

ABSTRACT

A second-language (L2) speaker who returns to an unfinished contribution may face an interactional task that differs substantially from the one projected earlier. A room first suggested as an exhibition venue, for example, may become relevant to overnight storage after the group has provisionally selected another venue. This article examines how speakers and recipients make such connections recognizable. It brings together research on the longitudinal organization of L2 interaction, conversational resumption, turn entry, embodied participation, and interactional assessment. The analytical unit follows four publicly inspectable events: the establishment of pending business, intervening action, a later pursuit of the contribution, and recipients' subsequent treatment. It distinguishes the continuity of a referent or concern from the continuity of the social action accomplished with it. It also distinguishes a speaker's design of a return from the invitation or other access arrangement that permits the return. Seven hypothetical alternatives drawn from one planning exchange demonstrate why unchanged wording can be understood or questioned, why redesigned contributions may receive no uptake, and why withdrawal must be recorded separately from resumed pursuit. Three conditional expectations address the handling of changed relevance, recurrence under comparable demands, and the explanatory limits of speaking-frequency counts. A specified observation design comprises four recurring learner triads, 12 weekly project meetings, an initial meeting, and a delayed meeting for each triad.

KEYWORDS: second-language acquisition; interactional competence; deferred contributions; conversational resumption; sequential relevance; longitudinal conversation analysis

1. THE PROBLEM OF RETURNING TO UNFINISHED TALK

Consider students choosing a room for an exhibition. One learner begins "We could use the room beside the—", but a classmate raises the library's closing time before the suggestion is completed. The group then tentatively chooses the main hall and turns to overnight storage. If the learner resumes speaking, completing "room beside the office" may reopen the venue selection or introduce an alternative storage location. The grammatical continuation remains available, but the social action it performs is no longer fixed by the earlier turn alone. This hypothetical exchange isolates the problem of how unfinished content becomes recognizable and relevant again after the activity has moved on.

Interactional competence in an additional language concerns more than accurate sentences, lexical range, or speaking speed. Skogmyr Marian and Balaman [1] review longitudinal conversation-analytic evidence that participants alter their ways of accomplishing social actions over time, while Hall [2] locates learning within repertoires deployed for particular interactional purposes. The room discussion directs attention to that relationship: the returning speaker has to address what others have already decided, what remains undecided, and how an earlier contribution can still serve the joint activity.

The central question is: *How can changes in an L2 speaker's handling of deferred contributions be distinguished from changes in recipient assistance, group relationships, and opportunities to speak?* This distinction is necessary if a longitudinal account is to attribute change to the appropriate interactional source. Two evidential conditions follow. First, the earlier contribution must have been publicly left unfinished or deferred, and a later contribution must display a traceable relationship to it. Second, a claim about learning requires repeated, comparable occasions. A new turn after silence is not necessarily a return, and a locally successful return cannot alone demonstrate acquisition.

A *pending contribution* is an expressed action whose completion or further treatment remains publicly relevant and observably due: an unfinished turn, an explicitly deferred objection, or an acknowledged suggestion awaiting discussion. *Contribution resumption* is a later attempt to pursue that matter after intervening activity. These terms describe the status of an expressed contribution rather than the participation status of its speaker. Listening, tracking shared materials, looking toward another speaker, and supporting a current task may continue during the interval without spoken turns.

The decisive analytical distinction is between *content continuity* and *action continuity*. The same room can remain under discussion while the speaker changes from recommending an exhibition venue to identifying a storage location. Alternatively, a learner can replace nearly every word of an objection while continuing to challenge the same choice. An analyst must therefore establish both the relationship between earlier and later content and what the later contribution actually does within the intervening decision sequence. Repetition alone establishes neither connection.

The distinctive focus is the interactional history that connects an unfinished contribution to its later pursuit after intervening activity has altered the local context. The unit encompasses the pending action, the intervening talk and embodied conduct, the means by which the speaker re-enters, and the recipient's treatment. This differs from counting turn initiations or observing topic recurrence alone: returning to a previously mentioned room does not necessarily resume a deferred proposal, while reformulating a deferred objection may preserve its action without repeating its words. The distinction is useful only where participants make the earlier connection available.

The discussion first examines research on L2 interactional development and resumption, then sets explicit criteria for identifying and delimiting returns. Contrasting continuations of a single hypothetical meeting make those criteria inspectable. The subsequent sections identify changes that repeated recordings could substantiate, detail a feasible longitudinal observation design, and consider language-teaching and assessment uses. The published research and the invented teaching examples have different evidential statuses; only the former can be cited as observed interactional findings.

2. L2 INTERACTIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND RESUMPTION

2.1. CONTEXT-SENSITIVE PRACTICES ACROSS TIME

Several studies locate interactional development within particular sequential environments rather than treating change as a general increase in talk. Watanabe [3] examines changing self-selection in post-expansion sequences in an EFL classroom. Konzett-Firth [4] follows responsive turn beginnings in L2 French using 15 video-recorded peer interactions across four years. Ekin [5] examines diversification of participatory actions during virtual exchange, including movement beyond contributions solicited by others. These works support environment-sensitive analysis of turn entry. Their reported objects do not, by themselves, identify how learners return to a contribution whose relevance has changed during intervening talk.

An increase in unsolicited contributions can arise from initiating new topics without ever reopening an earlier deferred proposal. Conversely, a learner may speak no more often yet become more precise in reconnecting an unfinished objection to a group's decision. These two trajectories would look similar if analysis counted turns only. The observation unit must therefore retain the earlier projected action and the intervening talk while describing how the new contribution relates to both.

Pekarek Doehler and Berger [6] directly establish the relevance of increasingly context-sensitive conduct in story openings and therefore provide an important precedent for comparing locally fitted practices across time. Dings [7] examines developing alignment activity during study abroad. Their work makes recipient orientation and the relation to preceding interaction central rather than incidental. Accordingly, the present article cannot claim that connecting talk with its context is a new learning object. The narrower question concerns connections maintained across a displacement: whether learners develop ways to preserve or revise pending content when the intervening interaction changes its practical role.

Grammar-for-interaction research offers a complementary perspective on the linguistic resources available for accomplishing that work in recurrent sequential environments. Pekarek Doehler [8] relates L2 grammatical resources to situated social action. Pekarek Doehler and Balaman [9] investigate the routinization of a social action format in video-mediated interaction. Schirm [10] traces one learner's use of German *also* over 11 months. These studies justify looking beyond the presence of an entry formula to its interactional deployment. They also caution against defining development solely as diversification: a streamlined routine can become an effective resource when its use fits recurrent conditions.

Together, the longitudinal findings justify examining whether a learner comes to deploy a more differentiated or more efficiently fitted set of links between deferred content and ongoing social action. Development may appear as a new formulation, a stabilized short routine, or a better-timed response to an invitation. A concise expression need not be less accomplished than an elaborate one: its adequacy depends on what the other participants already recognize. Repeated episodes are necessary to determine whether those resources become available under comparably demanding circumstances.

2.2. CONVERSATIONAL RESUMPTION AND TOPIC MANAGEMENT

Helisten [11] demonstrates the relevance of multimodal coordination in returning to suspended tellings and shows why resumption cannot be reduced to verbal repetition alone. A return to deferred business may likewise be accomplished through words, prosody, gaze, and material reference; its organization cannot be reduced to restarting the last clause. The specific question here is whether an L2 speaker can re-establish the relevance of an earlier expressed proposal, objection, or account when the joint activity has changed. That question can be investigated alongside established conversational resumption practices without treating it as a separate interactional law.

Topic management is another closely related analytical domain. Çimenli et al. [12] investigate topic maintenance in video-mediated L2 virtual exchanges. A recurring topic and a pending contribution can overlap, but the two provide different grounds for collection building. Returning to a previously discussed room does not show that the speaker is pursuing a pending proposal. Conversely, a pending objection may return through a new formulation without overtly repeating its topic. Identifying a return consequently requires evidence of unfinished business, not just thematic similarity.

Table 1 distinguishes the observable evidence needed for each neighboring collection. A previously mentioned topic may be resumed without completing anyone's deferred contribution; a repair sequence can occur inside a return without constituting the return itself. The decisive inclusion question is whether speakers or recipients demonstrably connect the later turn to an expressed matter left open earlier. The categories can overlap within the same interaction.

TABLE 1. RELATIONSHIPS AMONG CONVERSATIONAL RESUMPTION, TOPIC MANAGEMENT, TURN CONTINUATION, REPAIR, AND THE RETURN OF PENDING CONTRIBUTIONS.

Analytical focus	Organizing question	Relationship to a return episode
Conversational resumption	How is suspended activity made recognizable as being resumed?	Provides the closest established foundation; a pending contribution may resume through these practices.
Topic maintenance or resumption	How is a topical line maintained or brought back?	Can occur without publicly unfinished business; topic similarity alone is insufficient for inclusion.
Turn continuation	How is an earlier projected turn or action continued?	Can constitute resumption when intervening activity separates the continuation from its earlier projection.
Repair	How is a displayed problem in speaking, hearing, or understanding addressed?	Can interrupt, enable, or occur within a return; its trouble source need not be the pending contribution.
Return to a pending contribution	How is publicly pending content pursued after intervening activity, and what happens to its action relevance?	Adds the contribution's documented history to longitudinal comparison without claiming a separate competence scale.

2.3. PRIOR CAPABILITIES, SILENCE, AND SOCIAL RELATIONSHIPS

A learning interpretation must distinguish existing interactional capacities from L2 resources that become newly available, more stable, or more usable in a particular setting. Kecskes et al. [13] show why basic conversational capacities should not automatically be described as newly acquired in an additional language. A speaker may recognize that a delayed suggestion needs reframing but lack a ready L2 expression for the relation. Another may have the expression but encounter unfamiliar rules for entering a group discussion. The same surface outcome can have different origins.

Non-speaking conduct alone cannot distinguish those explanations. King [14] examines multiple routes to silence in Japanese university language classrooms, and Yashima et al. [15] examine willingness to communicate as situated

in the interplay of learner characteristics and context. These perspectives support caution about reading either inability or deliberate strategy directly from silence. A return collection must consequently begin with observable pending contributions, not a list of learners assumed to be reluctant. Learner reflections can be considered alongside that record without revealing an exact unspoken intention.

Embodiment further complicates the relation between turn entry and participation because bids and referential links may be accomplished through coordinated verbal and bodily conduct. Eskildsen and Wagner [16] investigate embodied L2 construction learning, while Mondada [17] addresses the representation of multiple temporalities in multimodal transcription. These works motivate recording the conduct through which bids, attention, and shared-object references become publicly available. They do not license treating every gesture as a return attempt. The evidence must connect the conduct with the pending contribution and with how others respond.

Relationships and patterns of coordination can also develop over time. Konzett-Firth [18] examines teacher–student co-adaptation, and Pekarek Doehler and Berger [19] connect interactional development with evolving social relationships. This literature supports retaining recipient conduct within the analysis. The present distinction between learner repertoire and participation environment is a distinction between claims, not an attempt to isolate an entirely independent individual competence. A group can develop a shared practice for keeping contributions available; an individual’s changing use of that practice and the group’s changing support can both be documented.

3. IDENTIFYING PENDING CONTRIBUTIONS AND THEIR RETURN

3.1. PUBLIC EVIDENCE OF AN UNFINISHED CONTRIBUTION

For collection purposes, a return episode comprises four observable phases that together preserve the interactional history of the deferred matter: (1) a contribution left publicly unfinished, explicitly deferred, or acknowledged as awaiting action; (2) intervening talk, gesture, or material activity; (3) a later attempt to pursue that expressed matter; and (4) enough subsequent conduct to establish how the attempt was treated. An incomplete utterance can establish pendingness without revealing its intended completion. The analyst may collect the projected turn but must not fill in an unspoken proposition on the learner’s behalf.

The link to the earlier contribution must be interactionally available to participants, not merely reconstructable by the analyst after the event. It can be displayed by a completed grammatical projection, lexical recycling together with sequential fit, an explicit reference such as “the room I mentioned earlier”, or a recipient’s response that recognizes the prior matter. A repeated object name is insufficient if it could also introduce an independent suggestion. Retrospective interviews may enrich interpretation, but an intention reported only after the meeting is not equivalent to a publicly displayed return during the meeting.

An episode begins with enough preceding context to establish what the unfinished matter projected and why it remained available for later treatment. Its intervening interval includes decisions, changes of topic, material work, and relevant embodied conduct. Its analytic endpoint is a local response: recognition, clarification, disagreement, acceptance, renewed deferral, explicit withdrawal, or an observable lack of response within the recording. Recording termination is coded as an observation limit, not as a rejection. When the same matter is deferred twice, its common identifier links both attempts while their recipient sequences remain distinct.

No fixed duration or number of intervening turns separates a return from an immediate continuation. One intervening objection may change the use of an earlier suggestion more substantially than several minutes spent checking a document. The analyst should describe elapsed time, intervening turns, and activity transitions, but classification rests on the publicly displayed connection. When the relation between the two contributions is uncertain, an uncertain classification is more informative than a time-based rule.

3.2. CONTINUITY OF CONTENT AND CHANGE OF ACTION

Content continuity and social action must be examined independently before their relationship is interpreted. *Content continuity* concerns a repeated referent, proposition, or concern; *action continuity* concerns whether the speaker is still recommending, objecting, requesting, explaining, or doing something else. In the exhibition discussion, “the room beside the office” can recur in a suggestion about storage after first appearing in a suggestion about the venue. The repeated room supports a content link, while the shift from venue selection to safeguarding materials changes the action. A reformulated objection, by contrast, may preserve the earlier challenge with few shared words.

A change in the social action does not exclude a case from the return collection when participants make the earlier

connection demonstrable within the interaction. A speaker's "That was the room I started to mention" provides direct retrospective linkage; a recipient who recognizes the earlier room suggestion may provide another. If neither connection appears, a later storage suggestion may be relevant to the same object without being demonstrably a return to the unfinished proposal. The distinction prevents analysts from assigning intentions from thematic similarity alone.

Explicit withdrawal is a distinct and analytically important disposition of pending business. "The hall solves my concern, so I will leave that suggestion" displays attention to intervening decisions but does not pursue the earlier proposal. The broader pending-contribution register therefore retains attempts to return, withdrawals, resolution by other speakers, repeated deferrals, and matters still open when recording stops. This record prevents a rise or fall in the number of returns from being interpreted without knowing how many pending matters arose and how they were settled.

3.3. RETURN DESIGN AND OPPORTUNITIES TO SPEAK

Two cross-cutting dimensions organize each attempt and prevent access from being confused with return design. *Return design* distinguishes direct continuation, recycling of the earlier wording, contextual reformulation, and a change in the action pursued. *Access* distinguishes a self-selected entry, a recipient invitation, a jointly negotiated turn, and an occasion whose availability is uncertain. The dimensions cannot be placed on a single developmental ladder. A speaker may produce an effective reformulation after being invited; the same speaker may make an unclear direct return without invitation.

Table 2 crosses the two dimensions without assigning a success rating. Recognition, clarification, agreement, and rejection must remain separate in analysis: a suggestion can be immediately understood but declined for practical reasons, and a lengthy explanation can still fail to establish the earlier connection. Recipient conduct records how a turn was treated, not a direct measure of a speaker's underlying ability.

TABLE 2. INTERSECTING DIMENSIONS OF RETURN DESIGN AND ACCESS. THE RECIPIENT MAY RECOGNIZE, QUESTION, REJECT, OR LEAVE ANY RETURN UNRESOLVED.

Access condition	Continuation or recycling	Contextual redesign or action transformation
Self-selected return	The learner resumes earlier material on an independently claimed turn.	The learner marks or displays its relation to changed activity while claiming a turn.
Recipient-enabled return	Another participant restores the pending matter; the learner continues its earlier form.	Another participant creates access; the learner also reconstructs the contribution's current relevance.

The important comparison is therefore among the prior practical problem, the available entry opportunity, the form of the return, and its subsequent treatment. Self-selection is not inherently more skilled than accepting an invitation: entering without invitation can disrupt one activity while an invitation may be the ordinary allocation of a turn in another. Claims about development must establish changing fit across repeated episodes, not simply higher assertiveness, longer utterances, or a decline in assistance.

4. ALTERNATIVE CONTINUATIONS OF ONE PLANNING CONVERSATION

The following exchanges are explicitly hypothetical classroom dialogues, written to hold the preceding discussion constant while varying the returning turn and its treatment. They are not learner transcripts, translations, or reports of observed development. A and B represent group members; L represents the speaker whose room suggestion remained unfinished. A dash indicates incomplete wording for readability, not a measured pause or overlap. Each continuation branches from the same lead-in; the order does not imply a sequence of proficiency stages.

4.1. THE UNFINISHED ROOM SUGGESTION

Three students are arranging an exhibition of course projects. L begins to suggest a location. The group moves from venue selection to the question of overnight storage before L completes the suggestion.

A: We need a room for the exhibition. The library is one option.

L: We could use the room beside the—

B: The library closes at five, though.

A: Then the main hall may be easier.

B: Yes, and the caretaker can leave the tables there.

A: So, the main hall. We still need somewhere to keep the displays overnight.

The lead-in makes an unfinished venue suggestion publicly visible and then redirects the group's attention to storage. It does not establish that B intended to silence L, that L was anxious, or that the suggestion would have been accepted. Nor does "So, the main hall" prove that later challenges to the venue are prohibited. Subsequent turns, not the analyst's assumptions, must establish whether reopening the decision is appropriate.

4.2. REPETITION FOLLOWED BY CLARIFICATION

L: We could use the room beside the office.

A: For the exhibition or for the displays afterwards?

L: For the exhibition.

A: What makes it better than the hall?

L completes the earlier venue suggestion and thereby makes the prior projection recognisable again. A's question explicitly asks whether the room is being suggested for the exhibition or for storing displays. L answers "For the exhibition", after which A requests a reason to revisit the room choice. The clarification sequence displays an initial ambiguity followed by successful identification of the action being pursued. Cutting off the episode at the first repair initiation would obscure that outcome.

Recognizing the action is analytically distinct from accepting its substantive proposal. A may understand that L is advocating the room beside the office and still reject it in favor of the hall. Such a rejection resolves a planning disagreement rather than demonstrating inability to return to the unfinished suggestion. Both action recognition and the eventual decision belong in the record.

4.3. REPETITION UNDERSTOOD WITHOUT CLARIFICATION

L: We could use the room beside the office.

A: Yes, that room would be a better exhibition venue if we can book it.

B: Shall I ask about the booking?

The same unfinished clause is completed without further contextual explanation, yet A interprets it as another exhibition venue and B immediately pursues the possibility of booking it. Compared with the preceding exchange, the returning wording is identical while the recipients' treatment differs. A well-shared interactional history can sometimes make a brief continuation sufficient; longer wording is not automatically more appropriate.

The number of intervening turns is therefore not a mechanical measure of how far the proposal has been displaced from its earlier action environment. "So, the main hall" could be a provisional selection or a final decision. A later return must be examined against how participants treat that selection. Describing continued availability requires evidence in the subsequent talk, not a retrospective assumption that decisions are always reversible or always settled.

4.4. FROM VENUE SUGGESTION TO STORAGE SUGGESTION

L: For overnight, the room beside the office might work. That was the room I started to mention.

B: Can we lock it?

L: Yes, the project tutor has a key.

L keeps the earlier room as the referent but now redesigns the proposal as a suggestion for overnight storage. The explicit phrase "That was the room I started to mention" links the current storage suggestion to the unfinished venue suggestion. B's question about a lock addresses a practical requirement of storage, and L's reply supplies the relevant condition. The speaker has retained the content and altered the social action; the recipients orient to that altered action rather than to a renewed exhibition proposal.

Without the explicit reference to the earlier suggestion, a storage proposal might instead be a new idea about an already mentioned room. The analyst cannot establish a resumed contribution merely because the two turns share a noun phrase. In this example the explicit link removes that ambiguity, but it remains a stipulated property of hypothetical dialogue, not an observed frequency of retrospective linking.

4.5. AN INVITATION FOLLOWED BY SPEAKER REFORMULATION

A: Before we finish, L, you were suggesting another room. Was that for the exhibition or for storing things?

L: Originally for the exhibition, but it would work for storage too.

B: Then let's check the key before deciding.

A reopens L's unfinished suggestion and explicitly makes both possible current actions available for clarification. L responds by distinguishing the initially intended exhibition venue from its potential storage use. The recipient creates access to the floor, while the learner contributes the comparison that connects the two actions. These are distinct contributions to the same locally accomplished return; assistance does not cancel the learner's own work.

To assess change over time, an observer would compare how L responds to later invitations under similar interactional demands. If recipients increasingly supply the link while L merely repeats a fixed answer, altered assistance explains more of the observable change. If L starts to produce action distinctions not suggested in the invitation, the evidence also bears on L's available interactional resources. Both interpretations require repeated cases rather than an assumption about what invitation signifies.

4.6. REFORMULATION WITHOUT A RECORDED RESPONSE

L: For overnight, the room beside the office might work. That was the room I started to mention.

B: Is the hall available on Tuesday?

A: Wednesday is the date on the booking form.

B: Then we should confirm Wednesday first.

The wording makes a clear link to the prior suggestion and adapts it to storage, but B and A next address the event's booking date instead. Nothing in this short excerpt shows recognition, acceptance, or rejection of L's storage idea. The result is a return with no displayed uptake in the excerpt. Whether the others ignored the suggestion deliberately, overlooked it, or postponed it remains undecidable.

This contrast guards against treating an immediately absent recipient response as proof of linguistic failure or unsuccessful return design. A continuous recording might reveal a later acknowledgment, an embodied response, or another invitation to discuss storage. If recording ends with the date discussion, the case is observation-limited. The analyst should not manufacture a negative outcome from missing subsequent conduct.

4.7. WITHDRAWING THE SUGGESTION AND USING A SHARED MAP

A speaker may instead explicitly withdraw the deferred matter: "The hall solves the problem I was going to raise, so we can leave my room suggestion." The statement displays attention to the intervening choice while explicitly terminating pursuit of the suggestion. It is classified as withdrawal, not as a resumed recommendation. Continuing not to speak would not establish the same action, because it supplies no public decision to withdraw.

Consider a different hypothetical continuation in which a campus map is visible to all three students. L points to a room and says, "This one could hold the displays." A asks, "The room you started to suggest earlier?" and proposes checking whether it can be locked. Here pointing makes the spatial referent available and A explicitly recognizes the link to the unfinished turn. The link is established jointly through speech and shared material reference; it could be missed in an audio-only record.

Across these contrasts, repeated wording can occasion clarification or immediate recognition, while a reformulated suggestion can receive direct engagement or no visible response in the available excerpt. Invitations may provide access while leaving substantial interpretive work to the returning speaker. These alternatives identify exactly what a longitudinal collection needs to preserve: the earlier projected action, the intervening activity, the entry arrangement, and the full recipient response. They are examples for analytic comparison, not evidence about learner prevalence or progress.

5. DEVELOPING RESOURCES FOR RESUMING CONTRIBUTIONS

5.1. LINGUISTIC, SEQUENTIAL, AND EMBODIED RESOURCES

One possible developmental trajectory is increased availability of linguistic and embodied ways to connect displaced talk with current tasks. Resources include retrospective expressions ("the point I started earlier"), contrasts ("I meant

it for the exhibition, but”), conditional formulations, and reference to shared documents or objects. The relevant achievement is not possession of a particular expression, but its use in a sequential position where recipients can identify the connection. Research on grammar for social action supports attending to use rather than isolated form [8].

Change could consist of learning an additional L2 formulation for a familiar conversational relationship, deploying a familiar form with finer contextual distinctions, stabilizing a short routine for recurrent requests, or jointly establishing ways to preserve unfinished business with recurring partners. These outcomes are not interchangeable. The existence of basic conversational capacities before L2 study [13] means that an observable change in L2 phrasing cannot automatically be described as acquisition of the underlying social understanding.

Development need not mean a uniform transition from repetition to greater elaboration or lexical complexity. A learner could initially produce a lengthy account of the earlier history and later use a short formulation when the relation becomes mutually available. Another could move from a visible shared-object reference to verbal reference in an audio-mediated setting. A routine could become more stable without expanding its wording. The developmental question concerns appropriately available resources in a documented range of environments, not an invariant increase in complexity.

A second candidate learning object is the management of access to an appropriate return opportunity. Relevant conduct could involve signaling pendingness, waiting while an urgent matter is settled, accepting an invitation, or negotiating a place for a return. These practices can develop with recipients’ practices for acknowledging bids or preserving unfinished business. Following the relational orientation of [19], such coordination is not treated as contamination of an otherwise individual process. The study must state whether its claim concerns one participant’s conduct, a shared practice, or both.

Repeated interaction can provide occasions for learning from how contributions are treated, but a recipient’s response cannot be assumed to deliver a simple reinforcement signal. Observation, collaborative accomplishment, reflection, and instruction can all contribute to the history of a practice. Balaman and Sert [20] supply an adjacent example of developing resources in collaborative online tasks. The specific pathway from these experiences to resuming pending contributions remains a hypothesis for subsequent observation, requiring a traceable history rather than a plausible retrospective story.

5.2. SINGLE EPISODES AND LONGITUDINAL CHANGE

A well-fitted return is an instance of local performance rather than, by itself, evidence of durable development. To interpret a changing repertoire, analysis must connect that instance with other occasions and with the conditions under which it occurs. A learner’s first observed use of a connective establishes availability on that occasion. It does not establish when the expression was learned, whether it is generally available, or whether it will be used again. The absence of a later return also has limited meaning when no comparable pending matter occurs.

Three kinds of claim must be distinguished if developmental conclusions are to remain proportionate to the evidence. A local claim establishes that an earlier contribution was reopened, transformed, recognized, or rejected within a recorded sequence. A longitudinal claim describes recurring changes in the learner’s or group’s conduct across comparable demands. A causal claim attributes those changes to a mechanism or a teaching intervention. The observation design specified here could support the first two if relevant recordings were collected; without additional comparison conditions it could not establish instructional causation or unobserved mental operations.

Persistence strengthens a trajectory claim when a practice appears again after an interval under an independently arising but sufficiently comparable demand. Adaptation across changed materials or partners can further specify its scope. However, generalization beyond familiar partners is not the only legitimate outcome. A practice can develop within a community’s shared history. The analyst should report that boundary rather than treat situated effectiveness as either universal competence or no learning at all.

5.3. THREE EMPIRICALLY INSPECTABLE EXPECTATIONS

Expectation 1: demonstrated changes in relevance should be associated with differentiated return design or recipient work. When participants visibly move a pending contribution into a different action environment, the collection should contain evidence of how they make its present relevance available. That work may be performed by the returning speaker, by recipients, or jointly. Across comparable longitudinal episodes, a learner-development claim predicts recurrent changes in the learner’s contribution to that work. The claim is constrained when exact continuation remains sufficient, when recipients supply all additional relevance, or when the assumed change in environment is not participant-displayed.

This expectation separates an interactional question from a developmental one. Evidence that a return needs clarification shows a local interpretive problem. Evidence that a learner later handles comparable problems with differently fitted resources can support change over time. The first does not entail the second. Substantial intervening talk without a demonstrated change in practical relevance is a boundary case rather than a convenient counterexample selected by duration alone.

Expectation 2: a developing repertoire should show recurrent situated deployment rather than only immediate reproduction. If the learner is developing resources for return problems, later independently arising episodes should show their relevant reuse, stabilization, or adaptation. Apparent change confined to the same prompted script, task content, and role configuration supports a narrower account of rehearsal. Routinization is compatible with development when its sequential fit is demonstrated; lexical novelty is not required. Lack of persistence limits the claim when comparable opportunities are available, but cannot be inferred from sessions that contain no relevant pending matter.

Expectation 3: return design and treatment should sometimes explain differences that speaking frequency alone leaves unspecified. Within collections containing comparable pending contributions, the four-part episode should distinguish trajectories with similar quantities of talk but different relationships between earlier content and current action. This concerns the added explanatory value of the episode-level account. It would be weakened for a particular set of recordings if differences in return design and recipient treatment contributed no defensible interpretation beyond changes in opportunities and speaking frequency. It is not a universal assertion that frequency is irrelevant or that development must leave speaking time unchanged.

The expectations supply questions for comparing recordings rather than proficiency levels or a numerical scoring rule. A late unchanged continuation may be perfectly fitted to the local task; a late complicated reformulation may still be unclear. Contrary observations should restrict any claim of improvement, especially where comparable opportunities recur without a persistent change in conduct.

5.4. REQUIREMENTS FOR A DEVELOPMENTAL INTERPRETATION

Three methodological requirements govern interpretation rather than predicting outcomes. First, cases must have identifiable public grounds for pendingness and resumption. Second, longitudinal comparisons must retain relevant differences in task, role, familiarity, and recipient conduct. Third, claims must be supported through recurrence with documented contrary and uncertain cases. These are requirements for the quality of an account, not additional developmental hypotheses.

The distinction is particularly important for recipient change. Recording invitations, acknowledgment, and blocking conduct is necessary to evaluate a claim; the analysis does not predict that recipients must become more accommodating. They may remain stable, change unevenly, or constrain later access. Those patterns establish the conditions under which the learner's conduct can be interpreted. Separating the level of the claim from the level of observation preserves the co-constructed character of interaction while avoiding an unsupported inference about an individual.

6. DESIGN FOR A LONGITUDINAL OBSERVATION STUDY

6.1. PARTICIPANTS, GROUPING, AND RECORDING VOLUME

A feasible observational investigation would enroll 12 adult learners of English from one higher-education language programme and organize them into four recurring three-person groups. The intended CEFR B1–B2 range would be determined by the programme's established placement procedure rather than by the analyst's impression of interactional skill. First-language background, prior relationships, and experience with collaborative projects would be recorded because each may influence how participants initiate and revive contributions. These specifications describe a study design; no learners have been enrolled or recorded for this article.

Participants' first languages, language-use histories, prior relationships, and experience with group discussion would be recorded as contextual information rather than treated as direct explanations of interactional conduct. Triads would remain together during the principal observation period so that their interactional histories are traceable. Roles within tasks would rotate transparently to reduce the possibility that later access simply reflects assignment of a more authoritative role. Rotation would not be used to force interruption or manufacture exclusion. All participants would be eligible for analysis from recruitment; focal learners would not be chosen because they later report improvement.

The recording plan contains one initial project meeting, 12 weekly meetings, and one follow-up meeting in week

16 for each group, creating repeated opportunities to inspect comparable interactional problems. Four groups observed on 14 occasions would produce 56 principal video recordings. At 40–50 minutes per meeting, the planned total is approximately 37–47 hours. Four additional sessions with partially different group membership could provide roughly three further hours to examine how changes in partner familiarity affect access and reference. These are estimates of recording volume, not observations, sample-size calculations, or findings.

Four continuing groups permit close examination of how each participant's interactional history develops while also offering contrasting patterns across groups. A semester-long collaborative project also creates repeated choices about materials, locations, scheduling, and task allocation. The number of analysable return episodes cannot be predicted from the number of meetings: some groups may have few publicly deferred contributions. If opportunities are sparse, claims should be restricted to the episodes actually observed rather than obtained by loosening the inclusion rule.

6.2. MEETINGS AND FOLLOW-UP OBSERVATIONS

The initial meeting would consist of collaborative project planning without direct instruction on returning to unfinished business, providing an initial record of existing practices. Weekly meetings would involve decisions with genuine alternatives, such as allocating display space, arranging a student event, and storing materials securely. No learner would be instructed to interrupt or exclude another. Entire meetings, rather than isolated successful returns, would be recorded; project changes, assigned roles, deadlines, and teacher intervention would be documented alongside the interaction.

The follow-up meeting in week 16 would introduce new planning content with comparable requirements for proposing, objecting, and deciding while preserving the principal group members. The additional changed-membership sessions would be inspected separately: new partners alter what can be assumed from shared history. Table 3 sets out the observation points and the specific comparison each enables.

TABLE 3. PLANNED OBSERVATIONS FOR FOUR GROUPS OF ADULT ENGLISH LEARNERS ACROSS WEEKS 0–16.

Observation point	Planned activity	Main analytical purpose
Initial, week 0	Complete planning meeting with no targeted return instruction	Establish initial practices and participation arrangements.
Weeks 1–12	Weekly project meetings with logged content and rotating task roles	Build comparable episode collections and trace changing resources and relationships.
Delayed meeting, week 16	New planning content with the original triads	Examine persistence when relevant opportunities arise.
Supplementary meetings, after the delayed observation	Similar planning demands with partly changed membership	Describe scope of adaptation without assuming social equivalence.

The principal investigation would observe naturally occurring talk rather than evaluate a teaching intervention. If teaching on deferred contributions were subsequently introduced, its content, delivery, timing, and participant exposure would have to be specified. A simple before-and-after contrast would remain vulnerable to increased familiarity, task repetition, and changing recipient conduct; identifying a teaching effect would require additional comparison evidence. Longitudinal conversation-analytic research provides the methodological basis for tracing the local organization of change [21].

6.3. VIDEO RECORDING AND TRANSCRIPTION

Face-to-face recordings would use a view of all participants and the shared workspace, with audio of sufficient quality to inspect turn timing and overlap. Video-mediated meetings would preserve relevant screen activity and platform events where consent permits. Equipment and camera placement would be piloted for audibility and visibility. The purpose is to retain conduct bearing on a bid, return, or recipient response, not to claim exhaustive capture of all bodily action. An unavailable gaze direction or obscured object reference would be recorded as a limitation rather than supplied by inference.

A meeting log would locate every candidate deferred contribution before detailed transcription begins, reducing the risk of selecting only analytically attractive successful cases. Selected sequences would preserve speaker entries, cut-offs, overlap, pauses, relevant prosody, gaze, pointing, and interaction with shared materials. Embodied conduct would be synchronized with speech where it contributes to establishing the prior link or the response. As [17] shows,

timing relationships matter in multimodal transcription; a gesture cannot simply be inserted as an unrelated note. The hypothetical exchanges above are not transcripts and do not use measurement notation.

Brief participant reflections could be collected after selected sessions, allowing learners to identify a contribution they withheld, changed, or no longer wished to pursue. Questions would invite disagreement with the analyst's interpretation. Such accounts would remain separate from interaction-internal grounds for collection inclusion. They can explain a participant's retrospective perspective, but cannot reveal the exact wording of an unspoken intention or demonstrate what recipients understood at the time.

The study would maintain three distinct access-related records: explicit invitations or acknowledgments of pendingness; publicly displayed bids to which recipients orient; and less determinate occasions in which availability remains uncertain. A possible turn boundary would not automatically count as an opportunity accessible to every learner. Counts of returns could be reported only with those distinctions visible. A single success-to-opportunity ratio would be avoided unless the denominator and its uncertain cases were justified.

6.4. DOCUMENTING PENDING CONTRIBUTIONS AND RETURN ATTEMPTS

The pending-matter register would include all observable candidate contributions, regardless of whether the speaker subsequently returns to them. An identifier links speaker, group, meeting, and the matter that was left open; a subordinate identifier distinguishes multiple attempts to pursue that matter. Each record retains the evidence of pendingness, intervening decisions or actions, the available speaking opportunity, the form of the return, and recipients' treatment. Other dispositions—withdrawal, resolution by someone else, renewed deferral, and the end of recording—remain in the same matter register but are not counted as additional attempts to resume it.

Several rules protect the collection from inflation, retrospective inference, and double-counting. Multiple pending matters in one meeting remain separate unless participants demonstrably connect them. A contribution containing more than one proposal can be segmented when each has a distinct publicly traceable history. An interruption within a return is linked as a nested sequence and does not automatically become an independent original bid. Repeated deferral retains the same matter identifier while recording the changed conditions of the next attempt. Cross-session returns require a participant-displayed link and a traceable earlier record; a gap between recordings is marked as unobserved interaction.

These distinctions prevent inflation of the evidential record and preserve the difference between matters and repeated attempts to pursue them. Several attempts at one unresolved room suggestion are not equivalent to separate matters arising in different meetings. Nor are 12 learners in four recurring groups 12 independent interactional histories: each group's practice develops jointly. Any descriptive count should identify the number of pending matters, the number of pursuit attempts, the learners represented, and the situations that were sufficiently comparable for longitudinal inspection.

Table 4 specifies the minimum information to retain for each matter and its linked attempts. Inclusion decisions would be applied to the complete meeting log, not just successful or fluent cases. If repeated inspection establishes that a category misses recognizable participant conduct, changes to the decision rules should be documented and earlier cases re-examined. Uncertain classifications must remain visible rather than being forced into a preferred return type.

TABLE 4. RECORDING FIELDS AND INCLUSION DECISIONS FOR DEFERRED CONTRIBUTIONS.

Information retained	Interactional evidence	Entry or exclusion decision
Matter identifier	Learner, group, date, meeting, and opening turn	One identifier for each publicly pending matter
Grounds for pendingness	Incomplete projected turn, explicit deferral, or recipient acknowledgment	Do not infer a hidden plan from silence alone
Intervening conduct	Spoken decisions, embodied acts, shared materials, and elapsed interval	Describe any participant-displayed shift in relevance
Return link	Completed projection, explicit earlier reference, sequentially supported recycling, or recipient recognition	Uncertain if only a topic word is repeated
Entry arrangement	Self-selection, invitation, negotiated access, or indeterminate opportunity	Do not infer equal access from a pause
Return action	Renewed proposal, objection, account, changed use of prior content, or other evidenced action	Distinguish retained content from action performed
Recipient treatment	Clarification, acceptance, disagreement, renewed deferral, no visible response, or recording limit	Do not equate rejection with incomprehension
Other disposition	Explicit withdrawal, resolution by others, continued pendingness	Keep separate from attempts to pursue the contribution
Longitudinal comparison	Earlier and later instances with task, partner, role, and support conditions	Compare recurrent demands; retain contradictory cases

6.5. COMPARING EPISODES AND CHECKING ALTERNATIVE EXPLANATIONS

Comparisons would first group episodes by their practical interactional demands: for example, renewing a proposal after a competing option has been advanced, returning to an account after intervening repair, or responding to an invitation concerning a deferred issue. Early and later cases would be compared within those environments. Their position in the calendar supplies temporal order but does not guarantee equivalent difficulty. Changes in topic knowledge, allocated role, task repetition, language demands, and recipients' conduct would be described alongside return design.

Focal trajectories would be selected using explicit, disclosed criteria: adequate recording quality, repeated interaction-internal grounds for inclusion, and available comparable demands at more than one observation point. The eligible pool and reasons for selecting a subset would be reported. When several learners qualify, selection should retain contrasting patterns, including stable practices, uneven change, and continued difficulty. Where a learner has too few episodes, that scarcity limits the available longitudinal comparison; it is not evidence of deficient participation. Meeting logs permit readers to assess how focal cases relate to the rest of the record.

Table 5 specifies alternative explanations. Its purpose is to keep multiple explanations open while the same episodes are inspected longitudinally. A more welcoming group, more accessible topic, and a developing learner repertoire can coexist. The analysis need not assign numerical shares to them. It must identify which aspects of the record support each claim and where the evidence cannot distinguish them.

TABLE 5. ALTERNATIVE EXPLANATIONS FOR APPARENT CHANGES IN RETURN PRACTICES AND THE EVIDENCE NEEDED TO ASSESS EACH.

Candidate account	Supporting observations	Necessary competing check
Changed learner repertoire	Recurrent changes in how the learner links pending content with current action	Similar demands, access conditions, and available support; persistence beyond one prompted sequence
Changed recipient support	More acknowledgment of pendingness, invitations, or preservation of access	Whether the learner contributes new relevance within comparable invitations
Increased topic familiarity	Later contributions draw on increasingly shared project knowledge	Returns under new content with a similar practical demand
Rehearsal or role allocation	A demonstrated formulation or authoritative task role closely precedes apparent change	Independently arising cases under different wording or roles
Changed recording visibility	Later audio or camera position makes bids easier to identify	Re-inspection of earlier visibility limits before claiming behavioral absence

7. IMPLICATIONS FOR LANGUAGE TEACHING AND ASSESSMENT

7.1. TEACHING ATTENTION TO UNFINISHED CONTRIBUTIONS

In classroom practice, attention can be directed to what has happened to an unfinished contribution while other participants continued pursuing the task. Students can examine the earlier suggestion, identify an intervening decision, and compare how a speaker might now request clarification, renew the proposal, adapt it to a new problem, or withdraw it. Barraja-Rohan [22] describes conversation-analysis-based instruction, and Balaman [23] investigates classroom self-evaluation in longitudinal interactional development. Neither study is presented here as an effectiveness trial of this particular teaching activity.

A possible instructional sequence would begin with a short, consented excerpt or a clearly identified hypothetical dialogue. Students would first describe the public actions rather than infer anxiety, rudeness, or willingness from non-speaking. They would identify the pending contribution, reconstruct the intervening activity, and offer several possible continuations. Comparison would include an unchanged continuation, an explicit redesign, an invited return, and withdrawal where appropriate. The question would be what each continuation makes available to recipients, not which student personality it represents.

The next step would examine the recipient side of the return sequence. Students could propose ways to acknowledge unfinished business, keep a place for a contribution, or explain that the group needs to settle an urgent matter first. An invitation should permit refusal, and the original speaker need not supply reasons for declining. These arrangements connect access with choice rather than making silence an automatic target for correction. They also make clear that conversational repair and disagreement can be legitimate responses to a return.

A later discussion with different content could provide occasions to inspect whether similar interactional demands arise independently. Reflection would remain descriptive: which resources were used, whether recipients displayed

an interpretation, and what limits the evidence places on the account. A student who returns less often may have fewer pending matters or may close them through an explicit withdrawal. A student who speaks more often may still leave the relation to earlier business unclear. These possibilities prevent quantity of speech from becoming the default teaching objective.

Teachers should resist turning the analysis into a phrase list detached from sequential use. Expressions such as “about the point I started earlier” can be useful resources, but repeated use does not establish an appropriate relationship to the ongoing activity. Students also need occasions to recognize when no explicit link is necessary, when clarification can be negotiated, and when a pending contribution has already been addressed. The learning target is an enlarged set of usable choices within particular interactional environments.

7.2. EXAMINING INSTRUCTIONAL EFFECTS

Evaluating such instruction would require observable and separately interpretable targets: whether students acknowledge another person’s unfinished contribution, explicitly connect an earlier suggestion to a new decision, invite a deferred speaker back into the discussion, or elaborate an action when invited. The dimensions should be reported separately rather than collapsed into a single fluency score. Wang and Yeh [24] investigate particular listener responses, reinforcing the need to identify which aspect of interaction an instructional activity might affect.

Evaluation would retain initial observations and later tasks that create independently arising decisions. Instruction could increase invitations to return even while speakers’ wording remained stable; that would indicate a change in group conduct, not necessarily a new individual expression. Conversely, reformulation might change even without increased recipient invitation. A causal claim would require a comparison design that addresses task familiarity, partner effects, and changes in access.

Students’ reports of usefulness could contribute a separate perspective on pedagogical acceptability. They might value having their unfinished contributions acknowledged, dislike invitations that expose them publicly, or regard an activity as relevant only to familiar classroom tasks. Such responses should be retained rather than reduced to satisfaction scores that imply learning. Pedagogical acceptability, perceived access, and observable interactional change address related but distinct questions.

7.3. INTERPRETIVE LIMITS IN SPEAKING ASSESSMENT

Research on interactional assessment emphasizes sequences and co-construction rather than monologic output alone, as discussed by Roever and Kasper [25]. Galaczi and Taylor [26] discuss the analytical and operational challenges of assessing interactional competence. These concerns apply directly to pending contributions: the occasion for return is shaped by other participants, and an assessment task can manufacture more or fewer such occasions. A learner’s observed conduct must therefore be interpreted with its access conditions visible.

The episode distinctions can support qualitative feedback about the recognizability of a return, the fit between an earlier and a current action, and the negotiation of clarification with recipients. They do not justify a numerical proficiency scale, a cut-off score, or a penalty for accepting an invitation. Rejection of a proposal may reflect a practical judgment rather than poor interactional conduct, and fluent sentence production is not identical to successfully pursuing deferred business.

Before numerical scoring could be justified, research would need to establish which practices occur across tasks, whether raters can interpret them consistently, how partner effects enter the construct, and whether the scoring procedure rewards particular conversational styles. The contextual categories in Tables 1–5 are consequently presented as analytical guides. Their classroom value can be explored without prematurely converting them into high-stakes assessment descriptors.

8. CONCLUSION

Returning to unfinished talk is not always a matter of retrieving the remaining words of a sentence. Intervening decisions can preserve an earlier action, make it ambiguous, or allow its content to serve a different purpose. The relevant interactional event extends from the publicly pending matter through the intervening activity to the returning contribution and the response it receives. An analyst who inspects only the resumed words may miss how the social action has changed.

The central distinction is between what content a speaker retains and what social action that content now performs.

Separating return design from turn access makes it possible to describe a learner's contribution without attributing recipients' assistance to an individual skill. Keeping explicit withdrawal, resolution by others, and recording limits alongside resumed pursuits also prevents a misleading interpretation of silence or turn counts. Repeated, closely comparable episodes—rather than individual fluent turns—are required to identify changing interactional resources.

The practical test of this analysis lies in recordings gathered through the specified longitudinal design: cases where unchanged continuations succeed, reformulations receive no response, and recipients provide differing degrees of access must all be retained. If learners come to display more reliable links between earlier contributions and current actions across comparable occasions, that record can support a bounded claim about developing L2 resources. Without those observations, the contribution is an explicit account of what to look for and how to distinguish it from the social conditions that make returning possible.

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