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ABSTRACT

Classroom interaction has long been a rich site for scholarly research, as attested by the sizable body of literature surrounding classroom discourse. This paper reviews three frameworks currently informing the analysis of classroom talk, or more specifically, the qualitative *microanalysis* of the turn-by-turn talk that occurs in naturally-occurring unfolding exchanges between teachers and students, and amongst students themselves. Findings from studies working within (1) language socialization, (2) critical discourse analysis, and (3) conversation analysis are explored, with particular attention paid to the ways in which these frameworks complement and complicate one another. The paper also attempts to identify areas of classroom discourse that have yet to be fully explored, and highlights the need for further research along those lines.

INTRODUCTION

Of the many activities that occur in the classroom, *talk* (Adger, 2001) is arguably what happens the most. While a teacher may be well-prepared to carry out the daily agenda, and supervisors may have thoughtfully constructed the teaching philosophy undergirding curricula, it is through the moment-by-moment unfolding of talk that these teaching plans actually unfold. As noted by Walsh (2006), the interactive decisions that teachers make are at least as important as preparations, since student participation and successful task completion may be facilitated or hindered during these exchanges (see also Hall 1998; Nystrand, 1997; Walsh, 2002). Christie (2005) asserts that the willingness to engage seriously with the discourse patterns particular to the institution of schooling is key to gaining an understanding of classroom talk. Van Lier (2004) even argues that language creates, perpetuates, and reproduces education. Unsurprisingly, then, a cursory glance at research during the past fifty years would reveal that classroom talk has by and large remained a fertile ground for scholarly work.

In recent years, research on classroom discourse in second language (L2) and foreign language (FL) classrooms has become increasingly popular. Interaction takes on an especially significant role in these spaces, considering that talk against such a background is “both the object of pedagogical attention, and the medium through which learning is accomplished” (Hall

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& Walsh, 2002, p. 187; see also Mori, 2002). Therefore, through examining teacher-student and student-student communication, scholars hope to ultimately gain insight into the potential link between classroom talk and second language development. To that end, L2 researchers working within the sociocultural paradigm (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Vygotsky, 1978) have maintained that language learning is not an internal assimilation of structural components of a language system, but rather, a type of development that begins through social interaction as an L2 learner embarks on getting engaged in intellectual and practical activities (Hall & Walsh, 2002). As such, a finer-grained understanding of interlanguage development might be obtained through analyzing how classroom talk engages students, and how students engage themselves in classroom talk.

This paper aims to critically review pertinent research on interaction in the L2 and FL classroom, focusing on some of the different lenses through which scholarly studies have performed *microanalyses* of classroom discourse, or examined in detail the turn-by-turn of naturally-occurring talk in the classroom. Reviews that take into account methodological assumptions, strengths, and limitations of this kind of qualitative research have been lacking (Zuengler & Mori, 2002). In an attempt to contribute to this conversation, findings from work that has examined transcripts of actual classroom talk as it unfolded in the L2 setting will be explored. Although many qualitative approaches engage at least partly in closely analyzing discourse, this paper will consider empirical studies working within three frameworks that have been particularly influential, and often utilized, in L2 classroom research: language socialization, critical discourse analysis, and conversation analysis. The paper also will attempt to identify issues that have yet to be fully explored in literature of this vein, and will issue a call for further research in these areas.

From Etic to Emic Research

Early work on classroom interaction focused on uncovering patterns of discourse through coding teacher utterances (e.g., Bellack, Kliebard, Hyman, & Smith, 1966; Fanselow, 1977; Flanders, 1970; Sinclair & Coulthard, 1975). They revealed that classroom talk was *structured*, and hence could be categorized, quantified, and analyzed. According to Sinclair and Coulthard, there exists at least a tacit understanding amongst students and teachers concerning who speaks and when. They further claim that this highly structured exchange consists of a teacher *initiation* in the form of a question, resulting in a student *response*, which is in turn followed by teacher *feedback* to the given response. The uncovering of the initiation-response-feedback (IRF) sequence has undergirded much of the research on classroom discourse that has since ensued, and has certainly influenced those working within the frameworks examined here. This text will refer to this three-part dialogue as *IRF*, although it has been termed otherwise as well (e.g., Lemke, 1990; McHoul, 1978, 1990; Mehan, 1979).

Sinclair and Coulthard's (1975) findings have greatly influenced subsequent research on classroom talk. However, the descriptive nature of their work assumed a detached, neutral tone indicative of their *etic*, or "outside observer" stance towards classroom research. Scholars working within frameworks informed by fields such as anthropology assume a more *emic*, or "inside observer" positioning, placing themselves in a position to microanalyze discourse not by imposing pre-set coding categories, but by examining talk and its surrounding context as it unfolds in moment-by-moment interactions.² While researchers working within the three

² The terms *etic* and *emic* are more fully explained in Pike (1967). For this paper, these terms are considered only in relation to microanalyzing classroom discourse.

frameworks presented here do not all espouse the same view on the role of context in interactions, they do agree that understanding classroom language use goes beyond the descriptive labeling of verbal exchanges as performed in this seminal work.

LANGUAGE SOCIALIZATION AND LINGUISTIC COMMUNITIES

Ochs and Schieffelin (1984) took an emic stance when tracing adult-child interactions across three cultures. Through a close examination of observed verbal exchanges between mothers and their young, they noted that the ways in which mothers spoke to their pre-verbal infant children differed across cultures. These linguistic differences are reflective of contrasting cultural beliefs concerning the appropriate ways to address interlocutors, and children's ensuing language development seemed to signal both an acquiring of language and an understanding of these cultural views on speaking. The findings in their case studies (Schieffelin & Ochs, 1986) led to the argument that language learning is an interactive, sociocultural process between more and less competent community members, in which two important and distinct processes occur: language is taught (children are socialized to *use* language), and culture is taught (children are socialized *through* language).

Many researchers have found language socialization a useful framework through which to study L2 learning. These scholars argue that L2 learners, like their L1 counterparts, learn through social interaction with those who are more proficient in the target language. They also argue, in line with Schieffelin and Ochs (1986), that language learners are members of communities, and their participation as such is crucial for their language development. Through classic ethnographic methods such as participant observation, interviews, and most importantly for the purpose of this paper – discourse analysis of naturally-occurring talk – they attempt to better understand how L2 learners are socialized into becoming competent members of such communities (cf. Kulik & Schieffelin, 2004, concerning ethnographic method).

Language Socialization as a Linear Process

Those utilizing a language socialization framework in the L2 classroom often attempt to trace the development of language learners as they move from novice to more competent users of the target language. Poole (1992) recorded verbal interactions and functioned as a participant observer in beginning-level adult ESL classes in the United States. The teachers, themselves middle-class European-Americans, tended toward speaking to the students in ways akin to what Ochs and Schieffelin (1984) uncovered in their observations of white, middle-class American caregivers and their children. For instance, teachers often asked questions whose answers were already known, commonly referred to as display questions. Such questions placed the questioner in a position to evaluate the accuracy of the response, and hence gave the teacher control to guide the novice through language production in the IRF sequence. As the discourse analysis demonstrated, all interactions in the classroom were carefully steered by the teacher.

Other studies have also espoused the socializing force of teacher talk, but have centered their discussions on the effects of such talk on L2 learner development. Ohta (1999) tracked one student's progress in a beginning adult Japanese class. In this setting, the IRF format practiced by the teacher proved to be quite constraining for the student, whose contributions were restricted to the 'R' portion of the dialogue. As a result, the participant was often excluded from practicing ways of giving feedback during interactions. This 'F' slot, used to express alignment

or affect, is very important in Japanese. Therefore, the teacher served as a living model, making such expressions particularly salient in the teacher-fronted discourse. As the semester progressed, the student was able to increasingly incorporate these expressions into group work. Kanagy (1999) looked at teacher modeling in a Kindergarten Japanese immersion classroom in the US. Like the teacher in Ohta's study, the teacher in this classroom carefully showed proper greetings through slow, deliberate enunciations, with exaggerated accompanying gestures. At first, the students imitated the teacher's moves and language or produced partially correct utterances. Gradually, the teacher removed the support structures, until the students could independently participate in the greeting. For both Ohta and Kanagy, the results lent evidence to the importance of expert-novice interactions for developing L2 proficiency. In recounting findings from her longitudinal data in an American high school, Zuengler (2011)

Duff's (1995) work, conducted in an EFL history classroom in a Hungarian dual-language high school, echoed Ohta's and Kanagy's findings that learners move from peripheral to independent participants in the classroom community through careful teacher modeling. These students in Duff's study were well socialized into a classroom format in Hungary known as *recitation*, in which a teacher-selected student must answer a series of display questions posed by the teacher. By contrast, they were novices in the student-centered, cooperative classrooms typical of Hungarian dual-language programs. When initially given the task of leading lectures, the students were dependent on formulaic expressions provided by the teacher to frame or conclude their talks. As the year progressed, students exhibited their adeptness at using language more creatively through asking for clarifications from the teacher, and providing their peers with feedback on improving student lectures. Duff concluded that the students were being socialized into becoming future EFL history teachers, performing as increasingly competent apprentices of this particular community.

Language Socialization as an Iterative Process

As some research has revealed, the language socialization process does not always progress neatly (Morita, 2004). For instance, some L2 learners never move from the periphery of the classroom community. Hall (1995) found that in a first-year Spanish class, the teacher attempted to engage students in verbal interactions. However, the talk had no overarching topic to lend it coherence. Instead, it was a string of talk in the IRF format, with the same information repeated and recycled. The highly constrained nature of the interactions precluded students from becoming active participants through elaboration or inquiry. In another study with the same Spanish instructor, Hall (1998) discovered that students did not have equal access to opportunities for linguistic interactions. In fact, it appeared that two status groups had formed, the "primary" group receiving considerably more interactional opportunities from the teacher than the "secondary" group. The primary group was able to successfully initiate turns, overlap other students' talk, and engage the teacher in discussing content. On the other hand, the teacher often either ignored initiations by secondary group members or critiqued their contributions based on linguistic form, blocking them from elaborating on content. Hall then concluded that this differential treatment resulted in varied opportunities for participation in the community of learners, and as a consequence, different understandings amongst the students concerning their roles and rights as Spanish language learners. While some were being socialized to use language, others were being socialized to limit their use.

Willet's (1995) year-long research in an American elementary-school classroom echoed Hall's (1998) conclusion that students experience the language socialization process differentially, and hence, follow different trajectories with regard to L2 development. She focused on a group of L2 students as they completed phonics seat work; what she noticed was a growing disparity in language development. Indeed, three of the four L2 learners had banded together, helping one another with tasks and experimenting with increasingly larger language chunks while conversing. Their active participation and linguistic independence increased during the year. By contrast, the fourth child's participation decreased, with his sparse linguistic contributions signaling his status as a peripheral member of the community. Toohey (1996) found similar results in her study of L2 learners in kindergarten with regard to student participation. However, she concluded that participation in the classroom community is not tied to language proficiency. In fact, not all students who exhibited a strong grasp on the target language became active participants in the classroom. Some students preferred to associate themselves with those who rejected classroom activities. In order to retain a high social status in one community, therefore, it was necessary to withdraw from another one. On this basis, Toohey effectively posited the argument that more than one community functions in classrooms, and that the competing goals of these communities can facilitate or hinder active participation at any moment. She also asserted that in forcing themselves to retreat to the margins of a community, students were actively *resisting* socialization. This finding was corroborated in Duff's (2002) study: it was found that some mainstreamed ESL high school learners in Canada refused to provide more than terse one-word answers to questions, even if they were capable of doing so.

The finding that some students either cannot or will not engage in active participation in a community interacting in the target language raises some challenges for a framework that assumes complete socialization as an endpoint. Even though researchers working within language socialization recognize that the process can be iterative, they have not traditionally considered factors that may temporarily or permanently disrupt the process. At the same time, however, scholars working within critical discourse analysis consider this kind of question(s) to be a launching pad for research in the L2 classroom.

CDA: FROM MICROANALYSIS TO MACROANALYSIS

While all three frameworks examined here operate with the argument that *language is socially co-constructed through interaction*, Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) alone asserts the claim that *language is inextricably intertwined with ideologies and notions of power embedded in the dominant cultures that use the language* (Kumaravadivelu, 1999). CDA further claims that *interactions are shaped by external sociopolitical conditions*. Thus, language use does not begin with spoken or written text, but with social and political issues (Fairclough, 2001). A critical analyst approaches the data with the intent to uncover larger sociopolitical issues operating within the culture. To do so, researchers engage in *critical ethnography* (Simon & Dippo, 1986). This method includes discourse analysis, participant observation, and interviews that one would expect of a classic ethnography. Yet, critical ethnographers share the expressed goal of discovering and examining the ideological discourse that is assumed to exist in the language.

The arguments outlined by CDA scholars have challenged many L2 classroom researchers to consider ways in which power relations and cultural ideologies function in educational institutions. Popular target languages such as French, English, and Spanish have been languages linked to societies that have histories of colonization, racial aggressions, and

socioeconomic and gender inequalities. In addition, language learners, many of whom are members of formerly colonized societies, enter the classroom with their own ideological assumptions. Therefore, these scholars have found it important to ask research questions concerning the ways in which cultural ideologies embedded in such languages affect language development in L2 learners.

Accepting or Resisting Hegemonic Discourse

Like some of the researchers working in language socialization frameworks, scholars in critical frameworks have addressed issues of learner exclusion or unequal learner access to the socialization process. Critical researchers go one step further, however, as to link notions of inequality and exclusion to larger sociopolitical forces. Gutiérrez and Larson (1994), for one, discussed the IRF structure in terms of *hegemony*, or the power exerted by a dominant group over marginalized groups (Gramsci, 1971). In their study of a 10th grade ESL class, the two researchers argue that the teacher's strict adherence to the IRF confined students to giving short answers only. When students attempted to elaborate on their answers, the teacher would interrupt or latch onto the response; at times, she simply ignored them. This lack of interactional space for students to develop their own text or inject their own content knowledge into the lesson resulted in students having little opportunities to develop a range of language skills and sociocultural knowledge necessary for entry into the academic community (cf. Hall, 1995). Based on such findings, Gutiérrez and Larson then attempted to connect the IRF structure to larger notions of power in the classroom. They contend that the teacher's adherence to the IRF pattern allowed her to assume the omniscient position of the sole possessor of knowledge. As such, student voices were marginalized in the presence of the teacher-dominated discourse. These findings are repeated and extended in Gutiérrez, Larson, and Kreuter (1995), which also revealed how the use of IRF imposed interactional constraints on students. When one student continually resisted these rules through speaking out of turn or ignoring directions, the teacher viewed the student as not only disruptive, but also academically deficient. Although the student's verbal expressions demonstrated her growing literacy skills, the teacher only focused on her disregard for classroom procedure, and labeled her as "remedial."

While the teacher's role as a member of the dominant culture was emphasized in both Gutiérrez and Larson's (1994) and Gutiérrez, Larson, and Kreuter's (1995) analyses of the discourse of classrooms, Canagarajah (1993) found that student resistance in an FL setting may produce differential results. More specifically, it was observed that an EFL classroom in Sri Lanka in which the entire class resisted the teacher-imposed interactional patterns. The teacher gave language instruction in the benefits of a student-centered, discussion-based classroom; unfortunately, he failed to engage his students, who were used to teacher-centered, grammar-based classes. Because of the local cultural view that teachers must impart their knowledge to students, the students would not accept an atmosphere in which knowledge was shared and students interacted with one another. As a result, many students stopped attending the class and enrolled in private tutoring classes instead in order to develop the L2 skills necessary for the next course in the sequence. This way, they effectively marginalized the teacher.

On a different note, some researchers have discovered opportunities within the classroom walls through which students can develop as language learners outside of the sanctioned student-teacher or student-student exchanges. Canagarajah (2004) analyzed moments in which L2 students were able to communicate, usually surreptitiously, outside the strict IRF format imposed

by the teacher. Gutiérrez, Rymes and Larson (1995) referred to these moments as belonging to the classroom *underlife*; Canagarajah, on the other hand, used the term *safe-houses*. This kind of exchanges usually occurred in a secondary ESL classroom as off-task or between-task talk, or during whole-class interactions. In these language safe-houses, students experimented with vocabulary and syntax, and would at times code-switch in order to further clarify a point. Through a close analysis of the language used here, Canagarajah convincingly identified a rich, multilingual site where students are exposed to important communication strategies such as style-switching, which involves having the interlocutor switch between formal and more informal registers. On this basis, he argued that more research needs to be conducted in such spaces.

Constructing Identities

Another prominent trend in this vein of research has been to closely analyze classroom discourse for the purpose of ascertaining how identities are negotiated. While identity negotiation has long been a point of interest for researchers from various paradigms, it is somewhat surprising how few studies there are that offer the close analysis of talk demonstrating how identity is actually constructed in the moment-by-moment of classroom interactions. Hruska (2004), in her year-long study of kindergarteners, examined ways in which linguistic realizations of gendered identities facilitated or hindered L2 learners' classroom participation. In line with findings from language socialization research, she noticed that L2 proficiency played less of a role in determining access to interactions than identity constructions in unfolding talk (see also Hruska, 2007; Norton, 2001). For instance, boys tended to engage in what Hruska referred to as *competitive discourse* about who had "won" or who was "bigger" while girls often opted for *romantic discourse*, discussing issues such as "Which classmates would marry each other?" This type of subject matter demarcations along gender lines constrained the types of interactions available for all. Furthermore, when the teacher commenced a class-wide discussion on the youth soccer league – an activity that the students had verbally proclaimed as masculine – girls retracted from speaking, despite the teacher's prodding. This somehow formed the basis for the ideological notions that gender seemed to govern who could speak, and what kind of talk could ensue. As stressed by Hruska, these notions of gender did not direct the discourse in the form of overarching stereotypes, but rather, occurred in certain moments; they were also constantly in flux as children negotiated them in specific interactions. She concluded that moments in which gender ideologies emerged in the discourse evoked served to block certain students from their linguistic expression, and barred certain L2 learners from participating in the talk.

Theorists have noted that terms such as "husband / wife," "married / divorced" are reflective of heterosexuality being the dominant discourse on sexual identity. Nelson (1999), among other scholars, has argued that L2 researchers need to be more sensitive to alternate sexual identities, and that it is important to provide opportunities for language learners to use expressive language to talk about it. In Nelson's study of a community-college ESL grammar course, the teacher presented a graphic of two women walking arm-in-arm during a lesson on modal verbs. This was followed by a content-based discussion of cultural assumptions about homosexuality. Though it remained unclear as to how this verbal exchange of sexual identity played a role in hindering or facilitating L2 development and learner participation in linguistic interactions, the importance of having L2 learners discuss cultural assumptions surrounding sexual identity was affirmed.

As can be seen, all of the researchers reviewed in this section microanalyzed discourse with the expressed purpose of connecting the use of language to larger sociopolitical structures that operate in the target language culture. They located interactional moments when the language serves to dominate, resist, or negotiate the cultural ideologies in the community. The last framework to be reviewed below, namely conversation analysis (CA), converges in the sense that it also engages in close analysis of verbal interaction. Nevertheless, it eschews *a priori* assumptions, and prefers to work directly from the data to form the research questions.

CA: THE MICROANALYSIS OF MICROSTRUCTURES

Sacks, Schegloff, and Jefferson (1974) delineated in their highly influential text the organization of ordinary talk, remarking that speakers tend to orient to the turn-constructive unit (TCU), which forms the foundation of ordinary interaction. Schegloff (2007) has further explicated the organization of TCUs: noting that exchanges, in their most basic form, consists of adjacency pairs (APs) with the first pair part uttered by one speaker, the second pair part spoken by another, and often, a sequence closing the third part put forth by the first speaker – a sequence that seems to resemble the structure of the IRF at least ostensibly. It was demonstrated that speakers and hearers seemed to orient to and respond to their interlocutor's turns at talk, thus showing that participants locally co-constructed and managed their interaction.

The claim that a turn at talk can accomplish several things simultaneously, and that verbal exchanges are collaboratively handled by all participants (Sacks, Schegloff, & Jefferson, 1974) somehow fueled related research describing classroom interactions within the useful framework of the IRF. The highly detailed analyses required to operationalize the CA framework has appealed to L2 classroom researchers who wish to better understand the immediate interactional accomplishments or consequences of words, phrases, and stress patterns. In contrast to the other frameworks studied, CA researchers do not aim to connect local interactions to larger ideas about language learning or cultural ideology. Rather, spates of talk are recorded and transcribed, and then analyzed by CA researchers, who then look for salient features that may contribute to an understanding of how L2 development occurs in a particular classroom.

Delving Into and Out of the IRF

Like the other frameworks examined in this paper, researchers working in the CA tradition have taken great interest in the interactional accomplishments of the IRF structure. Particular focus has been on the local effects of the third (for the purposes of this paper, F) turn. Seedhouse (2004) demonstrated that IRF cycles "... perform different interactional and pedagogical work according to the context in which they are operating" (p. 63). He supported his argument by juxtaposing two L2 classroom extracts: one text contained strings in which the F slot displayed a teacher's preoccupation with evaluating the grammar of a student; another showed a teacher handling grammar correction incidentally, while attending to the content of the student response, which triggered further teacher-student interaction. Seedhouse then concluded that the content of the third part can either narrow or widen the interactional space allotted to the learner.

Waring (2008) uncovered one specific way in which the third turn can close down interaction. Her analysis of homework checks conducted in an adult ESL classroom showed that phrases such as "very good" in the third turn, termed *explicit positive assessments* (EPA),

affirmed a second-turn response to a question. At the same time, EPA impeded any extended interaction related to a particular homework problem, as the positive assessment seemed to convey a message that the correct answer had been identified and there was no need for any further discussion. The data showed that students oriented to EPA as a signal that the sequence had shut down; when students did have questions related to the answer that received the EPA, they did not pose the questions until long after the exchange related to the homework item had passed. Thus, despite the proposed notion that affirmations in the classroom can nurture student participation by building a shared base of knowledge (Sullivan, 2000), Waring revealed that positive assessments can actually hinder student participation through blocking a response from further elaboration or questioning by other students (see also Seedhouse, 1999).

Rather than declaring the third turn a blanket “evaluation” or “feedback” move, Lee (2007) argues that attention must be paid to its local contingencies. In his analysis of college-level ESL classrooms, Lee uncovers five different functions for the third turn, each highly dependent upon the immediate context created by the second turn. For instance, a teacher may use the third turn to steer students into a particular interactional trajectory, leading them to evaluate the grammatical (in)correctness of a peer response; or a teacher may attend to classroom management issues, such as soliciting answers from the class after a second turn silence, or asking a student to repeat an answer that went unheard.

Markee (2004) and Waring (2009), on a related note, located spaces in which teachers and student departed from the three-part sequence, and discussed the interactional achievements that occurred during those spates of talk. Markee (2004) coined the term *zones of interactional transition* (ZIT) in describing moments when learners and teachers move from talk amongst students during group work to teacher-student exchanges. Markee asserts that a ZIT often occurs when a student summons a teacher to answer a question that a group of students has posed during peer work. The data revealed that teachers often responded by inserting a counter-question, thereby regaining the initiation slot, and repositioning the student as the one whose answer is a candidate for evaluation or feedback. As teachers and students engaged in a sort of struggle to control the question slot, they sometimes challenged the validity of each other’s questions. Markee concluded that the ZIT lends support to the claim that L2 classrooms attend to more than just language learning; they are also spaces in which participants use language to attend to locally contingent issues such as hierarchy and face. Similarly, Waring investigated a case in which a student effectively collaborated with a teacher to move out of the IRF, thereby creating a different type of interaction. Specifically, a student inquiry concerning homework launched a string of student questions and resulted in increased student participation. This very act of moving out of IRF into a less constrained type of interaction demonstrated that certain interactional moments in the classroom lend themselves to shifts in the dynamics of the teacher-student exchange.

Moving Into and Out of Task Talk

This notion of *interactional shifts* has proven to be a rich site for studying interactions. Many of these shifts occur as students begin and end tasks (Hellermann, 2007, 2008; Hellermann & Cole, 2008). Markee (2005) untangled an exchange during a university-level ESL class, in which the social practice of inviting a friend to a party co-existed with the teacher-assigned task of discussing Günter Grass. Between the teacher giving directions and the start of the task, an interactional space unrelated to the task opened up for talk. At that moment, two students began

what Markee called the “skillful schizophrenia” (p. 210), assuming multiple identities of inviter / invitee and students. Although the off-task exchange was subject to frequent interruption, the students used eye gaze and hand motions to signal alignment in finishing the business of the invitational act. One of the participants was able to answer a teacher question before turning back to the invitation sequence, deftly attending to his dual role as a student and an inviter. By locating moments in which students balance several identities and manage two unfolding sequences, Markee argues that students display their growing L2 competence both during and at the boundaries of tasks. As a matter of fact, these two moments did occur simultaneously in Markee’s study.

Research in the conversation analytic framework on student-student interaction during learning tasks has found that L2 learners of all proficiency levels engage in meaningful talk when given the opportunity to work with one another. In some cases, such interactional space allows students to aid one another in comprehending vocabulary words, or assist one another in repairing errors (Markee, 2000). However, as noted by Markee (2000) and Mori (2002), the teacher’s idea about what *should* be going on is not always what *is* going on. For instance, a student may strive to understand a lexical item in context, rather than in abstract terms. Or, students may be struggling with managing an interaction at precisely the moment that a teacher has intended them to experience “authentic” interaction. On the other hand, students may achieve a naturally flowing conversation in their L2 during the planning phase, when the teacher might not be expecting it. Taken together, the CA framework aids researchers in finding out exactly when and how these fruitful talks occur, thereby shedding light on ways to engage students in meaningful exchanges.

CONCLUSION

This brief review of frameworks informing the detailed analysis of classroom interaction demonstrates that talk in the classroom has proven to be highly structured, and as such, can be described and explored in various ways. For a scholar working in language socialization, for instance, the IRF format may afford teachers an opportunity to guide students through the process of using the target language in increasingly sophisticated ways. For a critical discourse analyst, the rigidity of the IRF may contribute to issues of teacher dominance in the classroom, resulting in the teacher’s control over the issue of who holds the floor. For a conversation analyst, each turn of the IRF sequence can be examined to shed light on how a turn-at-talk might play its role in constructing the next spate of interaction. All of these approaches allow researchers to understand the intricacies of how talk functions within the classroom walls. With such insight comes the possibility of linking theory to practice. Indeed, educating teachers about classroom language use might become more aware as to how students and teachers interact, and how such exchanges promote or hinder the possibility of the meaningful participation that purportedly leads to student learning.

Research stemming from the three frameworks examined has also looked into the kinds of interactions that are not part of canonical classroom talk. Marginalized student-student exchanges, including off-task talk and unsanctioned interactions, have been shown to create spaces for students to experiment freely with the target language. These studies, while still small in number, apparently contribute to a more complete understanding of how language is used in the classroom, and merit further investigation. Through a continued, close exploration of both teacher-student and perhaps student-student interactions in particular, researchers can gain

greater insight into the exact ways in which classroom discourse encourages or hinders student participation in the L2 classroom.

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