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Overcoming the hidden conversation killers

Pronunciation errors, grammatical difficulties and lack of vocabulary radically affect the linguistic competence of learners of English. These lexicogrammatical features are, however, adequately dealt with in most coursebooks and are often a key focus of English lessons given by non-native teachers. What is less often dealt with are the hidden conversation stoppers and the strategies that native speakers employ to keep conversations flowing smoothly. Greater familiarity with the conventional move structures of social interactions can help learners overcome these conversation stoppers. Native speaker and learner corpora are used to provide evidence of these conversational *faux pas*. Examples from the learner corpora include one-word answers and lack of development of topic, both of which block the natural flow of a conversation. The aim of this paper is to reveal these hidden conversation killers and provide teachers with a series of classroom activities to help their students master the relevant strategies. A series of small-talk blitz speaking sessions that moves students along the cline from linguistic competence to communicative competence will be presented.

Biodata

John Blake has taught English at universities and schools for over 20 years in Thailand, Hong Kong, Japan and the UK. He is a research lecturer in the Institute of General Education at the Japan Advanced Institute of Science and Technology. His research interests include ESP, EAP and corpus linguistics.