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# A dynamic discourse approach to classroom research

Anne Bannink\*, Jet van Dam<sup>1</sup>

*English Department, University of Amsterdam, Spuistraat 210, 1012VT Amsterdam, The Netherlands*

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## Abstract

In this paper we propose a theoretical reassessment of the discourse-analytic tools that are used in classroom research and of the data that are addressed. To that end we present in-depth analyses of 1) an IRE structure in a first English (EFL) lesson in a Dutch secondary school; 2) episodes from Dutch as a second language classes in a school for refugee children; 3) two instructional units that were used as reflection data in a university teacher training course. All of these exhibit complex footing changes (Goffman, 1981) and instances of co-speaking, muttering, whispering, overhearing etc. that are largely unexplored in classroom research. Yet these phenomena co-construct the interactional matrix that organizes participation and learning in multiparty settings. To shed light on what happens in the structural niches of turns and at the fuzzy edges of speaking-slots-in-progress we need a more dynamic and complex notion of context. Speaker/hearer roles may be embedded in or parasitic on each other along a continuum of official and informal or collusive stances. In our proposals to model emerging discourse complexity, subtle changes in register, bodily posture, tone of voice, rhythm and pitch are an integral part of what constitutes ‘the data’.

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*Keywords:* Classroom discourse; Micro-ethnography; Educational ethnography; Multiparty interaction; Peripheral participation; Footing changes; Context-sensitivity; Nonlinear modeling

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## 1. Introduction

There is a growing realization that learning and thinking, educational success and failure, are discursively constructed in social situations as a result of the sense-making processes that participants bring to bear upon them (e.g. Cazden, 1988; Duff, 2002; Hall, 1998; Kamberelis, 2001; Koole, 2003; Kramsch, 2002; Lantolf, 2000; Mehan, 1998; Van Lier, 1996, 2004; Varenne & McDermott, 1999; Wortham, 1994). From such a perspective, classroom practices (what actually happens in the institutional situation) is primary. Classroom settings should not be the locus where

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\* Corresponding author. Tel. +31 205253053; fax: +31 205253052.

*E-mail addresses:* [e.a.bannink@uva.nl](mailto:e.a.bannink@uva.nl) (A. Bannink), [h.r.vandamvanisselt@uva.nl](mailto:h.r.vandamvanisselt@uva.nl) (J. van Dam).

<sup>1</sup> Tel. +31 205253053; fax +31 205253052.

the merits and insights from various contributing disciplines and research traditions (Educational Theories; Linguistic Theories; Cultural Theories; Pedagogy; Methodology; Language Acquisition Theory, etc.) are tested and contested. There is a risk that the compartmentalized research questions and the results they yield are not empirically, ecologically valid: congruent with the common-sense knowledge and concerns of practitioners in everyday institutional situations (cf. Cole, Hood, & McDermott, 1997). The recommendations of experts especially when based upon data obtained in laboratory situations may be irrelevant, impossible to implement, or ineffective.

In this paper we argue that the research questions and research approaches of the separate disciplines may provide us with an incomplete and, at times, reductionist view on learning and teaching in institutional multiparty situations. It is not clear, for instance, what happens to interactional behaviours that do not, in a narrow sense, qualify as ‘the lesson’. The time-outs, interruptions, incoherences, multi-voiced comments from the margin, laughter and collusive behaviours that are the norm rather than the exception in classroom situations are often ignored as data. Can we be confident that the idealized inputs and outputs that are studied in mainstream classroom (acquisition) research are ‘the real thing’ or ‘the same’ after the disruptions or ‘irrelevancies’ that contextualize them have been edited out? They provide the backdrop against which lesson agendas have to be implemented. What happens in the margins of instructional conversations feeds into the discourse and affects what is taught and what is learnt (cf. Van Dam, 2003). It is part of the (multimodal) data that classroom research should address.

It stands to reason that some degree of abstraction from the ‘noise’ of classroom life is necessary. But the least one could ask from any theory or model for the description of classroom interaction is that it attempts to articulate what it is that has been removed, ignored or taken for granted. As Nunan (1996) argues, in a plea for the ‘evolution of a nexus between classroom research and teacher education’ (41):

It seems to me that a great deal of research in our field is conducted in contexts where classroom noise either is unheard or is considered irrelevant and therefore removed from the equation before the numbers are added up and their significance determined (1996:41–42).

What is underanalyzed in classroom research does not merely concern the maintenance of classroom order. Götz (1994) has convincingly shown how, in a *Deutsch-als-Fremdsprache* (German as a second language) lesson, Cape-Verdian learners conducted a very effective ‘negotiation of meaning’ in their home language parallel to and parasitic on what happened at the level of the official lesson agenda. Time-outs and collusive floors can be exploited by both learners and teachers for core lesson business: the participation and learning of all parties in situations where multiple agendas, both lesson and non-lesson, may simultaneously have the floor. Mainstream research needs to break free from its, often implicit, reliance on linear dyadic models of communication and learning (cf. Reddy, 1993; ‘the conduit metaphor’) in which one verbal utterance at a time bounces back and forth between a speaker and a targeted addressee. In real classrooms experienced teachers develop strategies to selectively deal with the complex range of contributions from a class of 25+ human beings who all have their own agendas (cf. McDermott & Tylbor, 1986; Mehan, 1979). The challenge for researchers is to make the expert orchestration and synchronization of classroom participation and classroom events more analytically transparent.

Point of departure in this study is that the individual’s cognitive processes are inextricably interwoven with their experiences in the physical and social worlds. Very little can be taken for granted about what are good or bad learning tasks or teaching strategies. What we can do is try and gain a more precise understanding of the way contexts of interpretation in classroom multiparty situations may emerge, change and become more complex on a moment-by-moment basis

(Wortham, 1994). Addressing that complexity first may well lead to clearer insights in the effects and effectiveness of specific interventions and ways of organizing learning in instructional settings.

In Section 2 we present proposals to model how participants (and analysts) are able to distinguish between a *next* event in a current activity or lesson unit in progress and a structural move whose relevance has to be constructed in some embedded discourse domain or sub-domain. The analyses in Section 4 have been selected to illustrate the type of insights such a dynamic, structural approach to classroom multiparty data can yield. We make no claims here about their effectiveness as an instrument of change or resource for reflection (see also Bannink & Van Dam, forthcoming). Topics that will be addressed are: switches between codes and registers in a traditional IRF structure in an EFL lesson (4.1); complex participation frames and speaker-hearer roles in Dutch as a second language classes (4.2); the recursive embedding of discourse contexts and the maintenance of classroom order (4.3).

## 2. A dynamic discourse approach to classroom interaction

A characteristic feature of classroom multiparty talk that baffles both the beginning practitioner and the would-be analyst is its interruptability. In fact, what probably most distinguishes expert teachers from their less experienced colleagues is their ability to orchestrate shifts into and out of the business at hand in interactive situations with large numbers of learners. In this section we present proposals to model how an utterance or interactional event can be recognized as *marked* with respect to default expectations as to what would be a relevant *next* move in an activity or discourse unit currently in progress. By definition these types of moves yield increased complexity for participants' interpretation of what is going on. That meaning is not on the inside of an utterance is by now uncontroversial (Hanks, 1996; McDermott & Tylbor, 1986). But if context determines how a classroom event or interactional move is interpreted in the situation, and if contexts or frames for the interpretation of events can change or be updated on a moment-by-moment basis, it is essential that we gain a more precise understanding of how participants keep track of 'where they are' in an evolving discourse (cf. Erickson & Shultz, 1981).

In some sense everything that happens between the bells that signal the beginning and the end of a lesson at school is 'the lesson'. Even if not part of a focused learning activity in the narrow sense of the term, whatever happens can at least be reported as having occurred during the lesson. For instance: 'We had such a laugh in the English lesson—a wasp flew into the classroom and we all shouted and went after it and then the teacher organized a wasp hunt and we all cheered X who was appointed wasp-killer' (Van Dam, 2002; Van Dam (van Isselt), 1993). Clearly such an episode creates an interruption of a lesson-unit-in-progress and on the spot introduces completely different scenarios for what can go on there. But what happens to the lesson, the institutional event that has been interrupted? All along participants are aware that, as soon as the embedded (in the case of our example: wasp) business is over, a return to lesson tasks and institutional roles automatically becomes relevant. This example illustrates how interruptions and embeddings create *structural* rather than sequential transition points in an ongoing discourse. Since they "not only presuppose context but also create new context" (Wortham, 1994: 13), the challenge is to articulate a notion of current context that can handle this complexity.

In traditional lessons a verbal 'where were we?' on the part of the teacher typically makes the closure of embedded units like interruptions and digressions definitive. Such a structural discourse operator or POP-marker (Polanyi & Scha, 1983; Polanyi, 1988) often occurs in combination with 'well', 'right', 'so', or 'ok' (cf. Dorr-Bremme, 1990). In the case of interruptions discourse operators signal the return to a still open, unfinished unit, an earlier state of talk that has been frozen,

as it were, until reactivated and resumed. But shifts into (PUSH) and out of (POP) the business at hand are also routinely cued by (partial) repetition of previous material, by prosodic shifts, by switches in code or register, and changes in bodily posture. All of these verbal, nonlinguistic and paralinguistic markers signal a break or discontinuity with what went on before. More complex presuppositions for the organization of utterances and interactional behaviours are locally introduced and have to be oriented too.

Units in progress inherit an orientation to their embedding higher-order parameter settings (cultural, institutional, situational and so on; cf. Bannink, 2002; Van Dam, 2003). In the example mentioned above the teacher draws upon a culturally available scenario ('a hunt') that overrules institutional roles in order to resolve a potentially chaotic classroom situation. But she also *re-embeds* her institutional right to allocate turns and tasks (McHoul, 1978). She is the one who appoints the wasp killer and signals when the wasp hunt is over ('recursive embedding', Polanyi & Scha, 1983; Polanyi, 1988).

In the classroom as elsewhere speaker/hearer roles are seldom discrete and monolithic (cf. Goffman, 1979, 1981). Just as we can quote others we can momentarily embed a different 'self' without invalidating the earlier one ('footing changes' or complex speaker roles; *ibidem*). For instance, in a service encounter a customer can momentarily address a crying child in her role of mother while placing her order or return a friend's greeting without losing her right to continue her order. And in institutional multiparty situations utterances may indirectly target an overhearing peer while overtly directed at an addressed student who is supposed to answer back (complex hearer roles, innuendo, collusion; *ibidem*).

Formal school settings normally generate specific expectations for and constraints on who can do or say what. Asymmetrical rights and obligations for participants in the role of teacher and those in the role of student are fixed by convention (cf. McHoul, 1978). However, more egalitarian unmarked cultural systems can locally be shifted to, e.g. conversational turn-taking systems (Sacks, Schegloff, & Jefferson, 1974) or politeness systems (Brown & Levinson, 1987). Global cultural systems are never completely overruled by more specific, for instance, institutional ones. They can be re-embedded when the situation so requires.

As a result of the stacking and nesting of units, subunits and participation frameworks, normative expectations about what is a relevant next move can become highly complex and overdetermined (cf. Bateson, 1972). One of the puzzles that faces analysts and practitioners alike is how cultural, social and interactional systems are interconnected in actual, situated, emerging discourses (cf. Leather & Van Dam, 2003; Van Lier, 2004). The emphasis on linear sequential features of talk has obscured the extent to which frames for the interpretation of events can be invalidated, partly overruled and re-embedded (with different implications) on a moment-by-moment basis.

Many of the features described above have of course been noticed and investigated by other educational ethnographers and discourse analysts. Our proposals aim to contribute to the body of professional knowledge by highlighting the importance of fine-grained observation, analytic rigor, and coherence. In the analyses below we hope to show that a well-defined, dynamic notion of current context (and the identification of contexts that are blurred or ambiguous) will enrich our understanding of what goes on in complex classroom situations.

### 3. Collection of data; background information about the data

The data we discuss in this paper originate from various instructional contexts. They were selected in order to demonstrate specific theoretical points that have consequences for what counts as data and for how these data could be transcribed and analyzed. Not in itself an ethnography the

paper draws on micro-ethnographic methods that emphasize detailed observation in situ, micro-analyses of transcribed data and triangulated inquiry: the *etic* embraces the *emic* (cf. Pike, 1967; Van Lier, 1988).

The first data (4.1) is taken from a small corpus of first English lessons (English as a foreign language or EFL) in Dutch secondary schools (cf. Van Dam (van Isselt), 1993; Van Dam, 2002). The lessons were observed and then transcribed on the basis of two audio-recordings (two machines in different parts of the classroom) and online notes. There were post-lesson conversations with the teacher who was an ex-colleague and friend. The learners were a group of 12–13-year-olds, who were new to the school, new to each other and new to the teacher. Some had had some formal training in English at primary school level, others had not. So, while the group was fairly homogeneous in terms of linguistic and socio-cultural background (students were middle-class monolinguals or at least fluent in Dutch) the differences between them in formal knowledge of English were considerable. Additional recordings were made in this group 3 weeks later and towards the end of the year.

The second set of data (4.2) is based on six hours of videotapes of lessons Dutch as a second language (L2-Dutch) in a school for refugee children in the North of Holland. There were 13 children between the ages of 6 and 9. Some had lived in the Netherlands for 10 months, others had arrived just a week ago. Their language abilities thus varied widely as did their cultural backgrounds. Some had received formal tuition in their home country before they came to the Netherlands, others had never seen the inside of a school before. The teacher was an experienced primary school teacher with no special training in teaching linguistically and culturally heterogeneous groups.

The third set of data (4.3) originated in reflection assignments in a graduate EFL teacher education course taught by the authors at the Graduate School of Teaching and Learning at the University of Amsterdam. The first episode was transcribed from video by one of the student teachers (see also Bannink & Van Dam, forthcoming). She submitted it to her peer group as an instance of the type of trouble she regularly came up against when trying to maintain classroom order. In the course of the group discussions we asked the students how experienced teachers deal with these types of trouble. This resulted in transcript 4. One of the other students came up with this episode taken from a video recording of a lesson taught by his school tutor.

We had informal conversations with the first two teachers immediately after the lessons observed and also later as a check on the analyses in progress. Where relevant we have referred to the insights these conversations yielded. We gratefully acknowledge the considerable contributions of the anonymous teachers and student teachers to this study.

#### **4. Structural features of classroom interactions: the analyses**

In this section we aim to show how a structural, dynamic approach to classroom interaction as presented in the proposals in Section 2 can become an instrument in classroom research and, possibly, teacher education. The challenge is to make what happens in institutional multiparty interactions more analytically transparent, while making minimal a priori assumptions about what should be going on there.

##### *4.1. Emerging discourse complexity: the interactional construction of incompetence*

The first data we will discuss is an instance of a much researched, almost prototypical, exchange structure in classroom talk: the three-part Initiation-Response-Evaluation/Feedback

structure (IRE/F; see e.g. Cazden, 1988; Lemke, 1990; Sinclair & Coulthard, 1975; Van Lier, 1988; Wells, 1993). We will not take a stance in ongoing discussions about its effectiveness in promoting learning and empowerment in educational settings. We trust that detailed structural analyses of actual occurrences of the IRE in educational settings will eventually feed into those discussions (e.g. Kamberelis, 2001).

The setting is a conventional teacher-fronted first English (EFL) lesson, taught on the very first day of the academic year in a secondary school in the Netherlands. There are twenty-five 12–13-year-old learners who have been randomly placed together in group 1B. Some have had some formal tuition in English at primary school level, others have had none. But in the Dutch context they have all been exposed to English informally through films, media and pop culture. Teacher B is a native speaker of English who is also fluent in Dutch.

After addressing the students in Dutch for 5 minutes on procedural matters, she switches to English (“But why am I speaking in Dutch? This is an English lesson isn’t it?”). From that moment onwards English is the medium of instruction and default language of interaction in the lesson. Of course the teacher accommodates her speech to what these beginning learners can be expected to understand. Throughout the lesson she speaks in a simplified teacher talk register (Cazden, 1988) that shares features with caretaker and foreigner talk registers documented in out-of-school settings (Ferguson, 1977). It is characterized by frequent repetitions and reformulations, long decoding pauses, emphatic articulation and prosodic contours.

The episode transcribed below occurs about half way into the lesson. The students have just been taught to say the English numbers up to a hundred. The next item on the lesson agenda is to learn and practise the names of the letters of the English alphabet. In making the transition to this new topic, the teacher asks how many letters there are in the alphabet. She thus creates a conversational topic shift as well as an opportunity for the students to display transfer: they can show that they are now able to say ‘twenty-six’ in a new context.

We will summarize what happened and zoom in on finer points later. Victor is assigned the turn but no response in the slot for student answers is forthcoming. The teacher waits, makes an off-record remark and waits again. Still there is no answer. Another student is called upon. She provides the correct answer and is praised.

*Transcript 1<sup>2</sup>*

- T* UHM – let me see – [lower pitch] listen please – [high pitch, slow, emphatic speech] HOW many – LETTERS – are there – in the – ALPHABET – in the – ALPHABET – how many – LETTERS are there – [allocates turn] VICTOR? –
- SVic* - - - [long silence]
- Ss* [hands raised]
- T* [very fast native speaker register] are you going to COUNT them all?
- SVic* –
- T* [slow, low pitch] WELL – we’ll come back to you – later=
- Sss* =[hands raised]
- T* [turns to Rosemary, allocates turn] YES?
- SRos* twenty-six
- T* you’re QUITE right – it IS twenty-six – ABSolutely

What we intuitively understand about this data is that here is a student who fails and who is framed as incompetent and inarticulate. Except for some insightful studies in the ethnography of speaking (e.g. McDermott, 1994; Philips, 1972; Tannen & Saville-Troike, 1985) there is no instrument to interpret silence. Pedagogy does not provide us with the tools to do so and neither

<sup>2</sup> Transcription conventions

does (educational) linguistics. Sandwiched between a teacher question and the teacher's evaluation of a student's zero answer, what it is a learner cannot understand, does not know or cannot say is often equated with what it was the teacher intended to ask or wanted to hear. In trying to establish a reading for Victor's silence (we have no metadata) we will systematically check various discourse contexts that could be involved.

When a student answer slot in a canonical classroom IRE structure remains empty, the floor automatically returns to the teacher (McHoul, 1978). It is up to him or her to initiate a negotiation of its meaning or scaffold whatever it was the student addressed did not know or understand. But constructing feedback on the nature of a learner's problem is problematic if the teacher strictly observes the self-imposed rule of addressing the learners exclusively in English. While the interactional conditions created here superficially resemble those obtaining in ESL (English as a second language) classes where English is the lingua franca by necessity rather than by choice, there is a crucial difference. In an emergency, for instance if a fire were to break out, everyone would immediately shift back to Dutch. The shared L1 or meta-language is always available even if it is temporarily overruled. English-only teaching strategies construct a game domain, a lesson sub-domain, not a real world interactional domain: at any moment the participants can stop pretending that they can only communicate in English.

In fact, a first option to consider is whether the discursive conditions created in this first English lesson could not themselves be the trouble source (cf. system constraints on communication; Goffman, 1981; Hatch, 1992). Can we be confident that Victor understood what the question in English was about? The English word 'alphabet' is pronounced very differently from its Dutch counterpart though in writing the two words look the same. And even if Victor did understand and was absolutely certain that '26' was the correct answer, he might still wonder whether he should say 'twenty-six' or 'six-and-twenty' or be afraid that his pronunciation was not up to scratch. These conjectures only serve to show that Victor may have had a host of other reasons for remaining silent apart from 'not knowing how many letters there are in the alphabet'. And that realization triggers another crucial question and structural discourse issue: what alphabet did the teacher refer to?

In principle a question in English inherits English-based knowledge domains. For instance, the default interpretation of the question: *When you went to London did you see the Queen?*, even when addressed to a Dutch person, is that Queen Elizabeth is being referred to, not Queen Beatrix. At the very least the question raises ambiguities as to who is meant that cannot be resolved if there is no metalanguage to switch to. It is not unreasonable to assume that, if Victor understood the question at all, he may have taken it as referring to the number of letters in the *English* alphabet. But the letters of the English alphabet are just about to be taught. He does not know how many there

T	:	teacher
S	:	student
S + initial	:	identified student, initial indicating first name
Sx, Sy	:	unidentified students
SSS	:	several or all students simultaneously
[ ]	:	contextual information, meta-comments
=	:	immediately adjacent utterances
[	:	overlapping utterances/moves
?	:	rising intonation, often indicating question
BROTHER	:	emphasis through pitch, tone or volume
---	:	marked pause
[mime ----]	:	ongoing nonverbal activities
-	:	unmarked pause



are and an intelligent 12-year-old may be well aware that not all alphabets have the same number of letters. He certainly cannot count them. Nor can he ask for clarification. He cannot speak in English or meta-communicate about his problem in Dutch. He has the choice to make a fault or be at fault: switch to Dutch and break a classroom rule or be exposed as dumb and incompetent. His problem has no floor: he remains inarticulate (cf. Bateson, 1972; McDermott, 1994).

Can we infer from the teacher's reaction in the situation how she assesses the nature of Victor's predicament? When no learner answer is forthcoming she POPs out of the ongoing IRE structure with a conversational aside. It interrupts his *wait time* (e.g. Nunan, 1991; Rowe, 1986; Thornbury, 1996) and provides a filler for the interactional vacuum it creates for the rest of the class. Features of its production format (pace, intonation, rhythm) clearly mark it as a shift from the teacher talk register to the native speaker English register. This cannot be the third-place teacher Evaluation move that is sequentially relevant in IRE units. It is a structural move, a change in footing (Goffman, 1979) in which the teacher momentarily distances herself from her official role. The 'joke' provides a window on her line of thought. She attributes Victor's silence to his not *knowing* how many letters there are in *the* alphabet, locating it in a cognitive cultural domain, i.e. normative expectations about what any 12-year-old should know off-hand. There is no suggestion that she considered alternative possibilities, i.e. that floor constraints or ambiguities arising in the current discourse situation might themselves be a trouble source.

The intra-code switch to the informal conversational English register provides Victor with more difficult input and another question he is unable to answer or defuse. His silence is now indexed both as a failure to provide a lesson answer and a failure to save his face. The discourse parameters of the second instalment of Victor's silence have become more complex. In the current classroom situation the use of the *conversational* English register is incoherent: it presupposes competent native listeners rather than beginning learners of English. Unlike the teacher, Victor cannot shift to a conversational role or footing to comment on his predicament. A problem-solving approach would have necessitated a different type of switch: an invitation to Victor to metacommunicate in L1-Dutch about the nature of his problem with a follow-up scaffolding move. Considering that the teacher broke her own 'rule' later on in the lesson and switched to Dutch when classroom discipline was at stake, such a move is significantly absent here.

The discourse marker 'well' signals that conventional expectations about what is a relevant next act (here: a teacher evaluation move) may have to be modified. It is a structural marker that serves 'as a signpost that directs the addressees to renegotiate the relevant background assumptions, either because a new set of assumptions becomes relevant or because some of the relevant assumptions are mistaken.' (Jucker, 1993: 446). The next teacher utterance closes off what now has to be *re-analyzed as a subunit of the IRE in progress*: only the interaction with Victor. The discourse automatically POPs back to the original question that is still open and that is inherited by the current state of talk. It recursively makes a turn allocation to a different student sequentially relevant. The learners recognize this: several hands are raised. Rosemary gives the correct answer – the answer that the teacher had in mind.

Victor was given a second chance ("We'll come back to you later"). Five minutes later, when the names of the letters of the English alphabet were being solicited in class, he was allocated the turn to say the letter 'j' in English. He said 'dzji:', the sound of the English letter 'g'. The teacher repeated 'dzji:?' with marked question intonation and prosodic contours. She continued: 'We already had 'g' before – we don't want TWO letters named 'g' – do we – that would be too difficult.' Again, what it is a learner does not know is interpreted in a personal domain: as evidence of lack of underlying rationality rather than a learner's struggle with English phonology. And again, for lack of language he cannot refute the implication (cf. O'Driscoll, 2001).

#### 4.1.1. Discussion

The analyses illustrate that the consequences of target language teaching strategies may be incompletely understood. Apart from procedural consequences, they introduce complexities in the discourse that teachers may be unaware of and that affect what it is a seemingly innocent comment or lesson question refers to. The same goes for global recommendations to provide learners with plenty of ‘wait time’. All of these recommendations are *context-sensitive* (cf. Arminen, 2000): the particulars of specific teaching/learning situations determine their effect and effectiveness. Most experienced teachers know this and selectively adopt the recommendations of experts. Rather than assuming randomness or inconsistency on teachers’ part, researchers should try and articulate the underlying rationality – or otherwise – of the choices teachers locally make.

What about Victor? In our first conversation with the teacher, immediately after the lesson from which this data was taken, he was the only student she made a spontaneous comment about. He had struck her as really odd, either not very clever or just strange (cf. Philips, 1972). This impression remained with her until he left school at the end of the year. Whether he succeeded in constructing a voice and social identity for himself in the new language we do not know. Numerous publications remind us of the fact that identities and differential perceptions of students are ‘radically dependent on situation and function not so much as a priori inputs to interaction but more as outcomes of it’ (O’Driscoll, 2001: 245; see also Leather & Van Dam, 2003; Martin-Jones & Heller, 1996; Rampton, 1995). From a language socialization perspective (e.g. Duff, 2002; Kramsch, 1993, 2002) identities are both ‘brought along’ and ‘brought about’ (Koole, 2003: 22) over time in emerging discourses and communities of practice. ‘Such a view locates monolingual and multilingual settings, foreign and second language learning and teaching along a continuum and explores commonalities rather than presupposing differences between them’ (Van Dam, 2003: 218). Victor’s inarticulateness is not unlike that of the proverbial ‘silent Indian’ (cf. McDermott, 1994). His silences are cast as cultural errors not classroom faults. If these are important distinctions, we should devise analytical tools that help us understand how and under what discursive conditions they arise.

#### 4.2. Structural features of interactions: the interactional construction of competence

Just as inarticulateness and incompetence of learners can emerge in and through classroom situations – as illustrated in the previous section – so can competence, membership and empowerment. Below we will analyze two episodes from Dutch as a second language classes in a school for refugee children. They illustrate how linguistic development can be constructed at the other end of the ‘smart-dumb continuum’ (McDermott & Tylbor, 1986: 132) by creating opportunities for multimodal participation in joint activities and exploiting structural features of evolving discourses and speaker/hearer roles.

The language abilities of the students we observed varied widely as did their cultural backgrounds. One girl had arrived just a week before, another had been in Holland for barely a month. Yet the interactions both in the language classes and the content classes seemed fairly unproblematic. The students clearly understood the procedural instructions they were given during the different parts of the day. Individual reactions to teacher requests for action were generally prompt. In the language lessons all students seemed to perform more or less the same tasks. They all participated enthusiastically and differences in competence between them were not immediately obvious. Below we will trace the discourse strategies on the part of the teacher that were mainly responsible for this state of affairs.



Fig. 1. Students in inner and outer circle mime drinking.

During the first part of the morning the students and the teacher were seated in a circle as is common practice in Dutch primary education. The teacher looked around the circle and asked a number of the more experienced students to stand up and take a step forward. They constituted an inner circle of officially appointed speaker/actors who, together with the teacher, started to act out and name daily routines such as waking up, washing, dressing, eating, etc. The teacher gave prompts and timed the transitions to next activities and vocabulary items. She visually subtitled the interaction with gestures and movements and now and then elicited new vocabulary through elaborating on these ‘primal’ scenes: when you take a shower “you also have to wash behind your ears”, for instance. The key items remained in focus throughout, but there were also plenty of opportunities for the more experienced learners to come up with novel productions and improvisations that were taken over and incorporated in the ongoing discourse. Since most activities constructed extended speaking slots (you cannot eat your breakfast in three seconds) there was ample time to repeat the keywords for the less proficient learners while allowing for enough variation to engage and challenge the more advanced ones. All students participated in the miming, including those in ‘second row’ (Fig. 1).

Note that the learners who are sitting in the outer circle were not *officially* assigned a role in the proceedings. For them an ambiguous, ‘off-record’ interactional domain was created in the context of the collective act-and-say classroom game. Participation was based wholly on the principle of self-regulation (cf. Donato, 1994). They could but did not *have to* take part in the miming or verbal naming of actions in progress. For every item and from moment to moment all students could select the participation mode they felt most comfortable with, in accordance with their current, self-assessed levels of competence and confidence. Less experienced students could observe and join in the actions and at the same time listen in on the output of the more competent peers in their immediate environment (cf. Rogoff, Paradise, Mejía Auraz, Correa-Chávez, & Angelillo, 2003). This enabled them to do peer-scaffolded self-corrections or ‘first-tries’ by coming in late at the fuzzy edges of speaking slots in-progress. Their participation was gradient along an emergent nonverbal/verbal continuum: just miming, lip modelling, whispering of keywords, and, eventually, private speech (Lantolf & Appel, 1994) or at least full vocalization. In this way the inner-outer circle configuration constructed a ‘hatchery’ for language, not a floor (cf. Goffman, 1981: 151, ‘a teething-ring for utterances’). The peripheral participation (Lave & Wenger, 1991) of the students in the outer circle mediated the transition from overhearer roles to mutterer/speaker roles. In terms

<b>Teacher</b>	what do we do next?		then you EAT- okay have sth. to EAT [mimes]	what are you going to EAT?		bread - and a drink -you have a nice DRINK [mimes]	what are you going to drink?	fine-okay have a nice drink [mimes - -]	yeah - a nice drink of WATER
<b>Inner Circle (standing)</b> Samira Angela Nema Chris Rovi		then we eat	[mimes -----]			[mimes -- lemonade [mimes -----] [mimes -----] [mimes -----] [mimes -----]		tea, water	[mimes -----]
<b>Outer circle (sitting)</b> Dua Raima Wolf A. Rabia Ali Amina Zuchrab Zohra			[mimes ---- ]			[mimes ----- ] [mimes ----- ] [mimes ----- ] [mimes ----- ] [mimes ----- ]		milk	[mimes ----- ] water [mimes ----- ] yes milk - [mimes ----- ] wa [whisper]
				bread					[liprounding]

Fig. 2. Participation across verbal, non-verbal and paralinguistic modes.

of the language socialisation paradigm and Vygotsky's proposals about development in the zone of proximal development (Vygotsky, 1978) we were allowed 'a snapshot of the ZPD' (Ohta, 2001: 34). Since it is difficult to render simultaneous participation modes in conventional transcripts, we zoom in on a short sequence that mainly involves one-word utterances (see Fig. 2).

Later in the day the teacher took a group of eight students to another room for a 'Total Physical Response' (TPR; Asher, 1977) episode. Individual learners were called upon to follow up formulaic instructions and perform actions that identified specific landmarks in the classroom. One might expect that the differences in linguistic competence between the learners would now become salient. They did not: all learners seemed to perform their tasks flawlessly. It is only when we zoom in on details of each of the teacher's instructions-in-progress that we get a glimpse of the intricate organization of learning and multimodal scaffolding that was in evidence all through the day (as shown in transcript 2):

#### Transcript 2

The teacher and eight learners are sitting in a circle; Rabia, Rovi, Angela, Dua and Ali are the more experienced learners; Amina, Zohra and Zuchrab are newcomers.

T Okay - Angela - go to the DOOR [A. walks to the door]  
 Rabia - go to the WINDOW [R. walks to the window].  
 Ali - go to the BLACKBOARD [A. walks to the blackboard]  
 Dua - go to the clock - the CLOCK [D. walks to the clock]  
 Rovi - go to the tape-recorder - the TAPE-recorder - [Rovi starts moving in the direction of the recorder; teacher nods] - well done  
 And Amina go to the DOOR - [softly] that's where Angela is, you see?  
 [ gaze in direction door, puts arm around A.'s shoulder  
 turning her body gently in right direction; A. walks to the door]  
 And Zohra - go to RABIA [points arm in right direction; Z. walks to R.]  
 And Zuchrab - go to the BLACKBOARD [learner hesitates]  
 [ softly] where Ali is [Z walks to the board]  
 VERY good

*De lerares en acht leerlingen zitten in een cirkel; Rabia, Rovi, Angela, Dua en Ali zijn de meer ervaren leerders; Amina, Zohra en Zugrab zijn net aangekomen.*

*T*            *Okay – Angela – loop naar de DEUR [A. loopt naar de deur]*  
*Rabia – loop naar het RAAM [R. loopt naar het raam]*  
*Dua – loop naar de klok – de KLOK [D. loopt naar de klok]*  
*Rovi – loop naar de cassette-recorder – the CASSETTE-recorder [Rovi loopt in de richting van de recorder; lerares knikt] - goed zo*  
*En Amina loop naar de DEUR – [zachtjes]waar Angela staat, zie je?*  
                  [                                 ]  
                  *[kijkt naar de deur, slaat arm om de schouder van A. en draait haar zachtjes in de richting van de deur; A. loopt naar de deur]*  
*En Zohra – loop naar RABIA [wijst in de richting; Z. loopt naar R.]*  
*En Zugrab – loop naar het BORD [leerling aarzelt]*  
                  [                                 ]  
                  *[zacht] waar Ali staat [Z. loopt naar het bord]*  
  
*HEEL goed*

As the sequence progressed, it became clear that the teacher asked the more experienced children to perform certain acts first, so they were contextualized in the situation before one of the newcomers was requested to perform more or less the same actions (there was more variation and elaboration later on in the sequence). Turns and tasks were in fact carefully positioned in the discourse not randomly distributed: they were designed to construct rather than find competence. Understanding was bootstrapped in the situation.

The teacher's body language showed that she was alert during the 'production' of each turn. Although she knew approximately what each of the learners could understand she was constantly on guard for any mismatch between her a priori expectations and what actually happened in the situation. At the slightest hitch or hesitation she immediately supplied an extra sotto-voce verbal hint, for instance, 'Go to the blackboard – [Zugrab hesitates] – *[low voice] where Ali is*' (even newly arrived students know the names of their peers, of course). As an alternative strategy she anticipated Amina's possible non-understanding by subtitling her instructions with nonverbal cues. She visually identified the target location and gently guided the student's bodily orientation in the right direction. All of these finely tuned scaffolding moves were collusively performed: as *structural components of an instructional unit-in-progress* and without noticeably delaying the next relevant act, the actual performance of the action by the students. Since these types of moves do not occupy a legitimate interactional space of their own, they are often not publicly noticed, either in the classroom situation or in classroom research. Interventions that occur before next turn becomes current do not count as other-corrections (cf. Schegloff, Jefferson, & Sacks, 1997; Van Dam, 1993, 2002). Structural scaffolding moves enabled the teacher to frame these students' competent performances as their sole accomplishment.

#### 4.2.1. Discussion

The activities described above evoke participation modes and communicative practices documented for early stages of language development and language socialization in various cultures and settings (e.g. Heath, 1982, 1983; Ochs & Schieffelin, 1983). Newcomers have to rely primarily on cues and events in the domains of physical activity and expressive behaviour. Formulaic phrases associated with junctures in routine and ritual behaviours (Ellis, 1998) mediate learners' 'coming into language' (Toolan, 2003). Such affordances can also be created in off-record niches of institutional talk. Being assigned competence and membership is conditional for learners' linguistic development (cf. also Pallotti, 2003).

The emphasis on dyadic conversational frames in western societies has obscured the extent to which a multimodal reading of the situation is essential and explanatory in determining success and failure in educational settings. Non-verbal, prosodic and paralinguistic features of talk; changes in tone of voice, rhythm and timing (cf. Goodwin, 1981; Kendon, 1992; Scollon, 1982) are crucially involved in minimizing the risk of failure and loss of face. The importance of these subtle cues in the *orchestration* of learners' turns at talk and classroom behaviours has long been noticed (e.g. Cazden, 1988: 171). They can only become part of the repertoire of (novice) teachers if we devise observational tools to bring them to light and make them transparent.

#### 4.3. Emergent discourse complexity: classroom management

Classroom management and discipline are traditionally hot items on (novice) teachers agendas, and understandably so. There are a number of dilemmas here that can be predicted. Among the professional obligations of teachers is the requirement that they structure learning tasks, give instructions and maintain continuity and coherence at the level of the lesson agenda. Corrections of classroom misbehaviours disrupt that continuity. On the other hand, if off-task behaviours such as continuous comments on the behaviour of others, lengthy in-group conversations and interruptions of lesson activities for other business are ignored, conditions for learning are equally at risk. The explicit verbal correction of classroom misbehaviours is almost by definition an interactional fault. It interrupts the lesson agenda for other business ('PUSH') and requires extra interactional work to establish a return ('POP') to that agenda. This is especially salient in multiparty situations. In the course of the correction sequence, the attention of those students who were on task before may start to wander. Thus, one fault may generate a cascade of faults, as will be illustrated below.

##### 4.3.1. Introducing the data

All students attending the 1-year post-graduate teacher education program at the University of Amsterdam are required to have two of their lessons taped for a video reflection assignment (cf. Bannink & Van Dam, *forthcoming*). The following episode is taken from one of those lessons. It shows how a student teacher deals with disciplinary problems in her grade 10 classroom. During the previous lesson the teacher had introduced measures to improve classroom discipline. One of these involved writing the names of misbehaving students on a list on the blackboard. Three offences meant trouble and sanctions.

##### Transcript 3

- SSS [students talk among each other]  
 T PSSS – let ME talk for a change [...] I've noticed that – [Hiba starts talking; teacher raises her voice]  
 HIBA – once more and your name 'll be on the board too – this is my last warning and this time I'll make sure you really have to sweat=  
 Sx =[raises hand]  
 T yes?  
 Sx why don't I get a warning?  
 T the warning is like one, two, three, just like last time – only me [cut-off, does not finish her explanation] – OK I think most of you talk too much [pauses to write Hiba's name on the blackboard]  
 Sy I'm not doing anything so you've got nothing on me  
 T you can keep on talking – but so can I  
 SSS [leerlingen zijn aan het praten]  
 T PSSS – even mij laten praten [...] het valt mij op dat – [Hiba begint te praten; leraar verheft stem] HIBA – nog EEN keer en je staat ook op het bord – dit is de LAATSTE waarschuwing en deze keer zorg ik dat je er niet onderuit komt=

- Sx        *[steekt haar hand op]*  
 T        *yes?*  
 Sx        *waarom krijg IK geen waarschuwing?*  
 T        *de waarschuwing is een, twee, drie – net als vorige keer – alleen ik – [maakt haar uitleg niet af] – OK - ik vind dat de meeste van jullie te veel kletsen [stopt even om Hiba's naam op het bord te schrijven]*  
 Sy        *ik doe niks dus je kunt mij niks maken*  
 T        *je kunt wel verder kletsen – dat kan ik ook*

Clearly all of the novice teacher's disciplinary moves generate spontaneous conversational next moves on the part of the students. The explicit verbal correction of one student provokes a particularly ingenious next disruption on the part of her peer. She uses a correct, unmarked institutional bid-for-the-floor procedure to gain permission to speak up (raising her hand) and, having got that permission, uses it to question the rules of the embedded sanction game. Questions construct adjacency pairs that make a responding move on the part of the addressee sequentially relevant. Thus, the teacher is drawn into a doubly embedded discussion about exactly how the rules are and that discussion takes the discourse even further away from lesson-related business and tasks. No wonder she cuts off her explanations, in the realization they do not lead anywhere. The continuity – such as it was – of the lesson as planned is now completely lost.

In an attempt to remedy the situation the novice teacher now follows up a recommendation that is often proposed in teacher education courses as a strategy to improve relations between the students and the teacher. She shifts to a more personal stance and delivers an 'ik-boodschap' or 'I-message' (Gordon, 2003): '*ik vind dat de meesten van jullie te veel kletsen*' – 'I think most of you talk too much'). But shifting to a more informal conversational stance invites more informal moves in return. Without bidding for the floor another student now uses her conversational right to self-select to exempt herself from the global accusation: she is not among the set of students thus negatively referred to. Her very denial constructs a new violation as well as a challenge to the teacher's authority: the ritual fault many novice teachers are most afraid of. The situation has now become completely incoherent, overdetermined (Bateson, 1972). It is hard to imagine what would be a relevant next move. The only way out is a metacomment about the situation that names her predicament: this is a verbal contest in which she hopes to have the last word.

#### 4.3.2. Discussion

Recommendations about what are adequate strategies to deal with unruly classes often focus on the content level of messages and ignore their interactional consequences in multiparty situations. If continuity and coherence at the level of the lesson agenda are a primary concern, 'I-messages' are likely to aggravate problems rather than repair them. An important item on the agenda of teacher education courses should be monitoring how contexts change and reflecting on the interactional consequences of these changes. Novice teachers may have to *unlearn* default *conversational* responses to learner utterances: in some situations questions are better left unanswered. On the other hand they have to *learn* how to build in conversational by-play, improvisation, and comic relief to defuse the inevitable slack moments that are inherent in the routine of everyday institutional interactions (Kamberelis, 2001: 122; see also Van Dam, 2003).

How do expert teachers deal with these types of situations? When we put that question to our cohort of novice teachers their first reaction was that they seldom seemed to occur. Apparently most experienced teachers have developed strategies to anticipate what might happen and/or have devised other means to maintain coherence at the level of the lesson agenda. In the following episode an experienced language teacher is giving instructions for a 'spot-the-differences' fluency task that is to be done in pairs in a grade 7 EFL classroom. We will focus on the way he succeeds

in re-locating a turn at talk, a learner question, by shifting to the nonverbal channel, in such a way that it does not interrupt his instructions-in-progress. The relevant nonverbal behaviours are rendered in bold in the transcript:

*Transcript 4*

- T *you are supposed to keep on firing questions at one another*  
**[Rashish raises his hand, teacher directs his gaze at him while he keeps talking]**  
*and in picture number TWO*  
**[averts his gaze from Rashish who lowers his hand]**  
*a teacher is explaining something in front of a class – right? – and then Tara says – Uh – is there – uh – a TEACHER in your picture? – YES – Is he standing in FRONT of the class? – YES – is he talking to the class? YES – well [softly] then that is the same picture – SO YOU KNOW - THAT one – that one is the SAME*  
**[Rashish raises his hand again, the teacher immediately directs his gaze at R., raises his arm and points at R, tilting his chin backwards to show he has not finished yet; R. drops his hand but keeps his pen up in the air to signal he still claim to the floor]**  
*OK? – [softly] and you only have to WRITE DOWN which pictures are DIFFERENT –*  
**[allocates turn to Rashish who still has his pen up in the air]**  
 RASHISH?
- SR *what do you do if they are different?*
- T *you write down the number*
- T *de bedoeling is natuurlijk dat je een beetje beter doorvraagt*  
**[Rashish steekt zijn vinger op; de leraar kijkt naar hem terwijl hij doorpraat]**  
*en bij plaatje TWEE*  
**[kijkt weg van Rashish die zijn vinger laat zakken]**  
*heb je een leraar die iets uitlegt voor de klas – right? – dan zegt Tara- Uh - is there – a – TEACHER in your picture? – YES – Is he standing in FRONT of the class? – YES – Is he talking to the class – YES – well [zachtjes] then that is the same picture – DUS JE WEET - DIE – die is gelijk*  
**[Rashish' hand gaat weer omhoog; de leraar kijkt meteen naar hem en wijst naar hem, maar tilt tegelijkertijd zijn kin op ten teken dat hij nog niet uitgesproken is; R. laat zijn vinger zakken maar houdt zijn pen op om zijn 'claim to the floor' te continueren]**  
*OK? – [zachtjes] je hoeft alleen OP te schrijven de plaatjes die VERSCHILLEND zijn*  
**[geeft beurt aan Rashish die nog steeds zijn pen omhoog houdt]**  
 RASHISH?
- SR *wat doe je als ze verschillend zijn wat doe je dan?*
- T *dan schrijf je het nummer van dat plaatje op*

Without yielding the floor but embedded in his monologue the teacher has managed to sustain a collusive negotiation with Rashish that his claim to the floor has been seen and registered, but is not yet in force, is being postponed. It is not accidental that Rashish raises his hand again immediately after a possible juncture (closure) in the instruction sequence that is marked by emphatic intonation and the verbal POP-marker ‘*dus*’ (approximately English ‘so’): ‘*DUS JE WEET*’ ... (SO YOU KNOW ...). Once more Rashish has his claim overruled – by a change in the teacher’s posture – while it is being re-confirmed at the same time (cf. Goodwin, 1981). When, at last, he does get the floor, his question is no longer relevant. It addresses information that the teacher gave at the very end of his instructions. By shifting to a different modality, the teacher has been able to finish his instructional unit without being interrupted.

## 5. Summary and concluding remarks

The analyses in this study zoom in on structural discourse moves that are produced in off-record niches of multiparty talk in institutional settings. They also, crucially, address the issue of



what counts as data in classroom research (see also Van Dam, 2003). We showed that online floor and footing changes routinely occur at embedded levels of turns, discourse units and activities in progress. Although linguistic, prosodic and non-vocal markers clearly signal the occurrence of these frame changes or emergent (re)contextualizations (cf. POP and PUSH markers, Polanyi & Scha, 1983; Bannink, 2001; Van Dam (van Isselt), 1993; Van Dam, 2003) they are often overlooked or underanalyzed in classroom research. If there is consensus that meaning making in classroom multiparty interactions involves the interpretation and reinterpretation of utterances and interactional events on a moment-by-moment basis, the scholarly neglect of these structural features of talk is surely unjustified.

The analyses in Sections 4.1 and 4.2 show that marginalization and empowerment may quite literally happen in the margins of classroom configurations and institutional encounters. Classroom interactions involve participants in states of talk and activity contexts along a continuum of formal, more informal and peripheral or collusive participation modes that are cued in the production format of utterances (Goffman, 1979). We showed how a shift to a more informal English register, also marked by a change in tempo and rhythm, contextualized a teacher utterance in an evolving IRE structure as *not* a candidate for the predicted third part teacher Evaluation move that was sequentially relevant. The resulting discourse complexity produced cultural incompetence rather than classroom error for what it was a learner did not say (cf. McDermott, 1994). Similarly the scaffolding moves and off-record repairs that constructed competence for individual learners (4.2) were timed and produced in such a way as to maximally encourage the illusion that they never happened: they did not occupy a turn at talk. That does not mean a turn at talk is not a suitable unit for analysis of classroom talk and classroom-based language acquisition (cf. Markee, 2000: 33). What matters is that we recognize the structural basis of subtle intra-turn shifts in footing. They are the linguist's domain and need to be systematically taken into account (cf. Goffman, 1981: 147 ff.). Since they co-determine success and failure in educational settings (cf. Varenne & McDermott, 1999) they should be part of the data that classroom research addresses.

In teacher education novice teachers are urged to reflect on their own and their students' classroom behaviours in order to gradually approximate the expert practices of professionals. But they can only reflect on what they are able to see (cf. Bannink & Van Dam, *forthcoming*). In Section 4.3 we witnessed the pragmatic dilemmas that result from discourse complexity in full display. The analyses showed how a novice teacher was confounded by the intricate frame play her students indulged in. One interruption engendered another and this nesting of unfinished open units made the discourse situation increasingly opaque, overdetermined. A more experienced colleague, however, sustained two simultaneous states of talk by shifting to nonverbal communication modes that were embedded in and ran parallel to his ongoing official speaking role. Again, such features of professional behaviour can be articulated and made analytically transparent.

A learner silence in a canonical learner answer slot, an incomplete sentence and a word half uttered are typically regarded as interactional errors, as 'failed runs' that are "discarded as data" in classroom research (Gee, 1994: 35). A close look into the contexts of these flawed (or zero) utterances reveals that they may cue the awareness of emerging discourse complexity such as: the incoherence of a prior classroom question (4.1), the interactional consequences of re-embedding conversational question-answering modes in an institutional episode (4.3), affordances for peripheral participation and the first step towards 'becoming a speaker' or acquiring a voice in the new language (4.2). The framing practices that yield these instances of online learning can only be made transparent if we devise analytic models that look beyond categorical distinctions between speaker-hearer roles and discrete, singly authored, context-free turns at talk as the building blocks of 'interaction'. In many cases it is "the overall participation framework as an emergent process

that ‘does the learning’, just as [...] it is the participation framework in which an utterance acquires meaning that “does the talking” (Hanks, 1996: 222). A closed system approach to learner data cannot bring to light the extent to which cognition is situated and socially occasioned.

It is significant that most of the behaviours we analyzed could never be reproduced under experimental conditions (cf. Leather & Van Dam, 2003: 23 ff.). For classroom research to yield empirically valid results it must be able to articulate the discursive contexts and interactional conditions that mediate learning and empowerment (or the lack thereof). While there is of course a place for large-scale investigations of learner data, detailed fine-grained observation and rigorous theoretical modelling will always be required. Global recommendations and educational innovations can only be successfully implemented if we do justice to the context-sensitive, dynamic and situated nature of multiparty interactions in their respective ecologies.

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