They can prepare for the interview for two weeks but cannot bring any memo in their interviews. The teacher does not specify a topic and questions. They had freedom to speak about any topic and to ask any questions to the teacher.

### 3.2.3. Procedure of Interview II

In Interview II , each participant is interviewed by the teacher only in English one-on-one for five minutes as the interviewee about three weeks after Interview I . The procedure is the same as Interview I . The teacher chooses topics which were mostly given by participants in Interview I (winter or spring vacation, favorite movies). These same topics are given to all participants but not told before the interviews.

### 3.2.4. The method of data collection

All interviews are recorded and transcribed for precisely 5 minutes. Based on the transcription, the total number of words uttered by a participant is counted in order to know how much they speak in each interview. Also, the total number of words uttered by a teacher is counted to examine the interaction between interviewer and interviewee. The respective number of turn-takings, silent pauses of the participant and the teacher, and laughter of both are counted, too. According to Madeley's study (1994), he distinguished pauses into three kinds: less than 1 second, from 1 to 3 seconds, and more than 3 seconds.(1994:91:*JALT Journal, Vol 16, No.1.*) Since the English proficiency of participants of my experiments is all low-level, more than 5 second pauses are counted as silent pauses.

## 3.3. Result of Experiment

### 3.3.1. Analysis 1: Learners' questions and topics in Interview I

In Interview I , participants must ask some questions to the teacher according to the topics that they choose. In other words, they have freedom to choose the questions and their topics. All questions and topics are listed in Table3

Table 3

	Questions	Topics
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	What do you like flower? (What flower do you like?)	Flowers
P10	Are you a skier? What is your hobby? What are winter holiday? Where do you live?	Sports Hobbies Holidays Address

How do these participants choose the questions and topics? We would like to get the idea from their questionnaire. Question 13 of Questionnaire is about the topic. Participants can choose more than one. In addition, participants wrote their comments as follows:

<Question17> What did you choose for the topic of Interview I ?

I chose the topic that:

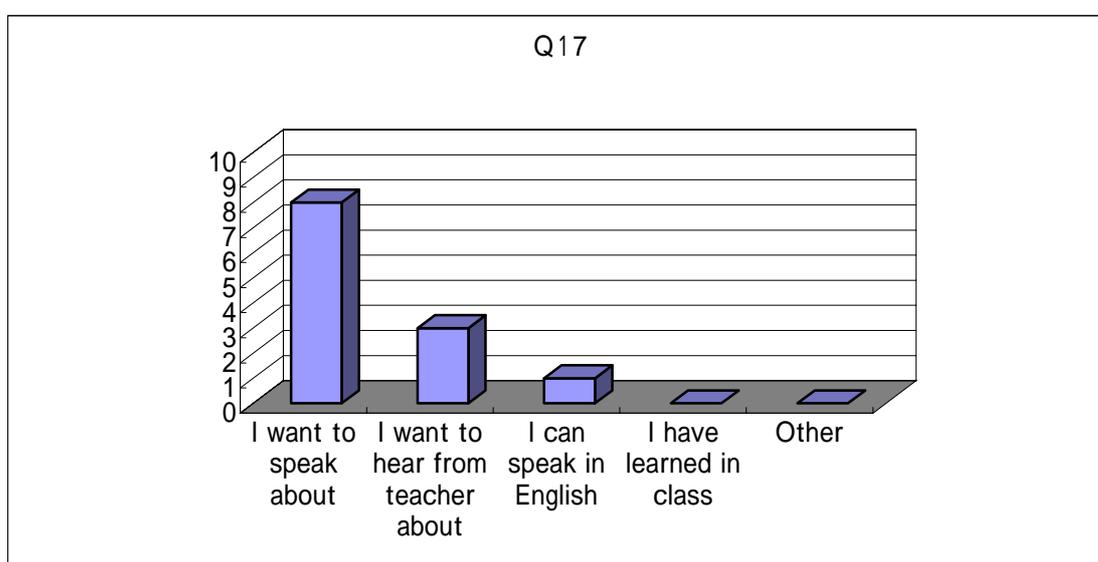


Figure1

Comments for “I want to speak about”:

- \* “I wanted to ask the things I ‘m interested in if I do it at all. Besides, it’s easier to talk about.”
- \* “If you want to ask questions to others, you have to talk about yourself. I can continue the conversation when I talk about the things that I want to.”
- \* “I looked up in the dictionary the thing I wanted to talk about, because I wanted to let a teacher know more about myself .”
- \* I can talk more about a topic on which I have an opinion.”

### 3.3.2. Analysis 2: Conversational features in Interview I and II

Trappes-Lomax (2000) categorizes the characteristics of conversation as a type of communication such as sharedness, unplannedness, interactiveness, and expressiveness, visibility and orality. Since this experiment is based on transcription and questionnaire data, which do not have visual and oral data, we would like to refer four categories as follows:

What we know about conversation (as a type of communication) and we can expect (language features)

Table 4

WHAT WE KNOW	WHAT WE CAN EXPECT (LOOK FOR)
Conversation takes place in a <b>shared</b> context (including shared experience and expectations between the participants)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. forms without precise meaning (pronouns, vague nouns)</li> <li>2. incomplete forms (various kinds of ellipsis, sentence fragments)</li> <li>3. expressions which deliberately convey vagueness (<i>sort of, more or less, and stuff</i>)</li> </ol>
Conversations are <b>unplanned</b> and take place 'in real time'	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. pauses, hesitations (erm), repetitions, and reformulations</li> <li>2. utterances left grammatically incomplete or grammatically muddled</li> <li>3. 'effort reducing' features such as elision and assimilation</li> <li>4. 'prefaces' (helpful beginnings) and 'tags' (helpful endings)</li> </ol>
Conversations are <b>interactive</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. adjacency pairs ('Hi!'-'Hi!' 'Can you give me a hand with us?'-'Of course')</li> <li>2. high frequency questions and imperatives</li> <li>3. short response forms (<i>okay, sure, alright...</i>)</li> <li>4. discourse markers (<i>well, right, ok...</i>)</li> <li>5. high frequency of adverbials (<i>frankly, to be honest with you, all the same...</i>)</li> <li>6. typically conversational linking adverbials (<i>anyway, so</i> compared with <i>however</i> and <i>therefore</i> in the written language)</li> <li>7. vocatives (forms of address) (both identifying and attitudinal functions)</li> <li>8. high frequency of negation</li> <li>9. high frequency of <i>but</i> (contradiction)</li> </ol>
Conversations are <b>expressive</b> of people's attitudes to one another as well as to their topics	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. vocatives</li> <li>2. polite openings (<i>would you, could you</i>) and other politeness markers</li> <li>3. <i>let's</i></li> <li>4. endearments (<i>honey</i>)</li> <li>5. familiarisers (<i>man</i>)</li> <li>6. interjections (<i>oh, ah, wow</i>)</li> <li>7. exclamation marks (<i>what a...</i>)</li> <li>8. positive evaluating adjectives (<i>nice, lovely</i>)</li> <li>9. intensifying co-ordination (<i>nice and...</i>)</li> <li>10. expletives (<i>shit!</i>)</li> </ol>

(Trappes-Lomax 2000, from handout 4 of his Cyber lecture in the year 2000  
[http://pc171115.pc.waseda.ac.jp/ccdl/cl\\_edinburgh2/4-Handout.pdf](http://pc171115.pc.waseda.ac.jp/ccdl/cl_edinburgh2/4-Handout.pdf))

Can we find these four categories in L2 learner's interview? Is there any difference between Interview I which in a learner interviews the teacher and Interview II in which the teacher interviews a learner? Now, we will look at whole contents of Interview I and Interview II.

Participant 4 :

Interview I

<T>Hello.

<P 4 >Hello.(Interactiveness1) My name is ×××. Please (Expressiveness2) call me ×××.

<T>All right.

<P 4 >My, ah, may I (Expressiveness 2) ask your name?

<T>Sure. My name is Minako Sunaga.

<P 4 >Minako? (Unplannedness1)

<T>Just call me Minako.

<P 4 >Nice to meet you, Minako. (Interactiveness7)

<T>Oh, nice to meet you, too.

<P 4 >Nice to meet you.(Interactiveness1) Um, what, what (Unplannedness1) do you do weekend?

<T>Ah, well, oh, I went to nail salon.

<P 4 >Nail salon? (Unplannedness1) Oh, (Expressiveness6) yes.

<T>For the first time.

<P 4 >First time? (Unplannedness1)

<T>First time.

<P 4 >Mm.

<T>And I really liked it because, Ah, see? I think it's, it's pretty, isn't it?

<P 4 >Pretty? (Unplannedness1) Yes. Natural. (Expressiveness8)

<T><Laughter> I really like it.

<P 4 >Ah, (Expressiveness6) I, I, I (Unplannedness1) usually, usually (Unplannedness1) do my part-time job.

<T>Oh.

<P 4 >And it's, it's(Unplannedness1) public pub.

<T>Mm hm.

<P 4 >Yeah. Very busy. (Sharedness2)

<T>Oh, really?

<P 4 >Um. And next week is Christmas Eve and Christmas.

<T>All right. Yes.

<P 4 >So, I, I go to see, I go to see (Unplannedness1) my boyfriend in Iwate.

<T>Iwate?

<P 4 >Iwate. (Sharedness2)

<T>Oh, kind of far. Far away.

<P 4 >Far away? (Unplannedness1)

<T>Iwate is far, so far from Tokyo.

<P 4 >Tokyo, (Unplannedness1) yes, three hours. (Unplannedness2)

<T>Umm. Oh, your boyfriend is living in Iwate.

<P 4 >Iwate. (Unplannedness2)

<T>Ah, are you from Iwate?

<P 4 >No.

<T>Where are you from?

<P 4 >Tokyo.

<T>You are from Tokyo.

<P 4 >So, I, Long distance love. (Sharedness2) <Laughter>

<T><Laughter> yes, yes, it is.

<P 4 >Yeah.

<T>Wow, so you are very excited.

<P 4 >Yes.

<T>Mm

<P 4 >How about you?

<T>Christmas?

<P 4 >Christmas. (Sharedness2)

<T>Well, I'll stay in Tokyo with my family.

<P 4 >Mm.

<T>Ah, I have two children.

<P 4 >Oh. (Expressiveness6)

<T>So, ah, I'll prepare cakes, and presents for my children.

<P 4 >Oh. (Expressiveness6)

<T>That's all. Family Christmas. <Laughter>Not romantic Christmas.

<P 4 ><Laughter>What, what (Unplannedness1) do you want Christmas presents?

<T>Well, nobody will give to me Christmas presents because I have to give Christmas presents to my Children. Nobody gives me.

<P 4 >Uh-huh.

<T>But, well if, if somebody gives a present to me, maybe I would like to have a flower.

<P 4 >Flower? (Unplannedness1) Oh. (Expressiveness6)

<T>I like flowers very much.

<P 4 >You like flowers. (Unplannedness1) I, I (Unplannedness1) want to black boots.

<T>Oh, boots. Mm hm.

<P 4 >Boots. (Sharedness2) Yes. Mm, by the way, (Interactiveness6) where do you live?

<T>I live in Suginami-ku.

<P 4 >Suginami-ku. (Sharedness2)

<T>Mm hm.

<P 4 >Oh, (Expressiveness6) yeah, and I live in Kitasenju.

<T>Kitasenju? I see.

<P 4 >Yeah.

<T>It's in Adachi-ku?

<P 4 >Yeah, Adachi-ku. Mm, how, how many (Unplannedness1) are there in your family?

<T>Well, including me, five people.

<P 4 >Five people? (Sharedness2)

<T>My, my mother, my husband, two children, and me. So, all together, five people.

<P 4 >Five people. (Sharedness2)

<T>Mm hm.

<P 4 >Oh, (Expressiveness6) and my family is grandfather, grandmother, and father, mother, and older sister, older brother, and me.

<T>Are you the youngest child?

<P 4 >Yes.

<T>Oh.

<P 4 >And, I have one dog.

<T><Laughter> One dog?

<P 4 >Dog. (Sharedness2)

<T>OK. I don't have any pet.

<P 4 >No? ((Sharedness2)

<T>No pet.

<P 4 >Oh. (Expressiveness6)

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Interview II

< T > May I ask your name?

< P 4 > My name is ×××.

< T > OK. Ah, it's so cold and dark outside, isn't it?

< P 4 > Today? (Sharedness2)

< T > Mm hum.

< P 4 > Yeah.

< T > Aren't you cold?

< P 4 > Cold? (Sharedness2) Yes.

< T > OK. Well, I'm going to ask some questions. Please answer in English. All right?

< P 4 > OK. (Interactiveness4)

< T > Ah, what did you do in winter vacation?

< P 4 > Mm, I, < Silent Pauses > (Unplannedness1)

< T > Yes?

< P 4 > I, < Silent Pauses > (Unplannedness1)

< T > Mm hum?

< P 4 > I went to, I went to see, (Unplannedness1) my boyfriend.

< T > Oh, how great! Did you have good time?

< P 4 > Yes.

< T > Wonderful time?

< P 4 > Yes.

< T > OK. What else did you do?

< P 4 > < Silent Pauses > (Unplannedness1)

< T > What else did you do?

< P 4 > What else? (Unplannedness1)

< T > What did you do besides visiting your boyfriend?

< P 4 > < Silent Pauses > (Unplannedness1)

< T > What did you do?

< P 4 > < Silent Pauses > (Unplannedness1)

< T > OK. Ah, second question.

<P 4 ><Laughter >

<T >What are you going to do in spring vacation?

<P 4 >Ah, I, I want, I want to go <Silent Pauses > (Unplannedness1)

<T >You want to go?

<P 4 >Mm, foreign country. (Unplannedness1)

<T >Oh, this spring?

<P 4 >Yes.

<T >Where?

<P 4 >Mm, <Silent Pauses > (Unplannedness1)

<T >Which country?

<P 4 >Italia. (Sharedness2)

<T >Italy? Oh, spring. Wow, have you already had a plan to, visit to Italy?

<P 4 >Italy. (Unplannedness1) Mm, sister. With sister. (Unplannedness1)

<T >Oh, with your sister.

<P 4 >Mm.

<T >Two people? (Unplannedness1)

<P 4 >No, three.

<T >Oh, you have two sisters?

<P 4 >Yes.

<T >Oh, so, all of your sisters are going to Italy.

<P 4 >Yes.

<T >Then, what are you going to in Italy?

<P 4 >Mm.<Silent Pauses > (Unplannedness1)

<T >Do you have any plan? How are you going to spend, how are you going to spend time in Italy?

<P 4 ><Silent Pauses > (Unplannedness1)

<T >OK. Which town, which town are you going to visit in Italy?

<P 4 >Which town? (Unplannedness1)

<T >Which city? Which city?

<P 4 >Uh, <Silent Pauses > (Unplannedness1) Mm,

<T >In Italy? Rome?

<P 4 >A, Rome wa Roma ka.(Japanese). Yeah. Rome.

<T> And? You don't know?

<P 4 >Rome. (Unplannedness1)

<T> Only Rome?

<P 4 > Yes.

<T> OK. I've never been to Italy. I just have seen in movies. Why are you going to go Italy?  
Why?

<P 4 > Uh, <Silent Pauses> (Unplannedness1)

<T> Why?

<P 4 > No reason. (Sharedness2)

<T> No reason?

<P 4 > Yes.

<T> You just like Italy?

<P 4 > Yes.

Table 5

	Sharedness	Unplannedness	Interactiveness	Expressiveness
Interview I	10	18	4	11
Interview II	4	19	1	0

We might be able to argue that this learner was more willing to share and to be interactive, and more expressive in giving her opinions when she was an interviewer than an interviewee.

### 3.3.3. Participants' comments about experiences of interviewers and interviewees

<Question 9> Interview I was easier than Interview II .

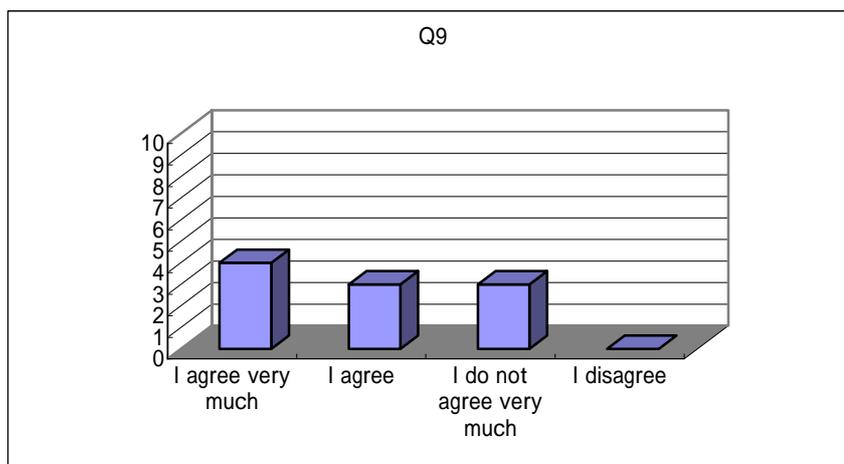


Figure 2

< Question 10 > I could speak more in Interview I than Interview II .

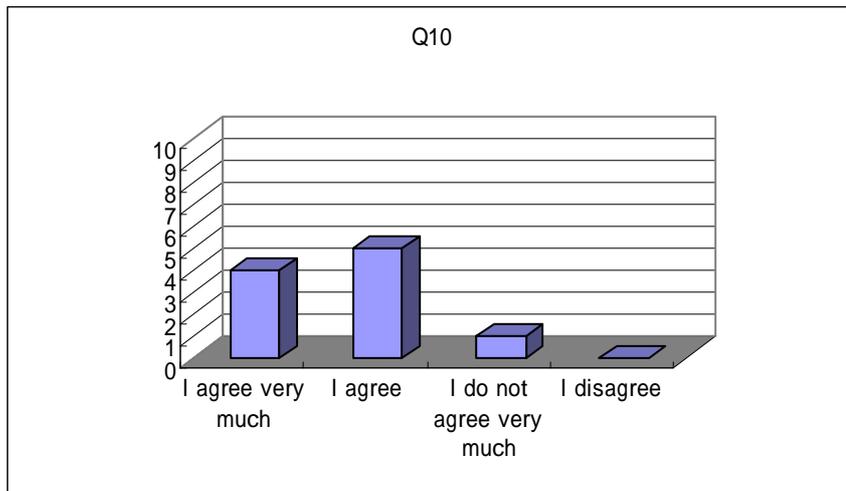


Figure 3

< Question 11 > I like Interview I better than Interview II .

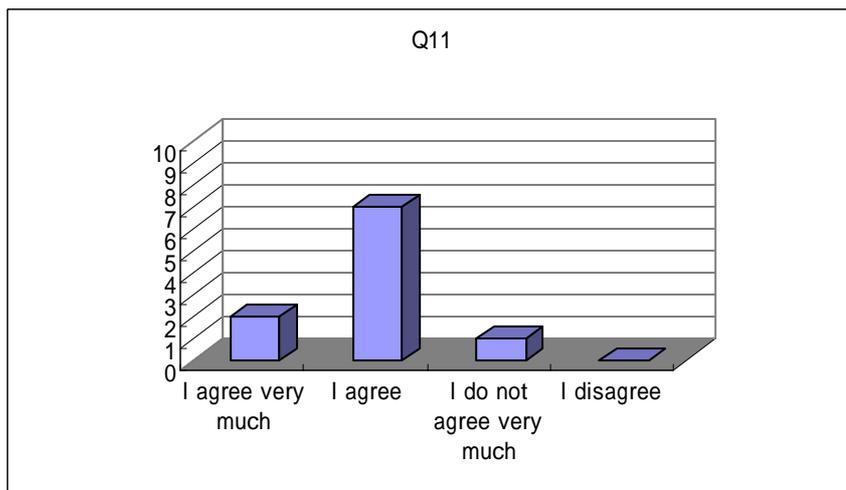


Figure 4

< Question 12 > I learned more from Interview I than Interview II .

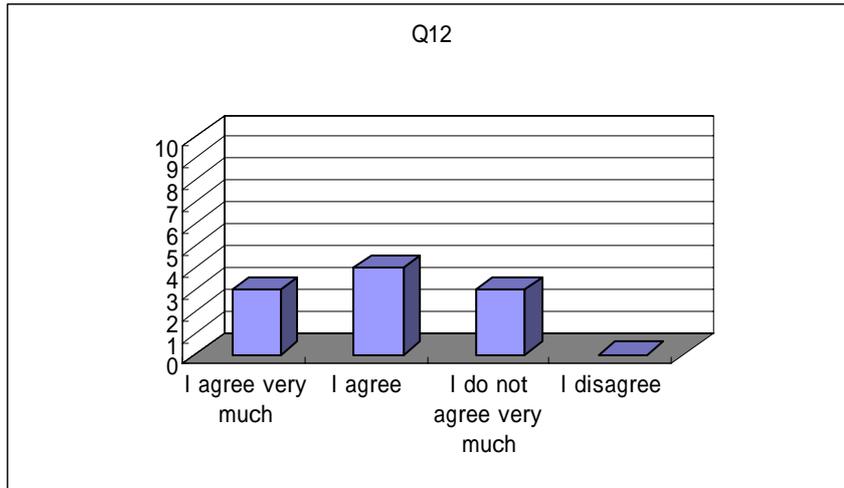


Figure 5

7 participants think that Interview I is easier than Interview II because they can choose the topic and prepare in advance. It can be said that learners' freedom to choose topics of interview makes them feel easier. On the other hand, 3 participants do not think Interview I is easier because they are not used to interviewing somebody. We can say that lack of experience simply makes some participants uneasy. Most of the participants, in fact nine but of ten, think they could speak more in Interview I than Interview II because the role of interviewer made them to speak more. Only 1 participant does not think she could speak more in Interview I because she was not familiar with the role of interviewer. Most participants, nine out of ten, prefer Interview I to Interview II and only 1 does not. 7 participants think they learned more from Interview I than from Interview II and 3 do not.

### 3.3.4. Analysis 3: Data analysis

(1) The method of data analysis

I tested these data by Wilcoxon Matched-pairs Signed-Ranks Test.

(2) Comparison of Interview I and Interview II

(a) Total number of words used by each participant in Interviews.

Table 6 Total number of words used by each participant (Interview I VS Interview II)

	P 1	P 2	P 3	P 4	P 5	P 6	P 7	P 8	P 9	P10
Interview I	153	105	233	188	152	114	190	149	110	123
Interview II	118	26	118	68	72	65	77	59	59	41

p : 0.0050622 significant at the 0.05 level

● Total number of words used by each participant is statistically different between in Interview I and II.

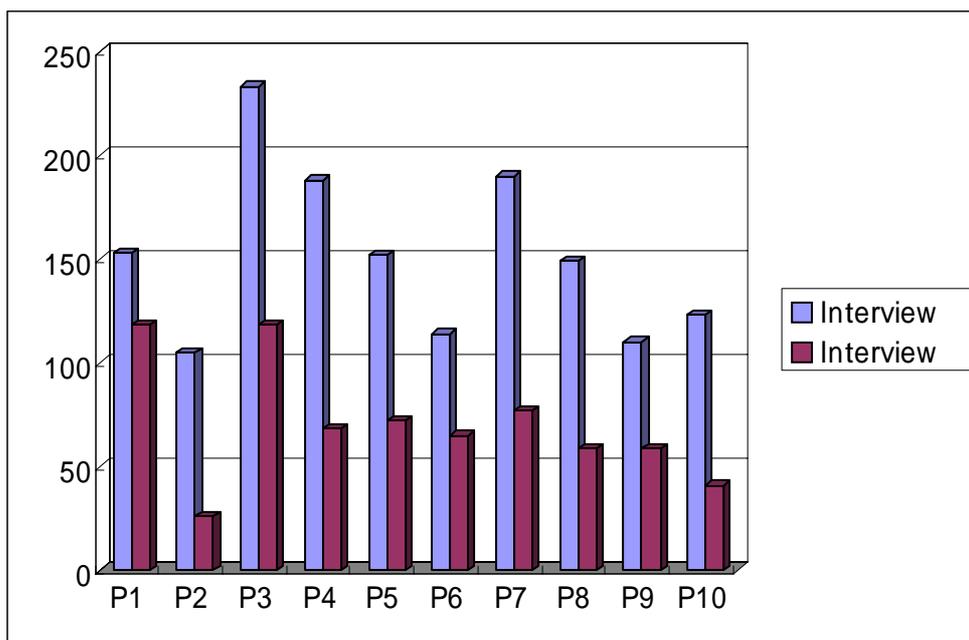


Figure 6. Total number of words used by each participant (Interview I VS Interview II)

(b) Total number of words used by Teacher

Table 7 Total number of words used by Teacher (Interview I VS Interview II)

	P 1	P 2	P 3	P 4	P 5	P 6	P 7	P 8	P 9	P10
Interview I	182	133	171	234	207	250	199	246	129	168
Interview II	236	177	234	210	252	205	177	185	186	220

p : 0.2411214 non-significant at the 0.05 level

Total number of words used by Teacher is not statistically different.

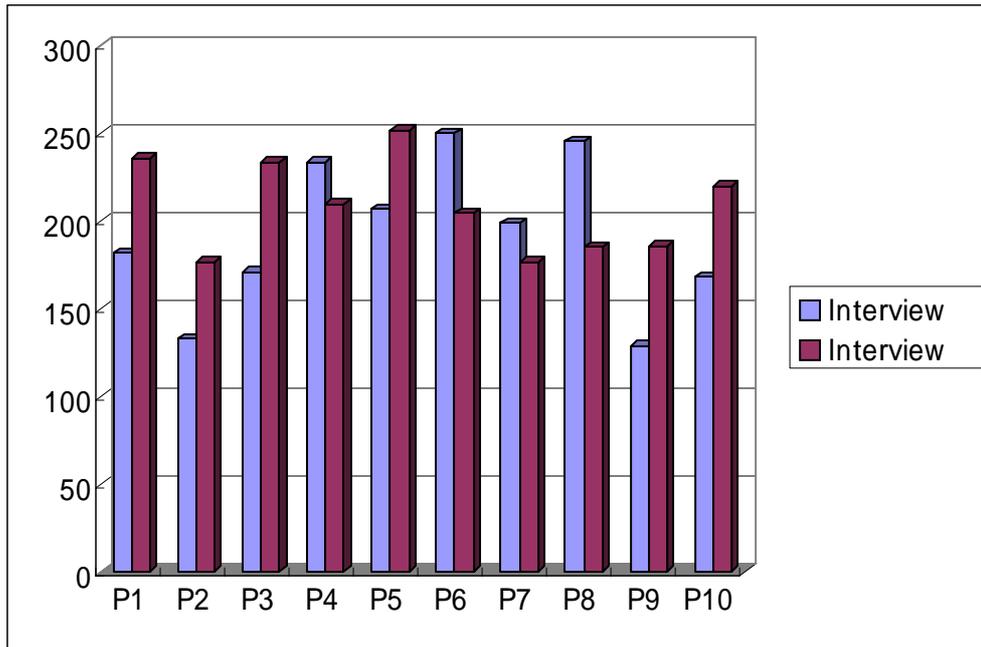


Figure 7 Total number of words used by Teacher (Interview I VS Interview II)

(b) Turn-taking

Table 8 The number of turn-taking (Interview I VS Interview II)

	P 1	P 2	P 3	P 4	P 5	P 6	P 7	P 8	P 9	P10
Interview I	18	21	41	44	37	23	28	39	23	26
Interview II	40	18	37	36	38	28	29	25	28	28

p : 0.878418 non-significant at the 0.05 level

● The number of turn-taking is not statistically different.

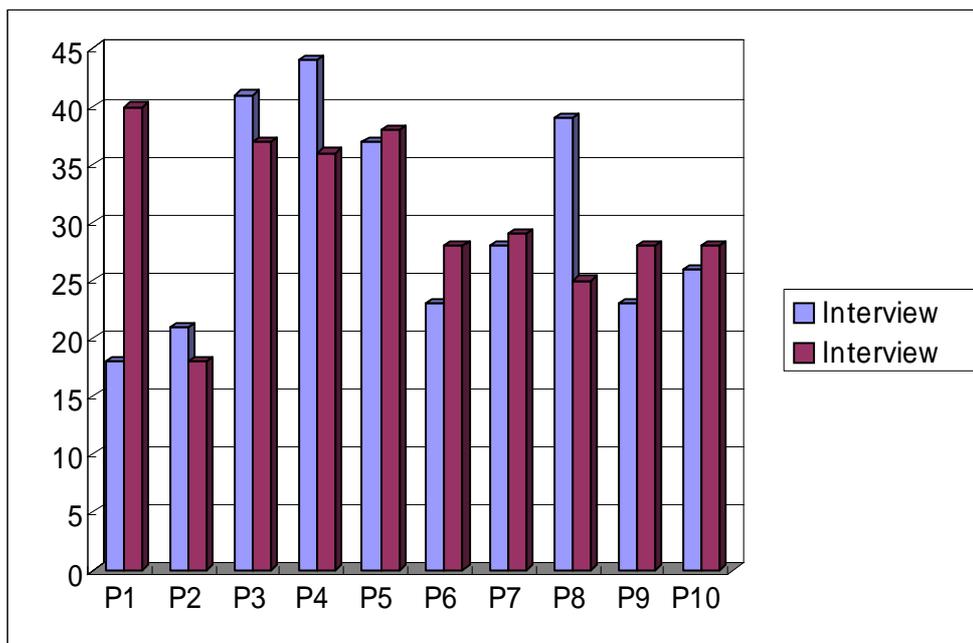


Figure 8 Turn-taking (Interview I VS Interview II)

(d) The number of silent pauses that are longer than five seconds.

Table 9 The number of silent pauses (Interview I VS Interview II)

	P 1	P 2	P 3	P 4	P 5	P 6	P 7	P 8	P 9	P10
Interview I	0	0	1	0	1	1	0	2	1	1
Interview II	2	8	1	11	7	5	6	7	3	11

p : 0.0050622 significant at the 0.05 level

●The number of silent pauses that are longer than five seconds by their teacher and participants is statistically different between Interview I and II .

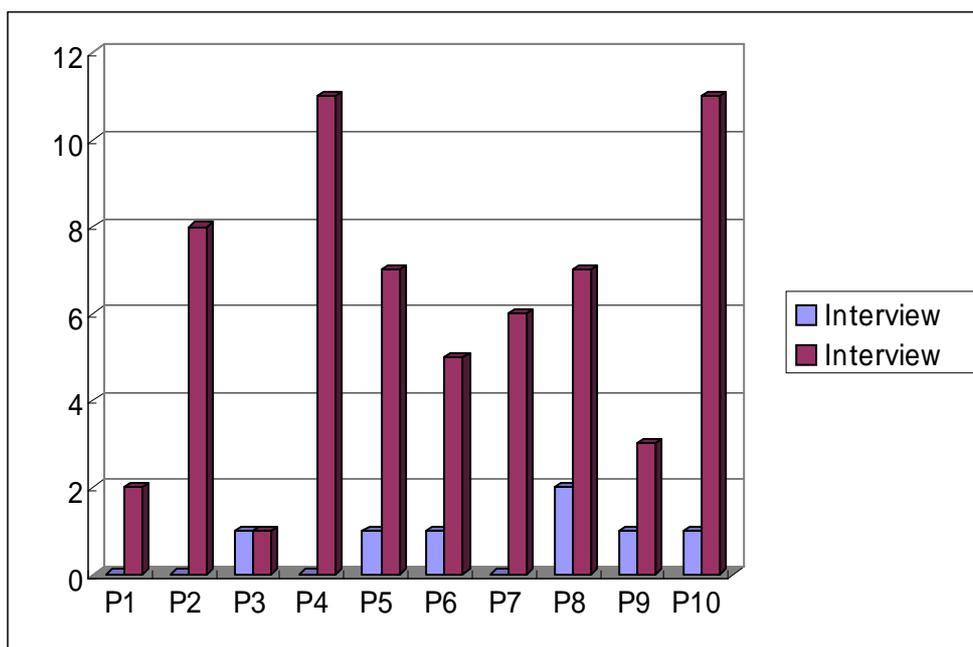


Figure 9 The number of silent pauses (Interview I VS Interview II)

(e) The number of Laughter by participants and their teacher

Table 10 The number of laughter by participants and teacher (Interview I VS Interview II)

	P 1	P 2	P 3	P 4	P 5	P 6	P 7	P 8	P 9	P10
Interview I	2	4	9	6	6	5	0	10	7	6
Interview II	8	3	4	1	2	3	1	2	5	4

p : 0.0366578 significant at the 0.05 level

●The number of laughing occasions is statistically different.

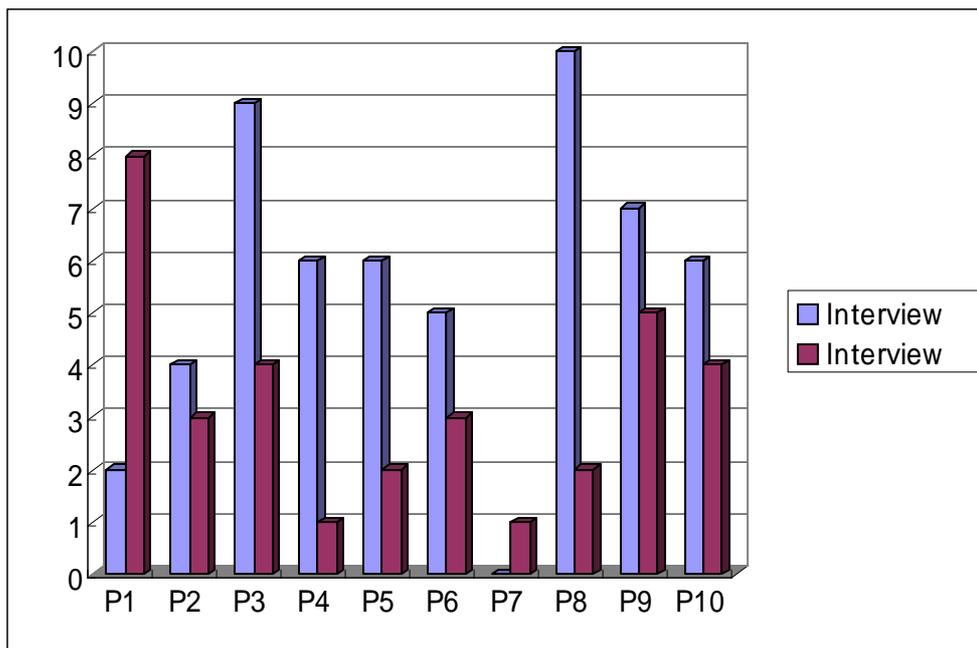


Figure 10 The number of Laughter of teacher and participants (Interview I VS Interview II )

#### 4. Conclusion

In the situation where students can choose the topic of their interactions as they like and act as an interviewer (Interview I ),

- (1) The number of words they uttered increased.
- (2) Spoken interaction was more effective, since more laughter and less silent pauses are observed.
- (3) There are no relationships between the students' level of English and rate of increase in the number of words.

We have considered the facts and the result of questionnaires to clarify the effectiveness of interview, and have reached the following conclusions:

- (1) To make students choose the topic of interview is effective in motivating them.
- (2) To give students the initiative of conversation (by being an interviewer) is effective in promoting their autonomy.
- (3) With this method it is possible that low- level students can experience effective interactions.

The possibility and potentiality of the interview as a means of teaching English conversation is explained to some extent by this research, but further research is still needed.

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