

# Listener Support Strategies: A Study of Swedish High School Students' Use of Response Tokens in English

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## **Abstract**

This study examines the use of response tokens (RTs) in Swedish high school learners' speech. The data analysed consists of nine student-produced podcasts from English 5 and 6, in which they have conversations about different topics. By using the framework of applied conversation analysis, this study describes and analyses how the students use RTs and other listener strategies, as well as the functions they seem to achieve by employing these strategies to provide listener support in interaction. The findings show that students use RTs for five major functions in interaction, among which 'receipt' and 'agreement' predominate. Furthermore, the listener support strategies were classified into 'listener support' and 'confirmations of comprehension', in which the former strategy is most frequent. While many students provide their partners with adequate listener support in a timely manner, there were significant differences between students and podcasts in terms of frequency, variety and alignment between speakers. From a pedagogical point of view, these results can indicate that a discussion of these tokens' importance is merited in the classroom to further develop students' interactional competence. The findings in the present study are relevant to Swedish English language teaching settings and have the potential to inform pedagogical practices regarding interactional competence.

## **Keywords**

Response Tokens; Interactional Competence; Foreign/Second Language Acquisition; Interactive Listening.

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# 1. Introduction

To demonstrate listener involvement, interlocutors use response tokens (henceforth RTs), such as: *Mm, Yeah, Oh, Okay, Mm hm* or *Right* among others (Gardner, 2001). These RTs have different functions in interaction; however, broadly speaking they are used by participants to indicate to the speaker that their talk has been received in some kind of way. RTs and their functions have been widely investigated in English native speech (Gardner, 2001; Gardner, 2004; Heritage, 1984; Jefferson, 1984; Norrick, 2011; Schegloff, 1982; Stubbe, 1998; Wong & Peters, 2007).

Researchers have also shown an interest in listening strategies and co-construction of interaction within the area of Foreign Language Acquisition, especially in regard to what they can entail about the interactional competence of learners (Pekarek-Doehler, 2018). Using an interactional competence framework, scholars have then investigated RTs in conversations by learners of English (Fung & Carter, 2007; Galaczi, 2008; Gardner, 1998; Moore, 2011), including assessment situations (Ducasse & Brown, 2009; Galaczi, 2013). RTs have also been examined in many other foreign language contexts, such as in learners of German (Betz & Huth, 2014) and Italian (Pauletto & Kunitz, in press). Moreover, several studies have focused on how speakers use RTs and other discourse markers to express agreement in various languages such as in Japanese (Mori, 1999), English (Pomerantz, 1984), Italian (Andorno, 2016) and in contexts of second language acquisition in Italian (Andorno & Rosi, 2016; Borreguero Zuloaga, 2019) and Spanish (Koch & Thörle, 2019).

To the author's knowledge, the topic remains largely under-researched in a Swedish English learner setting. Research is scarce also regarding podcasts produced by high school students. The material used in this research was collected from four classes of English 5 and 6 from two different high schools located in a Swedish large urban area. The data consists of nine student-produced podcasts (for a total of approximately 1 hour and 25 minutes), with the finality of assessing their oral proficiency. The students from English 5 could choose their own topics which resulted in various topics, whereas English 6 had a set topic. The sequences of interest have been analysed and transcribed, and the present paper will use the methodology of an applied conversation analysis (CA) approach (see Kasper & Wagner, 2014, for a distinction between basic or pure CA and applied CA). The scope of this study is to examine the learners' use of RTs and whether they provide their interactional partners with adequate listener support in a timely manner. Pedagogic implications will also briefly be discussed. To answer this scope this study will answer these two questions:

- 1) Which RTs do the subjects in the present study employ, to perform which functions?
- 2) With regard to interactional competence, which functions do the RTs provide in terms of listener support?

## 2. Background

In this section a general outline of the functions of RTs will be provided with relevance to interactional competence. Subsequent to this, previous research will be presented on RTs mainly in the field of second/foreign language acquisition, including comparative studies between languages and cultures.

### 2.1 Response tokens

The use of RTs can be described as a strategy that listeners have at their disposal to indicate to the speaker that their talk has been received. They also provide “information on how the response token utterer is projecting further activities in the talk, for example whether they approve of, agree with, disagree with, will remain silent on, or have something to say about the prior talk” (Gardner, 2001, p. 3). Listeners can also indicate disinterest by using the same tokens consecutively across turns (Schegloff, 1982, p. 85). Examples of these utterances are in English *Yeah*, *Mm*, *Mm hm*, *Oh*, and *Okay*. Some of these also exist in Swedish such as *Mm* or *Okej*, but there are also differences among others; *Ah*, *Aha*.

In previous research, there is a great inconsistency regarding the terminology, and to some extent, the function of these tokens. Some researchers have also investigated nonverbal responses such as nods or shrugs; however, they will not be discussed here since the material collected for this study is solely aural. Previous research has called them ‘backchannels’ (Yngve, 1970), ‘reactive tokens’ (Clancy et al., 1996), ‘continuers’ (Schegloff, 1982), ‘acknowledgement tokens’ (Jefferson, 1984), ‘minimal responses’ (Hanamoto, 2016) among others. In the sections outlining previous research below, the researchers often use different terminology to indicate these tokens. However, generally they all encompass the same phenomena to a degree that make them comparable and relevant for the present study. Indeed, Gardner (2001) criticizes the common usage of the collective term *backchanneling* since it obscures their distinctive functions (p. 3). Instead, he suggests this classification of listener activities with prototypical examples of each category, where he names the first four RTs.

**Continuers**, which function to hand the floor back to the immediately prior speaker (e.g. *Mm hm*, *Uh huh*);

**Acknowledgements**, which claim agreement or understanding of the prior turn (e.g. *Mm*, *Yeah*);

**Newsmarkers**, (...) which mark the prior speaker’s turn as newsworthy in some way, (e.g. *Really*, the change-of-state token *Oh*, the ‘idea-connector’ *Right*);

**Change-of-activity tokens**, which mark a transition to a new activity or a new topic in the talk (e.g. *Okay*, *Alright*);

**Assessments**, which evaluate the talk of the prior speakers (e.g. *Great*, *How intriguing*, *What a load of rubbish*);

**Brief questions**, for clarification or other types of repair, which seek to clarify mishearings or misunderstandings (e.g. *Who?* (...) *Huh?*);

**Collaborative completions**, whereby one speaker finishes a prior speaker’s utterance (e.g. A: So he’s moved into ... B: commercial interests; Gardner, 2001, p. 2)

All RTs can be said to pass a turn-taking opportunity. However, Clancy et al. (1996) also add 'resumptive openers' to their list of listener strategies. These are used at turn-initial points and are followed by a full turn (p. 363). Their functions are similar to some of Jefferson's (1984) acknowledgement tokens that are followed by a full turn, which demonstrates a listener's "shift from reciprocity to speakership" (p. 200). The term 'resumptive openers' will therefore be adopted in the present study to distinguish them from other acknowledgement tokens that are not followed by a full turn.

Within the field of interactional competence and language acquisition, some scholars have differentiated interactive listening strategies into i) listener support (backchanneling) and ii) confirmations of comprehension (Galaczi, 2013; Ducasse & Brown, 2009). In their classification, most RTs would fall under the category of listener support. With that in mind, Schegloff (1982) states "[i]t is worth noting ... that 'uh huh', 'mm hmm', 'yeah', head nods, and the like at best *claim* attention and/or understanding rather than showing it or evidencing it" (p. 78). Therefore, when RTs function as continuers the utterer at least displays his/her understanding that the talk is not finished, and that the other may continue (p. 81). Moreover, continuers can be considered acts of politeness since they provide recognition and support for the speaker to continue with the talk in progress. In fact, absence of RTs can be interpreted as disinterest or lack of attention, which consequently might cause disruptions or even termination of the current speaker's talk (Norrick, 2013, p. 574).

What many of the aforementioned researchers have in common is that the terms used in defining listener strategies and their functions derive from Conversation Analysis (CA). Sacks et al. (1974) were the first ones to introduce the CA method, in which they described the turn-taking system, a model that describes how interlocutors co-construct and organize their dialogues in everyday conversation. In other words, CA examines interactional sequences in which "each utterance [is] dependent upon what has gone before, and in turn setting up a context for a next utterance" (Heritage, 1984, cited in Gardner, 2001, p. 4). When studying RTs, it is therefore important to consider their sequential placement in order to understand their functions (Gardner, 2001, p. 4).

A discussion of the turn-taking system is therefore relevant for the placement and function of RTs, given that the roles of speakers and listeners are constantly changing in interaction. In everyday conversation neither turn size nor order is fixed but is "interactively determined" (Sacks et al., 1974, p. 727). Since turn size can vary, a speaker can produce several turn constructional units (TCUs). When a speaker initiates a turn, that speaker is entitled to that turn until the turn is completed, which is the transition-relevant place (TRP; Sacks et al., 1974). TRPs are "points in the talk of others that are potentially grammatically, intonationally and pragmatically complete" (Gardner, 2001, p. 6). Speakers can engage in more extensive turns, such as in jokes, storytelling or explanations thus producing multi-unit turns. The progress and success of a multi-unit turn depends on the other interlocutors who can use RTs to add to the story in progress and signal to the primary speaker that s/he can continue (Norrick, 2013, p. 568). The most occurring placement of RTs in English is at or near the TRP (Norrick, 2013; Schegloff, 1982; Gardner, 2001). Likewise, speaker change occurs near the TRP, usually with latching/overlap or in a manner of no-gap-no-overlap (Sacks et al., 1974). Therefore, within the turn-taking system, the listener and potential next speaker have an

obligation to monitor the speaker's talk to predict where in the course of the talk the turn is potentially completed. This is to follow the turn allocation rules, in which either the primary speaker selects the next speaker, or someone self-selects (Sacks et al., 1974).

## **2.2 Interactional competence**

Interactional competence (IC) has become an increasingly important aspect of Foreign/Second Language Acquisition. It was Kramsch (1986), who coined the expression, which stresses that communication is jointly produced and not an individual competence. The focus on interaction within language acquisition has increased due to the shifted focus from viewing language competence as something individual to a more sociocultural view according to which language competence is socially situated and co-constructed. This is visible in the communicative approach to language teaching, the so-called Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), which largely derives from the Hymesian idea of communicative competence (Celce-Murcia, 2014, p. 8). Closely related to CLT is the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR), which promotes interactional competence together with other skills such as reading and writing (Duff, 2014).

Moreover, the definition of IC differs slightly amongst researchers, due to its roots: in fact, IC is a conflation of the fields of linguistic anthropology and CA. "In the former tradition, the term is used to refer to the fundamental variability of individual knowledge. In the latter, competence is viewed as a universal construct and used to refer to a basic interaction infrastructure of human sociality" (Hall, 2018, p. 28). Following this tradition of researchers who have discussed and argued for an IC framework within the domain of CA and second language acquisition, IC can broadly be defined as the ability or methods that members of a speech community use to jointly produce and organize social interaction in real time. This involves procedures such as: turn-taking, preference organization, disagreeing, adjacency pairs, opening and closing conversation and repairing (Barraja-Rohan, 2011; Eskildsen, 2018; Hall, 2018; Markee, 2008; Pekarek-Doehler, 2018; Pekarek-Doehler & Pochon-Berger, 2015). The IC framework has then been applied to second or foreign language acquisition research. For example, how learners manage topic development and turn-taking strategies (Gan et al., 2008; Gan, 2010; Moore, 2011). Furthermore, Barraja-Rohan (2011) explicitly mentions RTs as a feature of IC, since IC "involves, among other skills, precision timing and a quick analysis of speakers' turns" (p. 481). Other scholars who have focused on RTs, often within the framework of IC, will be further discussed below.

## **2.3 Previous research on interactive listening strategies**

It emerges from a literature review of RTs studies in SLA that some have focused on them in contexts within assessment. Since the podcasts in this study were used for assessment of student's oral proficiency, a review of previous research on listening strategies is in order.

Previous research has considered interactive listening strategies within an IC framework and has differentiated between moves that include listener support (backchanneling<sup>1</sup>) and confirmations of comprehension (Galaczi, 2013; Ducasse & Brown, 2009). A listener can demonstrate comprehension by assisting with word search, but also by providing other verbal support to indicate that the speaker can continue, or to break silence. Backchanneling on the other hand also provides listener support, although in a weaker form, since it does not actively demonstrate comprehension. Ducasse & Brown (2009) investigated raters' perceptions of students' listener support strategies; they conclude that both strategies for interactive listening are important. They also underline that backchanneling can be used as a tool for pretending to listen; however, it can also be seen as a strategic competence that allows the speaker to continue and permits the listener to re-join the conversation once they comprehend. In Galaczi's (2013) study, the findings revealed that test takers provided different types of listener support with regards to their proficiency levels. As the proficiency level increases so does the overall usage of listener strategies. Furthermore, in higher proficiency levels the use of confirmations of comprehension increase together with a decrease of backchanneling. These studies underline that both types have a relevant place in second language learners' development of interactional competence. Moreover, the classification of listener strategies is a useful tool for assessors and other educators since they can be used to operationalize different discourse characteristics. For example, one can demonstrate listener support through backchanneling and cohesion between turns through acknowledgement tokens (Galaczi, 2008).

Following the same tradition, in a longitudinal study, Sert (2019) investigates learners' development of interactive listening strategies. Focusing on turn completions, the findings suggest that learners with more experience in L2 discussions demonstrate active listenership by producing an increased and varied number of collaborative completions. Furthermore, he also agrees with the scholars mentioned above that on the continuum of claiming understanding, turn completions have a claim of comprehension, active listenership and thus IC (pp. 142-145).

RTs have also been investigated in other English classroom settings within the area of language acquisition, contrasted with the use of native speakers. When investigating differences between native speakers and learners, Gardner (1998) found that natives use more RTs in terms of variation and frequency. However, non-natives have been reported to use *yeah* more frequently than natives. This indicates that learners do not use other possible RTs and instead rely on *yeah*. Fung & Carter (2007) found similar results while investigating discourse marker use between native English speakers and English learners in Hong Kong. They found that learners do not employ all varieties that are available, especially not the discourse markers with RT functions. Additionally, they argue for more attention to the pragmatic functions of discourse markers within language pedagogy, in order to decrease possible misunderstandings and enhance interactional competence and security in the L2. Gardner (1998) further argues for the teaching of listener support moves in language pedagogy; indeed, he argues that a lack

<sup>1</sup> Here, it is useful to remember Gardner's (2001) critic against the term backchanneling. However, what they refer to is mainly what Gardner would classify as *continuers* and in some instances, *acknowledgement tokens*.

of proficiency in their usage is just as harmful as not knowing central aspects of grammar (p. 205). With this in mind, Fung & Carter (2007) also raise the question to what degree teachers should aim for their pupils to speak native-like. This choice should ultimately be made by the pupils, however, a greater awareness of discourse markers thus also RTs, leaves more choices (pp. 433-434).

Furthermore, RTs have been investigated in a contrastive study of turn-taking strategies between learners from a content and language (CLIL) program and mainstream learners (MS; Moore, 2011). It was found that learners used continuers to give affective, interactive and linguistic support. The CLIL learners used more RTs than MS learners. However, it could not be concluded to be due to a higher proficiency level, more probably because the CLIL pupils were more accustomed to group work (Moore, 2011). Another study investigated whether researchers' use of backchanneling had an effect on the fluency of Japanese learners of English. The results suggest support for the 'backchannel output hypothesis' which means "that backchannels may facilitate the fluency of non-advanced learners of English during oral tasks depending on the nature of backchannel use in their L1 and sociocultural environments" (Wolf, 2008, p. 279).

Research has also focused on the difference between cultures in using RTs, which illustrates that the role of RTs in IC varies between languages and cultures. For example, Maori and Pakehas' use of verbal feedback in New Zealand English differ where one ethnic group provided more feedback (Stubbe, 1998). Another study found that Japanese, American English and Mandarin speakers' use of RTs varied in terms of frequency, variation and placement (Clancy et al., 1996). The latest mentioned study also concurs with another that found that Japanese speakers provide more RTs than American English speakers (Ide, 2001). In Japanese, RTs uttered in overlap are deemed more polite than those produced at the TRPs since they are then not perceived as claiming the turn. In American English, overlap is also common, carrying however a greater risk of sounding impolite since they "violate the one-speaker-at-a-time rule" (Norrick, 2013, p. 574).

Moreover, in a comparative study between English and Swedish speakers, it was found that acknowledgement tokens share universal functions, with some differences, for instance the Swedish token *Eh* (Beach & Lindstrom, 1992). However, given the placement of the token *eh* in their transcripts, it is possible that they intend what is usually transcribed as *ah* in Swedish. *Ah* has the function of an RT in Swedish, whereas *eh* carries the function similar to *uh* or *uhm* in English as turn-holding tokens or as repair markers (Lindström, 2008; Gardner, 2007).

RTs have also been researched in English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) settings. A study investigated intermediate and advanced learners' use of backchanneling in material collected partly from oral exams (Bjørge, 2010). It found that nonverbal backchanneling predominated followed by *yes/yeah*, *mhm* and *okay*. More extensive backchanneling such as *right* or *absolutely* was less frequent. The author also notes that several of these items that predominated are not exclusive to English (Bjørge, 2010). Moreover, it is possible that RTs can function differently when used in interaction between native and non-native speakers. Misunderstandings can occur when RTs with claims of understanding and RTs that are used to indicate the "speaker's right to be heard" are confused (Wong, 2000, p. 263). Similarly, in ELF contexts minimal responses such as

*oh* can create ambiguity when participants do not share the same cultural backgrounds, which risks creating troubles of comprehension when interlocutors interpret them differently (Hanamoto, 2016).

It has been demonstrated that RTs have been investigated in various contexts within the fields of linguistics and English acquisition. One area that still remains largely under researched is within a Swedish context and within student-produced podcasts, which have been the focus of the present study.

### **3. Methods and procedures**

#### **3.1 Method**

The methodology used in this thesis is applied conversation analysis. Applied CA is “the application of basic CA’s principles, methods and findings to the study of social domains and practices that are interactionally constituted” (Kasper & Wagner, 2014 p. 171). The difference of methodology lies in the context of classroom talk from which the material for this study was collected. Talk within classroom contexts can be understood as institutional talk since the students’ productions are influenced by what previously have been requested by the teacher. The students will therefore be aware of the teacher’s pedagogic purpose and later assessment of their productions (Seedhouse, 1999). Given the students’ awareness of pedagogic purpose, it can then be argued that interaction within the classroom will differ from that occurring outside of the classroom, which includes students’ topic selection, lexical choices and turn-taking organization among others (Kasper & Wagner, 2014, pp. 192-193). This paper can be seen as a follow-up of those who have argued for an applied CA approach to talk in institutional settings (e.g. Björkman, 2017; 2018; Santner-Wolfartsberger, 2015; Deterding, 2013). The study uses CA analytic procedures in investigating the use of RTs by students since the focus is on *what* tokens the students use and *how* they use them, that is what functions they have (Have, 2007).

#### **3.2 Procedures**

The data has been analysed from a qualitative perspective, including however also quantitative elements in terms of frequencies of listener strategies. The sequences of interests were transcribed according to the transcription conventions of CA (Hepburn & Bolden, 2013, see Appendix A). The program Audacity (Version 2.3.1; Audacity Team, 2019) was used to listen to the podcasts and to capture instances of silences and sound stretches. In some instances where the pitch was of relevance, the program Praat was used (Version 6.1.10; Boersma & Weenink, 2020). The pitch contour was traced to view the terminal pitch direction, which is one distinguishing feature between continuers and acknowledgement tokens (Gardner, 2001). Only sequences which contain RTs are analysed. If an RT-like utterance was used as the second pair part of an adjacency pair (Sacks et al., 1974), for example answering *yeah* to a question, it was not included in the analysis. Furthermore, given their frequency a fourth common listener

support move, collaborative finishes, was deemed relevant for analysis even though they are not strictly RTs.

To answer the first question, *which RTs do the subjects in the present study employ, to perform which functions?* all RTs (total of 578) were transcribed and counted according to their shape and function, following Gardner's (2001) and Pauletto & Kunitz's (in press) classifications.

To answer the second question, *with regard to interactional competence, which functions do the RTs provide in terms of listener support?* all RTs were classified according to the categories i) listener support and ii) confirmations of comprehension, following previous researchers (Ducasse & Brown, 2009; Galaczi, 2013; Sert, 2019).

### 3.2.1 Material and participants

The material analysed in this research was collected from two Swedish high schools, from four classes of English, namely two from grade 5 and two from grade 6. The podcast assignment for English 5 was used for assessing their oral proficiency, in which one of the goals of the assignment was to maintain and develop a conversation. The podcast assignment for English 6 was only used partly for assessment due to their short nature. The students' ages range from 16 to 18. All students were given consent forms in which they were informed of the aim of this research, that their participation was voluntary, with the information that they could withdraw their consent at any stage. They were also informed that they would remain anonymous, and to guarantee their anonymity the material has been saved on a separate server and their names have been substituted with pseudonyms, leaving nothing in the study that can be traced back to them. The podcasts in which there was at least one student who did not want to participate or did not hand in a form were all discarded from the analysis. From English 5, 52 consent forms were collected, 38 stating 'yes' and 14 'no'. This left a total of eight podcast for analysis with a total of 25 speakers. Of the students in these podcasts, 22 are bilingual or multilingual speakers, meaning that they speak at least one more language other than Swedish at home. The remaining three are monolingual, Swedish speakers. The students' different languages were not included as an aspect for analysis; however, they could have implications for their production of RTs.

Following below a table is presented for the podcasts collected from English 5. The dialogic degree is based on whether their talk can be considered as interactional events with co-constructive elements (Jacoby & Ochs, 1995). What lowered their dialogic degree is therefore when students in some instances of the podcasts read pre-scripted parts since that does not classify as interaction. The topics for discussion were chosen by the students which resulted in various topics all of which are visible in table 1.

**Table 1. Podcasts English 5**

Podcasts numbered	Number of speakers	Length	Dialogic degree	Topic
1	4	12'20"	dialogic	School related stress
2	2	9'54"	dialogic	Criminal system in

				Sweden
3	3	10'00"	largely dialogic	OJ Simpson
4	3	10'28"	dialogic	Transsexuality
5	3	11'45"	dialogic	Body ideals
6	3	9'56"	partly dialogic	Madeleine McCann
7	3	9'29"	largely dialogic	Gypsy Rose
8	4	7'13"	dialogic	Girls vs. Boys
<b>Total: 8</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>1h 21' 5"</b>		

From English 6, 64 forms were collected, 53 stating ‘yes’, 3 ‘no’ and 8 blanks. This left a total of 11 podcasts for analysis; however, further 10 had to be discarded due to technical issues regarding audio quality and their format. For example, some podcast groups read their separate parts, which did not result in any RTs and some interviewed additional participants who had not given consent. In the podcast remaining, all three students are monolingual Swedish speakers. The podcast is 4 minutes and 20 seconds, it is dialogic, and the topic of discussion is what they have learnt during an interview with a researcher, which was a set topic given by their teacher.

## 4. Results

The RTs most frequently used by the students in the present dataset were *yeah*, followed by *mm* and *mm hm*. The analysis revealed some variation present in their repertoire, which will be illustrated in the immediately following sections. From the analysis of the dataset described above, the following five main functions emerged:

- 1) RTs that indicate receipt, and thus passing the opportunity to claim the turn;
- 2) RTs that claim agreement /or demonstrating agreement;
- 3) RTs used as resumptive openers to indicate agreement or acknowledgement to the prior turn, by claiming the present turn;
- 4) Collaborative finishes;
- 5) one example of a newsmarker.

Each category with representative examples will be presented below, together with a discussion of what type of listener support they provide.

### 4.1 Receipt

The first category for analysis is the one in which the students use tokens to indicate receipt to what the speaker is currently telling, thus recognizing that the talk is still in progress by uttering tokens such as *mm*, *mm hm*, *yeah* or *myeah*. Conventionally *mm* and *yeah* function as acknowledgement tokens and *mm hms* as continuers; however, it

must be noted that these are not fixed categories (Gardner, 2001). One clue in classifying these tokens lies in their terminal pitch direction, in which continuers typically end with a terminal rise indicating continuation and acknowledgement tokens with terminal fall which indicates completion (Gardner, 2001, p. 104). Continuers function to hand back the floor, whereas acknowledgement tokens are more retrospective and function to claim agreement or understanding.

Extract 1.

01 L10 so: but (0.3) if we would see it like this If you would have met someone (.)  
 02 if you would meet someone,  
 03 (1.1)  
 → 04 L11 mm [hm, ]  
 05 L10 [that's] (0.5) a boy,  
 06 (0.4)  
 → 07 L12 [yeah. ]  
 08 L10 [and you wi]ll fall i-loov with him,  
 09 (0.5)  
 → 10 L11 mm,=  
 11 L10 =and then you found out that (0.6) earlier in his life (0.3) he (0.4) ^he was born as  
 12 a woman.  
 13 (0.5)  
 → 14 L12 mm,=  
 15 L10 =so he's [a trans ]=  
 → 16 L11 [mm hm,]  
 17 L10 =gender.  
 18 (0.3)  
 → 19 L12 mm.  
 20 L10 how would you react?  
 21 L12 uhm (0.5) I don't (.) I don't think I should ^eller I-that I would react (...)

In extract 1, L10 is in progress of formulating a question, during which there are several gaps (silences between turns) and pauses (silences within a TCU; Hepburn & Bolden, 2013, p. 60). L10 starts to formulate her question which ends incomplete and with a slight rise in intonation, indicating that she is not yet done (line 1 and 2). After a significantly long silence (line 3), L11 produces a continuer *mm hm* (line 4) indicating that she is listening and waiting for L10 to continue. The same can be claimed for L12's RTs *yeah* and *mm* (line 7 and 14), L11's *mm* (line 10) which all occur after rather long silences, as well as L11's continuer *mm hm* (line 16) which overlaps with L10's talk. Finally, L12 produces an acknowledgement token *mm* (line 19), thus claiming understanding to what has been said so far before L10 adds the final part of her question which L12 begins to answer. Almost all RTs are produced after significant silences (more than 0.2 seconds) and not in vicinity to the TRPs. However, this is probably not a matter of delayed responses but rather to indicate that they are listening and acknowledging L10's claim to the floor, who in this case has troubles finishing her question. In fact, L10's difficulties resemble what Gardner (2007) calls broken starts. That is when a speaker commences a turn haltingly for example, with turn-holding tokens such as *uhm*, silences in the interturn space, self-repair or reformulations among other cues. Finally, the speaker finishes the turn with more fluency which suggests that initial halts are used for planning the remaining part of the turn (Gardner, 2007, p. 63). This is visible in L10's reformulation (line 2), the pauses within the TCUs (lines 4, 10) and in the gaps between turns.

In extract 2, another example of RTs for receipt is presented. During the minutes preceding this extract L22 has given a personal account of her family life, in which her brothers do not help with household chores. L23, who is acting as the moderator of the podcast, then selects L25 as the next speaker to answer why boys are not expected to help with chores (line 1).

Extract 2.

- 01 L23 why do you think L25?  
 02 (0.6)  
 03 L25 I mean (0.5) I don't have any brothers:: (0.4) brut like e::h it's clear i-eh the  
 04 difference between boys and girls it's clear,=  
 → 05 L23 =mm hm:,  
 06 L25 because bo:ys::: can do whatever they want (.) [and not, ]  
 → 07 L23 [mm hm:,]  
 08 L25 tha- get judged for it (.) [they can]=  
 → 09 L23 [mm hm,]  
 10 L25 =stay out late: eh hang out with who they will (1.4) ^E:::hm (0.4) ah, yeah.  
 11 (0.5)  
 → 12 L23 myeah.  
 13 (0.8)  
 14 L25 a::nd eh in like Balkans::,  
 → 15 L23 mm hm,

While L25 is speaking, L23 provides several continuers in close proximity to the TRPs (line 5, 7, 9). After a significant silence of 1.4 seconds (line 10), L25 self-selects but abandons the turn and finally closes the topic with the tokens *ah* and *yeah* respectively used with Swedish and English pronunciation (line 10). L23 then utters an acknowledgement token without claiming the floor (line 12). After another silence (line 13), L23 self-selects and commences a new topic which is again followed by a continuer by L23 (line 15), indicating that her attention is again in progress. The RTs uttered by L25 at the TRPs provides a type of listener support that indicates that she is following the story of the current speaker and that she will not claim the floor.

Extract 3.

- 01 L17 ^oh yeah, you know what I've heard, I've heard that they wanted to put the blame  
 02 on the parents right away because they didn't want to make Portugal seem like a  
 03 bad country.  
 04 (0.9)  
 → 05 L17 haven't you heard that?  
 06 L16 no I've not heard that  
 07 L17 ^yeah, well (.) becuz they did not want to make Portugal seem like a dangerous  
 08 country because they do want tourism. .hhh [that's]=  
 → 09 L16 [yeah.]  
 10 L17 =why the:: e:::hm (0.5) politicians [want ]=  
 → 11 L16 [yeah,]  
 12 L17 =to put the blame on the parents [you know,]  
 → 13 L16 [yeah. ]  
 14 L17 that they left their kids all alone.  
 → 15 L18 yeah.

In extract 3, L17 begins by giving an account which is followed by a considerable silence (line 4). It is possible that to the absence of an RT is what prompts her to retake the turn and ask a question that demands an answer. It is also conceivable that L16 might have given her a surprised look but since visual information is unavailable, it is only possible to analyse the audial aspects. As L17's account progresses, L16 provides

several RTs (*yeah*: lines 9, 11, 13) and so does L18 (line 15). Again, these RTs are uttered by the listeners to signal to the speaker that they have received her message and will let her continue without interfering further. Indeed, if we agree with the interpretation above regarding what prompts L17's question, they seem both expected and preferred.

In the extracts presented above, it can be noted that the students provide their partners with various RTs that indicate receipt. They are therefore classified as listener support since they do not demonstrate comprehension. Nevertheless, even these can be placed on a continuum of *claims* of comprehension. *Mm* can be seen as "a weaker acknowledgement" (Gardner, 2001, p. 34), whereas *yeah* has a greater speaker incipency since it is more likely to be followed by further talk (Jefferson, 1984). Together they both function to indicate some kind of receipt without claiming trouble of understanding, and refrain from taking the turn (Pauletto & Kunitz, in press; Schegloff, 1982).

## 4.2 Agreement

Another typical use that emerges from the data analysis is RTs that function to claim or demonstrate agreement. It is useful to be reminded that acknowledgement tokens for example can only claim agreement (Schegloff, 1982). Agreement is also expressed in resumptive openers; however, they will be discussed in the subsequent section. The most common token found in the data to express agreement is *yeah*, but they also use other tokens such as *exactly*, *absolutely*, *yes* and *no*, and other strategies such as repetition.

Extract 4.

- |   |    |    |  |
|---|----|----|--|
|   | 01 | L5 | e::h (0.6) you're not change your culture because you came from another country    |
|   | 02 | L5 | (0.8) e::h (0.3) and I think (0.7) eh in Sweden we have e::h (.) came very fast eh |
|   | 03 |    | ^far,  |
| → | 04 | L6 | myeah.=  |
|   | 05 | L5 | =with this eh women's rights, [and human ]=  |
| → | 06 | L6 | [yeah=ye=ye=ye. ]  |
|   | 07 | L5 | =rights.   |
|   | 08 | L6 | <u>we</u> see women and men as [equally,]  |
| → | 09 | L5 | [exactly.] [exa ]ctly.   |
|   | 10 | L6 | [yeah.]  |
| → | 11 | L5 | yeah, (0.3) equally. .hhh a:nde:h but ine::h for example middle eastern,           |
|   | 12 |    | (0.3)  |
|   | 13 | L6 | mm,=   |
|   | 14 | L5 | =they haven't came that far,   |
| → | 15 | L6 | no:::.=  |
|   | 16 | L5 | =so I think .hhh eh people from those countries (0.7) eh see women (0.5) like      |
|   | 17 |    | (1.3) ^halfhumans.   |
| → | 18 | L6 | ^ye:ah.  |

This sequence is part of a longer discussion regarding why the students think some immigrants commit crimes. In extract 4, the students express agreement to varying degrees. After L5 has stated that in Sweden we have come far, L6 utters an RT that can only claim agreement (line 4). After L5 completes his sentence (line 5) L6 again utters a series of RTs (line 6) indicating agreement followed by an insert (line 8) which further underlines her agreement and ends with a *yeah* (line 10). L5 provides RTs of agreement

anticipating the TRP (line 9) and repeats *equally* (line 11) accentuating his agreement to L6's previous insert. To this point, they have established agreement on Swedish values. L5 then begins to argue that some immigrants do not share these values to which L6 provides RTs of agreement to the negative construction (line 14) with a *no* (line 15). Moreover, she indicates agreement with *yeah* which has a significant rise in pitch (line 18). All RTs are uttered in close proximity to the TRP.

Extract 5.

01 L3 E:::h (0.9) a couple year-like (0.5) ma-my parents or yea yo-your parents  
 02 too they didn't have MacBook's and all [those fancy,]  
 → 03 L4 [no:::..£ ]  
 04 L3 [things,]  
 → 05 L2 [yeah. ]  
 06 L3 so they couldn't lo- e::h they couldn't look ^up youtube and,  
 → 07 L4 [mm no::.]  
 08 L3 [asså eh ] have something that is distracts them bu::e::h they di-just have books.

Preceding this excerpt, L2 has given an account of the difficulties in studying given that there are too many distractions such as videogames or computers. In extract 5, L3 continues on the same topic by providing a contrast to the life of their parents who did not have MacBooks or YouTube. Interestingly, these negative constructions are answered in alignment to their polarity with the negative particles *no* by L4 (line 3, 7) whereas L2 uses an affirmative *yeah* instead (line 5). Furthermore, they are produced in vicinity to the TRPs.

Extract 6.

01 L15 I think we need to just be: (.) glad that we have a nose so we can [breathe.]  
 → 02 L14 [yes. ]  
 03 (0.4)  
 → 04 L14 [yes exactly.]  
 05 L15 [ehehehah ] £or what do you think L14?£=  
 06 L14 =^yes of course I agree and we should turn this eh these fl^aws that we have into  
 07 (0.4) >good thing because< we should be grateful for evr- for like that o:::ur  
 08 budi- body is functioning.=  
 → 09 L15 =ye::s:.=  
 10 L14 =and ^also .h (.) e:::hm what what I-it could lead to is encouraging people to  
 11 exercise but (0.3) for the wrong re[ason:::s:. ]  
 12 L15 [reason:::.. ]

In extract 6, L15 is arguing that girls should be content with all different body parts since they have useful functions. L15 does so by providing examples such as breathing for the nose (line 1). L14 provides an RT of agreement, *yes* anticipating the TRP (line 2), followed by a significant gap (line 3). L14 provides further RTs of agreement *yes exactly* (line 4), which overlaps with L15's laughter (line 5). L15 then asks L14's opinion on the subject (line 5). First, L14 answers by stating explicitly that she agrees (line 6) and later she confirms L15's previous argument that they should be grateful that the body is functioning (lines 7, 8). L14's previous RTs all had strong claims of agreement; however, in her answer the agreement is further strengthened. Furthermore, after L14's answer, L15 also provides an RT of agreement, *yes* with considerable emphasis (line 9). Lastly, L15 also inserts a collaborative finish (line 12); these will be further discussed in section 4.4. It is not regarded as a repetition since it is produced only slightly after L14's utterance of the word, and it mainly overlaps.

In the extracts above, it has been demonstrated that the students use various tokens to demonstrate or claim agreement to their interactional partners' utterances. The RT's can further be categorized accordingly, where *yes*, *no*, *exactly*, and repetitions have a stronger claim of agreement, whereas *yeah* have a weaker claim since it can also simply signify receipt. Furthermore, all RTs are uttered in close proximity of the TRP which is another indicator of agreement since long gaps usually suggests disagreement, refusal to express an opinion or other problems of understanding (Pomerantz, 1984, p. 65). Subsequently, resumptive openers will be discussed, which often are used to signal agreement however, with full turns following the initial RT.

### 4.3 Resumptive openers

The main functions found in RTs placed as resumptive openers are to claim agreement or acknowledgement to the prior turn, as well as claiming the floor.

Extract 7.

- 01 L13 and the good thing is that you can e::h (0.5) exercise .hhhh because you can feel  
 02 better (0.4) and e::::h exercit can motivate you,=  
 → 03 L14 =yeah.=  
 04 L13 =to be more health[y. ]  
 → 05 L14 [and] it ^als-^yeah exactly it can also lead to a better health and  
 06 that we cut out the junk food .hhh and e::::i::::e::::h instead eat eh v[egeta ]bles.  
 → 07 L15 [^yeah.]  
 08 L14 which .hh also helps our en^vironment.  
 → 09 L15 ^ye::s to be ^better because (0.7) if we e::h it can reduce overweight ^and support  
 10 (0.4) e::h the an-en- environment .hhh and that's just u:::::h (1.5) a very good  
 thing  
 11 that we can do .hh if we believe that we want to be (0.4) to .hh (0.4) to look better  
 12 for ourselves.  
 13 L14 exactly.

In extract 7, the students are discussing topics related to the beauty standards girls have to compare and relate to. In this excerpt L13 is underway of explaining what she thinks are negative and positive aspects of exercising, starting with the positive aspects. L14 provides an RT claiming agreement (line 3) near the TRP. When L13 later finishes the turn, L14 begins her turn with a brief overlap (line 5). Nevertheless, she stops her reasoning to provide two RTs of agreement *yeah* and *exactly* (line 5) before recommencing her talk. When L14 has finished, L15 opens her turn with the RT *yes* (line 9), and the TCU is also syntactically connected to L14's turn which further underscores the agreement expressed in the RT. It also demonstrates that she has both listened to and comprehended L14's prior turn. Furthermore, they develop mutuality since they expand on each other's topics (Galaczi, 2013, p. 561). In extract 7, it is also possible to note that the acknowledgement tokens *yeah* (line 3 and 7) demonstrate the greater speakership incipency that Jefferson (1984) mentions since they are also followed by further talk.

Extract 8.

- 01 L19 I think thi is a this sitch- I think this situation is sad because what her mum did to  
 02 her daughter is terrible .hh and I think it's insane that people thought she was a  
 03 perfect mother but the result was the opposite.  
 04 (1.3)

- 05 L20 yeah. I think it's horrible cuz her mother lied to her her whole life (0.7) and just  
 06 did everything (0.7) eh because of money (0.3) so they could get free trips and  
 07 they could get a hou::se and money.

In extract 8, L19 begins by answering a question posed by L21 about what they think of the situation of Gypsy Rose Blanchard, which is the topic of the podcast. During the first three minutes of the podcast the students have read their separate parts and L19 continues with reading, which is evidenced while she tries to pronounce “*situation*” (“sitch”, “sitasion”; line 1). L20 does not read her answer, however, and lets a significant silence pass before doing so (line 4). L20 begins her turn with an RT of agreement and continues with L19’s topic, assessing further why she thinks Gypsy’s mother was bad. Therefore, both speakers provide assessments in agreement with each other on Gypsy’s mother’s behavior. Moreover, these gaps were quite common in the data for this particular podcast which suggests weak alignment between the speakers and violates the no-gap rule (Sacks et al., 1974). The gaps do not seem to indicate disagreement, but rather that these students might have a difficulty to follow the talk while also preparing their own responses (Galaczi, 2013, p. 562).

Extract 9.

- 01 L3 and I also think like it's it's **not** only school sometimes you have two or three  
 02 assignments but it's also how ^you plan up things,  
 03 L2 yeah.  
 04 L3 like,=  
 05 L4 =exactly.  
 06 L3 for me example I go home and try to make my assignment as quick as possible  
 07 so I d[on't leave,]  
 08 L4 [exactly. ]  
 09 L3 everything [at the ^same,]  
 10 L4 [and, ]  
 11 L3 ^week,=  
 → 12 L4 =yeah, and depend[ing ] on what you do [after school,]  
 13 L3 [(eh,)] [Yeah, ]  
 14 L4 if you have any activities doing after sch[ool then it]'s=  
 15 L3 [yea::h, ]  
 16 L4 =like [you have to,]  
 17 L3 [I, I,= ]  
 18 L4 [(wait)]  
 → 19 L3 [yeah. ] I play football [so, ]  
 20 L4 [yeah,]  
 21 L3 I=I have less time for school and tha-yeah that ge-also aff[ects, ]  
 22 L4 [mmyeah.]  
 23 L3 [if I get stressed. ]  
 24 L4 [and in that case you have] to eh va heter de prioritize.=  
 25 L3 =yeah.

In extract 9, the students are discussing how school contributes to stress. L3 starts by discussing how they can organize their homework better by not procrastinating. L4 and L2 provide several RTs of agreement (line 3, 5 and 8). L4 moves to initiate a new turn with *and* which overlaps with L3’s talk (line 10). Then she waits and reinitiates the turn at the TRP with a *yeah* (line 12) expressing agreement to L3’s previous turn. She also continues with the same topic. Moreover, L3’s *eh* (line 13) indicates that he wanted to continue talking, yet he takes on a listener role briefly which is evident in the receipt token expressed (line 13). The second *yeah* (line 15) already indicates speakership incipency since it is followed by *II* (line 17) and later he claims the turn initiating with

a *yeah* (line 19). L4 has not yet finished what she was in progress of saying, but takes on the listener role briefly providing a receipt token (line 20). Then she repeats the previous strategy of L3 by uttering a *mmyeah* (line 22), followed by a full turn (line 24) which overlaps with L3's talk, thus adding what she probably was in progress of saying before. This excerpt has demonstrated that the two participants L3 and L4 engage in some competition for the floor, which is evident in the many overlaps. They use resumptive openers of agreement as a strategy to claim these turns.

The excerpts have demonstrated that the students use RTs at the turn initial position to indicate agreement to the prior turn; therefore, they function much like the RTs of agreement described above with the difference that they are not used to pass a turn-taking opportunity but rather as a strategy to claim the turn. Different levels of alignment have been observed above, in which gaps indicate weak alignment whereas contributions produced at the TRP indicates stronger alignment. Furthermore, these RTs usually indicate strong agreement sequentially, with the minimization of gaps, and since the turn following contains other agreement orientated components, such as building on topics or assessments (Pomerantz, 1984, p. 64). On the other hand, a recurrent presence of gaps can be explained by the fact that learners have a difficulty in simultaneously following the talk as well as formulating their own responses (Galaczi, 2013, p. 562).

#### 4.4 Collaborative finishes

The function that will now be analyzed is collaborative finishes, that is, when another participant finishes the current speaker's turn (Gardner, 2001).

Extract 10.

01	L14	eh like we always find wrong things with our body or with ourselves and that's not
02		ok like we're not supposed to feel bad about [ourselves. ]
03	L15	[^no:: we need to] turn that to
04		^good things,
05	L14	[yes. ]
06	L15	[that we] can see on our bodies we need to look at our bodies and yes and like
07		think ^damn my my my feets are ^so:::?.hhh so:::;
→ 08	L14	^gorgeous.=
09	L15	=^gor^ge(h)o[us, ]=
10	L14	=[^yes.] ha[haha ]
11	L15	[hahaha]

In the first lines of extract 10, it is possible to observe some agreement RTs. L15 uses a negative particle *no* (line 3) which aligns with L14's previous utterance. L14 also expresses agreement (line 5) with a *yes* at the TRP. As L15 continues she begins to hesitate as she is searching for the right word. First she repeats *my* three times (line 7) but eventually adds *feet*. Then, she starts a new word search which is visible in the prolongation of the vowels in *so*, which she repeats twice, and in the inbreath between (line 7). L14 then provides a suggestion *gorgeous* (line 8), thus providing a collaborative finish which L15 accepts by repeating the word while simultaneously laughing (line 9). In the end L14 also expresses agreement (line 10).

Extract 11.

01	L7	so OJ also had been found guilty ofe::::::h .hhh spo::, (0.2) s=
→ 02	L8	=s[pousal. ]

03 L7 [spousa ]l,  
 04 (0.5)  
 05 L8 [^yeah. ]  
 06 L7 [£ideas£] with more than 9 police visits to his and Nicole's eh residence.

In excerpt 11, L7's word search begins as she prolongs *eh* (line 1), followed by an inbreath. As she starts to pronounce the word wanted, she pronounces it with a prolonged [u:] instead of [au] followed by a brief silence (line 1). This is probably what prompts L8 to insert the word with a correct pronunciation (line 2). However, given the overlap it seems that L7 already was in the process of formulating the word correctly as well (line 3). After a brief yet significant silence L8 utters an acknowledgement token (line 5) which overlaps with L7 who continues with her topic after the brief interruption (line 6).

Extract 12.

01 L16 but they seem very guilty:::.hh  
 02 L17 [yeah, really.]  
 03 L16 [e:::::h ] in the interviews they never look e:::::h,  
 → 04 L18 ^at the camera,  
 05 L16 e=exactly.

In extract 12, the students are discussing the case of Madeleine McCann, and the possibility that the parents were involved in her disappearance. Present here is another example of a typical collaborative completion sequence. L16 demonstrate hesitancy when she stretches the vowels in *eh* (line 3). This is what prompts L18 to add the collaborative completion *at the camera* (line 4) which L16 accepts by stating *exactly* (line 5). There is also an RT of agreement present in this extract (line 2).

The extracts analysed above have illustrated another listener strategy that participants have at their disposal to illustrate that they are following and comprehending the current speaker's turn. These collaborative finishes usually occur after the current speaker demonstrates some kind of trouble in the course of their turn, such as prolonged sound stretches. When the listener provides a suggestion, it is usually accepted by the speaker by either repeating the word or providing an RT such as *yeah* or *exactly*. Given that the listener has to provide a missing item that has to fit into the course of the talk they also have a strong claim of active listening and comprehension (Galaczi, 2013).

#### 4.5 Newsmarker

After the outline of the results of the four major functions found in the data one more function will be presented, namely an example of a typical news marker. Newsmarkers usually indicate that the utterer has undergone some kind of changed state in their knowledge due to the previous talk (Heritage, 1984, p. 299).

Extract 13.

01 L25 What are you doing as [a son?]  
 02 L24 [me? ] (0.4) e:::::h,  
 03 L23 aha::h  
 04 L22 haha £^yeah, [L24 what do you do in the house?£]  
 05 L24 [I (.) I (.) I £ doesn't do tha- eh, ]  
 06 [so mu:: ] ch.£  
 07 L23 [you don't do that much] no?

08 L22 [yeah, ]  
09 L24 [I (.) I] [don't do so much,]  
10 L25 [exactly. ]  
11 L24 because e:::h I am now (0.8) for the moment (0.4) I'm injury (0.2) in injury  
12 .hh e:::h and eh but eh I use eh I (0.7) ^usually I eh help my mom to clean the  
13 house and eh little bit wash the::: [dishes.]  
→ 14 L22 [oh, ]=  
15 L24 =and,  
16 L23 £sometimes.£  
17 L24 °yes.°  
18 (0.3)  
19 L25 £sometimes.£  
20 L24 yes some.

In extract 13, the students are discussing the different ways of raising boys and girls. L25, L23 and L22 are all female whereas L24 is male. Previous to this excerpt, the girls have all given similar familiar stories in which the men do not help a lot in the house. L24 then provides a contrasting story stating that his dad helps a lot. This prompts L25 to ask what L24 does to help with household chores (line 1). L24's answer, which starts with a pause and a prolonged hesitation marker *eh* (line 2), prompts the girls to laugh (lines 3 and 4). L22 also rephrases the question with a "smiley" voice (line 4). Both girls indicate that they have understood that L24 indeed does not help a lot in the house, which he initially confirms (line 5 and 9). However, in a later turn, he explains further that he usually helps but is currently unable to due to an injury (line 11-13). His explanation prompts L22 to provide a news marker *oh* (line 14) indicating that L24's talk has provided 'a change of state' (Heritage, 1984). L22's previous contributions indicate that she did not believe that he assisted with household chores (lines 4, 8). On the contrary, L23's response *sometimes* in a "smiley" voice (line 16) together with L25's repetition (line 19) indicate that they are not convinced of his previous explanation. L22's *oh* is classified as listener support since it is not followed by further talk. To indicate comprehension an assessment or other items that would invite the speaker to continue is requested. In fact, freestanding *oh*'s are relatively rare and often create disruptions in the talk (Heritage, 1984).

Finally, a table which shows the raw frequency of each function and category of RTs is presented.

**Table 2. Raw frequency of RTs**

<b>Total:</b>	Receipt	Agreement	Resumptive openers	Collaborative finishes	Others
578	197	178	109	49	45

It is possible to note that receipt is the most frequent category. Agreement can further be divided into 125 claims of agreement, and 53 strong agreements. The claims of agreement are therefore very close to the category of receipt, but still merited their own category. Due to the limited space in this study all RTs belonging to the category 'others' cannot be discussed fully. However, other than news markers (13 instances),

some of their functions include assessments, disagreement, repair, topic shift, closing of topic and sequence closing thirds.

## 5. Discussion

The results of the present study demonstrate that the students use a rather limited, and in some instances varied repertoire of RTs, where *yeah* is by far the most frequent, followed by *mm* and *mm hm*. There are also differences between individual learners since some demonstrate a more varied repertoire than others. Lack of variety and the frequency and overreliance on *yeah* have also been found in previous research (Bjørge, 2010; Fung & Carter, 2007; Gardner, 1998; Pauletto & Kunitz, in press). Just as Bjørge (2010) noted, it is also relevant to underline that the other frequent RTs such as *mm* and *mm hm* are not restricted to English but also exist in Swedish. Furthermore, it is interesting to note that the students use several Swedish discourse markers while managing their turns, *eller* (extract 1), *ah* (extract 2), *asså* (extract 5) and a metalinguistic comment *vad heter de* (extract 9).

The formats of the podcasts have likely influenced the number of RTs produced. The podcasts were classified according to their dialogic nature, and the students who in some parts of the podcast read out loud pre-scripted dialogues not surprisingly lead to a decrease in RTs. A comment on the discarded podcasts in which students solely read is also relevant here. They did not perform what is classified as interaction, and RTs were missing in all these podcasts, which further illustrates that RTs have a significant place within interaction.

Due to space limitations in the present study, the five most frequent functions of RTs have been analysed which resulted in the categories: receipt, agreement, resumptive openers, collaborative completions and one example of a news marker. In the data it is apparent that the students are highly agreement-oriented and instances of disagreement are very rare. It has been demonstrated that the students provide both listener support and confirmations of comprehension, in which the majority was found in the former category. Previous studies which have investigated students' interactional competence and how learners demonstrate comprehension have focused on a wider variety of interactional features such as topic development and turn-taking management (Galaczi, 2013). Furthermore, Ducasse & Brown (2009) for example stress that comprehension is usually displayed through more developed responses and comments. Since the topic of investigation in the present study mainly is RTs, which by default seemingly would fall under Galaczi (2013) and Ducasse & Brown's (2009) *backchanneling*, it is not surprising that the students provide mostly listener support. Nevertheless, other listening strategies were also included in the analysis, such as collaborative finishes and resumptive openers.

Galaczi (2013) and Ducasse & Brown's (2009) division is also fruitful for a distinction between various RTs in the present discussion. This has been noted in the distinction between agreement, where *yeah* has a weaker claim of agreement and therefore also comprehension whereas *exactly* and similar have a stronger claim (extracts 4 and 5). Moreover, a distinction was made in how the students use RTs as resumptive openers.

The students demonstrated different levels of alignment and after the initial RT varying degrees of developing topic mutuality (extracts 7, 8, 9). Finally, collaborative finishes demonstrate comprehension since they are able to predict the missing word/s (extracts 9, 10, 11). In contrast, the receipt tokens (in extract 1, 2 and 3) belong to the category of ‘backchanneling’ or ‘listener support’ since they do not demonstrate any comprehension. Both studies as well as the present deem them important for the progress and co-construction of interaction. However, Ducasse & Brown (2009) warn that they can also be used as a strategy for pretending to listen. They underline that this factor contributes to the issue that assessors can view them both positively and negatively which will have different implications for the assessment of student interactions.

Furthermore, students mostly produce RTs and more substantial turns in vicinity to the TRPs, but there were notable differences between podcasts. Nevertheless, significant gaps are sometimes present but for different reasons. In extract 1 for example, the RTs were produced after significant silences but did not seem to be regarded as troublesome since the listeners seemed to produce them to indicate to the current speaker that they received her talk and acknowledged her claim to continue the turn which she had trouble finishing. Examples of more troublesome gaps were instead present in extract 8 and 3. Galaczi (2013) argues that the absence of listener support moves and the presence of gaps indicate that the students struggle to maintain both the speaker and listener role at the same time, since they have to both monitor the others’ speech as well as formulating their own responses (p. 561). Similar long gaps and absence of RTs have also been found problematic in previous research, which has investigated beginner or intermediate learners (Ducasse & Brown, 2009; Galaczi, 2013, Pauletto & Kunitz, in press). Moreover, Galaczi (2013), who investigated more advanced learners, shows that with higher levels of proficiency, gaps decrease and the usage of RTs and other listener strategies increase. Considering this, it may be that the gaps encountered in the present dataset may be due to the students’ level of proficiency, which is intermediate.

Given that the results also illustrate areas of development for the students investigated in this study, some pedagogic implications for teaching RTs will briefly be discussed. Previous research has advocated for explicit teaching of RTs and other discourse markers as well as their pragmatic functions in interaction (Gardner, 1998; Fung & Carter, 2007). Furthermore, students who have had more practice in L2 communicative and interactive tasks, such as in discussions and groupwork use more RTs and other interactive strategies (Moore, 2011; Sert, 2019). Scholars have also both argued for and investigated how CA applied in the classroom can be used for teaching interactional competence, in which RTs were included. For increasing awareness and knowledge of interactional norms in the target language as well as improve the learners’ conversational skills (Barraja-Rohan, 2011; Huth & Taleghani-Nikazm, 2006)

So far it has been noted that many scholars advocate for more incorporation of RTs and other discourse markers into foreign or second language teaching for both reception and production purposes. It is worth considering, however, that there are considerable differences between languages and cultures in the use of RTs in terms of frequency, form and placement (Beach & Lindstrom, 1992; Clancy et al., 1996; Ide, 2001; Stubbe, 1998). Furthermore, these differences can create misunderstanding in intercultural

encounters (Hanamoto, 2016; Wong, 2000). Fung & Carter (2007) raise the question whether learning English should be directed towards making the learners sound like native speakers. This is an important point since a considerable body of research is comparative between native and non-native speech or at least investigating learners' acquisition of a more or less standard variety of the language. Fung & Carter (2007) conclude that ultimately teachers have to make choices regarding content for learning, and students have to make decisions about their production. This will lead to further challenges in the classroom; however, these choices will at least increase with more knowledge on the topic (pp. 434-435).

## 6. Conclusion

The objective of the current study was to examine Swedish high school students' use of RTs in English student-produced podcasts to find out what kind of listener support they provide their peers. Nine podcasts with a total of 28 students were included in the analysis to answer which RTs the students use to perform which functions. The analysis has demonstrated that the learners in this study use RTs for five major functions while interacting, to indicate receipt, agreement, in resumptive openers, collaborative finishes and as newsmarkers. The findings also show that their usage of interactive listener strategies could be classified as both listener support and confirmations of comprehension. The majority of occurrences were found in the former category.

Overall, the students provide their partners with adequate listener support in a timely manner. Illustrating that they are attentive of grammatical, pragmatic and intonational clues of where the talk is finished, near the TRPs. Nevertheless, the results also indicate that the learners can develop further in terms of variety given the frequency of *yeah* and alignment since not all RTs were produced near the TRPs.

For future research it would be interesting to expand and deepen the objective of the current study by focusing on a slightly larger sample of data in both qualitative and quantitative terms. Although conversation analysis traditionally zooms in on relatively smaller datasets with detailed manual analyses, a larger sample of data could help us gain more insights into the use of RTs. Additionally, inclusion of visual data would allow for analyses of nonverbal communication such as gaze and gestures, being important for IC. The present study advocates for further research for the development of didactic material for IC strategies by teacher action research projects as in Barraja-Rohan (2011). Finally, more longitudinal studies using CA can be done to investigate how students L2 use in interaction develops over time as in Pekarek-Doehler (2018).

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# Appendix A

**Transcription conventions** (moderately modified from Hepburn & Bolden, 2013)

.	falling intonation
,	slightly rising intonation
?	interrogative intonation (or strongly rising intonation)
ˆ	pitch rise stronger than “,”, but less than “?”
^word	rise in pitch
word:	prolongation/ stretching of sound (: for 0.1 sec, :: for 0.2 sec etc.)
wor-	the word is interrupted
word	emphasis
>word<	fast or rushed speech
£	smiley voice
[	overlapping speech begins
]	overlapping speech ends
(word)	uncertain transcription with possible interpretation
°word°	quiet/soft voice
.h	inhalation (.h for 0.1 sec, .hh for 0.2 sec etc.)
h.	exhalation (h. for 0.1 sec, hh. for 0.2 sec etc.)
hah/heh	laughter
wor(h)d	laughter in speech
(0.8)	measured silence
(.)	brief pause, less than 0.2 seconds
=	latching speech without any discernable silence



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