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'Being the teacher': Identity and classroom conversation

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Abstract

Recent debate on the standard classroom Initiation-Response-Follow up pattern has focused particular attention on the final move and the contribution it can make to productive interaction in teacher-fronted situations. This paper suggests that current research in this area has tended to exaggerate the pedagogic impact of changes based on specifiable discourse moves, proposing instead an approach to analysis which takes account of the dynamic nature of identity construction and its relationship to the development of ongoing talk. It challenges the view that the concept of classroom conversation is inherently contradictory and, drawing on the work of Zimmerman (1998) related to the broader field of Membership Categorization Analysis, demonstrates how shifts in the orientation to different aspects of identity produce distinctively different interactional patterns in teacher-fronted talk. Using Zimmerman's distinction between discourse, situated and transportable identities in talk, extracts from classroom exchanges from different educational contexts are analysed as the basis for claiming that conversation involving teacher and students in the classroom is indeed possible. The paper concludes with a discussion of the pedagogical implications of this.

Introduction

In the light of Vygotsky's insights into the importance of social interaction in learning (1968, 1972), there is evidence of renewed interest in the nature of classroom talk and signs of a willingness to re-assess the pedagogic value of interaction patterns which

had previously been seen by many as relatively unproductive in terms of language learning (e.g. Seedhouse 1996, Jarvis and Robinson 1997, Wells 1999: 167-208, Nassaji and Wells 2000). Work in this area has concentrated largely on discourse features and has contributed to our understanding of how the exploitation of particular patterns and interactional opportunities can enhance the quality of language learning in the classroom. In addition, some researchers have broadened the scope of their studies to embrace aspects of the classroom as a learning community, addressing issues of teacher role and identity (e.g. Green and Dixon 1994). However, the dynamic nature of identity construction and its relationship to the development of ongoing talk has received relatively little attention and teacher roles have for the most part been characterised as relatively static. In pedagogic terms, this tends to produce a two-dimensional picture of the teacher-learner relationship, and in proposing an analytic perspective which draws together social and discourse aspects of identity this paper offers a way of extending our characterisation classroom discourse.

The paper begins with a consideration of the IRF pattern and shifting views of its pedagogic potential, before responding to the claim that the concept of classroom conversation is inherently contradictory. The analytical core of the paper derives from work on identity seen from the perspective of its interactional construction, providing an analysis of four classroom exchanges as illustrations of the ways in which shifts in the orientation to different aspects of identity produce distinctively different interactional patterns. The final exchange serves as the foundation for a claim that conversation involving teacher and students in the classroom is indeed possible, and the paper concludes with a discussion of the pedagogical implications of this.

New ways with the IRF pattern

The Initiation Response Follow-up (IRF) pattern, identified originally as a 'teaching cycle' by Bellack et al. (1966) and given its distinctive characterisation by Sinclair and Coulthard nearly ten years later (1975), has emerged in various guises. Mehan (1979), for example, proposed an IRE pattern where the Follow-up (sometimes called 'Feedback') move is pinned down more precisely as an Evaluation move, while others (e.g. Lemke, 1990; Nassaji and Wells, 2000) prefer to talk in terms of 'triadic dialogue'. However, the basic structure and its fundamentally instructional orientation are widely regarded as pervasive. Van Lier (1996: 149), for example, basing his calculations on evidence from three classroom studies, suggests that between 50% and 70% of utterances in 'traditional classrooms' where the focus is on the transmission of information, fall within this pattern, a finding in line with Wells' estimate of 70% for secondary school classrooms (1993: 2). The findings of at least one researcher, though, indicate that not all classrooms reflect this distribution: Christie (2002: 107) found only one example of the IRE pattern in over two weeks of data collection from two upper primary classrooms in different schools. But whatever its distribution in teaching situations in general, in the language classroom the dominating presence of this teacher-controlled pattern is widely recognised as representing a serious challenge to teachers and teacher educators in the context of communicative language teaching.

The reason for this is fairly straightforward: in the context of a general acceptance that language learners need to be exposed to a variety of interactional types, the IRF pattern can seem a blunt and unforgiving instrument. Extract 1 (for transcription conventions, see Appendix 1) illustrates this:

Extract 1

01 T: But the writing is on 'weekends' which

02 tells you::
 03 S1: When
 04 T: Whe::n. Ye:::s. ((To S2)) So would you
 05 like to give me the question again.
 06 S2: When do: when do you go: (.) to
 07 on: [weekends
 08 Ss: [(XXXXXXXXXX)
 09 S2: When do you (0.5) when do you go: (0.5)
 er
 10 T: to
 11 S2 to er (0.5) er (.) er (1.0) weekends
 12 S3: ((To S2)) °Taif°
 13 T: When do you go to where? Banana Street?
 14 S2: When do you (.) when do you go (.) to
 15 Taif.
 16 T: Ye:::s!
 (Beginners' Exam Preparation Class)

The extract begins with a canonical IRF exchange: S2 has provided the wrong response to a transformation written on the blackboard and the talk begins with a teacher Initiation (l.01) in which sound stretching prompting S1 (non-verbally nominated) to provide a completion to the teacher's utterance; S1 delivers the correct Response (l.03); and the teacher's emphatic Follow-up (l.04) repeats and affirms the correct answer. The teacher then turns to the unfortunate S2 with an Initiation in the form of a surprisingly sophisticated invitation (ll.04-05). However, such is the power of the IRF pattern and the students' familiarity with its workings that that the redirection of attention to S2, and perhaps the presence of the word 'question', is sufficient to provoke an immediate but incorrect response (ll.6-7), the final word of which is overlapped by efforts from other students from the class. The teacher reads the message of the pauses, sound stretching and hesitation marker ('er') in the student's second attempt to provide an acceptable Response (l.09) and offers a further prompt (l.10) which the student immediately takes up before stumbling his way awkwardly to a conclusion (l.11). S3, recognising that this is not correct, whispers the required answer to S2, but the teacher adopts a different approach: his Re-Initiation in the form of the question (l.13) is followed by a further prompting

question designed to indicate the sort of answer required. This finally produces the required Response and he terminates the sequence with an emphatically relieved evaluation.

This particular example might be said to present the IRF pattern in its least attractive light, but it nevertheless illustrates its power as an instrument of pedagogic purpose and teacher control, aspects of its institutionality that make its continued presence probably inevitable (for an excellent discussion of its place in the broader educational context, see van Lier 1996, Chapter 7). Although there is some evidence that the pattern is associated with poor progress in language learning (Nystrand 1997) and restrictive teacher practices (Lin 2000), class level and motivation may be important factors here, as at least one study indicates (Heller 1995), and in the absence of a clearer picture it seems legitimate to seek ways of exploiting the structure to positive effect – the pedagogic equivalent of beating swords into ploughshares. This is the direction that current research into teacher-student interaction seems to be taking and the remainder of this section considers this response, arguing that although it represents a significant advance on our understanding of the discourse opportunities arising from the structure, there is an attendant danger that this will serve only to reinforce its ubiquity and leave unaddressed the more forbidding challenge of finding ways of engaging in ‘classroom conversation’, hence missing a valuable opportunity to extend the range of interaction types practised in the classroom.

The recent history of responses to the IRF pattern reveals a growing interest in the ways in which this pervasive structure might be harnessed to positive effect in the language classroom by exploiting the possibilities of the third part of the sequence, a position that represents a considerable advance on the original response to its presence, which focussed on the first part (for a useful overview of recent research in

this area, see Hall and Walsh 2002). This earlier approach trusted to the transformative power of open and 'genuine' questions, as opposed to those which were closed and for display purposes only, but an examination of such avowedly 'communicative' classroom interaction by Nunan (1987) revealed that it did nothing to change the inhibiting realities of teacher-controlled interaction.

Although recent research into the IRF pattern has not sought to question the importance of the Initiation move (Nassaji and Wells, 2000, for example, point to the potentially significant differences between what they call 'Known Information Questions' and 'Negotiatory Questions'), there seems to be broad agreement that teacher decisions in the Follow-up move have the most significant impact on the subsequent development of talk, as three representative studies, each working at a different educational level and each from a different part of the world, illustrate. Jarvis and Robinson (1997), working in primary classrooms in Malaysia, Malta and Tanzania, focus on the Follow-up move in primary classrooms and show how the development of a *Focus, Build, Summarize* pattern 'can link three-part exchanges into larger exchange complexes' (1997: 226) in which teacher-pupil participation is enriched. In their quantitative study at elementary and middle schools in the Toronto area, Nassaji and Wells also highlighted the interactional potential of the Follow-up move by the teacher (2000: 400-1):

...where student responses to questions are frequently given an evaluative follow-up, this tends to suppress extended student participation ... Conversely, even sequences that start with known information questions can develop into more equal dialogue if, in the follow-up move, the teacher avoids evaluation and instead requests justifications, connections or counter-arguments and allows students to self-select in making their contributions.

These findings are exactly in line with those of Cullen, whose data is drawn from a secondary school in Tanzania. He also distinguishes evaluative feedback from what

he calls discursal feedback, referring to the two as 'qualitatively different' (2002:120). The latter, typically content-oriented and referential, is designed to incorporate the student's contribution to the ongoing talk.

From a discourse perspective, there seems no reason to question the importance of the F-move or the distinction between the IRE pattern and other forms of IRF in terms of pedagogic potential: while teacher evaluation will always have an important function, the capacity to generate different forms of interaction seems to lie in other forms of follow-up (Cullen 2002: 124-5 summarises approaches to this). These studies and others like them offer a way in which teachers might understand different dimensions of their classroom practice, while providing those working in teacher development with a convenient tool for analysis and conceptualisation of that practice. Yet in the context of language teaching they leave unaddressed the issue of whether more conversational forms of interaction can be generated. Cullen (2002) suggests that discursal feedback will generate this and Nassaji and Wells claim that where the teacher avoids evaluation and encourages student self-selection, 'the initial IRF generic structure fades into the background and is replaced temporarily, by a more conversation-like genre' (2000: 401). Unfortunately, the authors provide no direct evidence for this from their data. In fact, the examples they provide, like those of Cullen, suggest a speech exchange system that is very different from that of ordinary conversation, as the following extracts showing teacher turns indicate (student turns omitted):

Nassaji & Wells 2000: 399

A1 Michael?

A2 Excuse me. you'll have a chance to talk. Let Michael talk.

A3 OK. so you're – you're um concluding that it's dead. How many people agree with Michael?

A4 OK. why do you agree with Michael, Nir

Cullen 2002: 121

B1 Yes, please?

B2 She won't do anything. She'll just close her eyes ... and say:
'Take me if you want – if you don't want, leave me.' Yes?

B3 You will shout. Aagh! I don't know if Heaven will hear you.
Yes, please?

An essential characteristic of conversation is equal access to turns, the floor remaining open to all participants. In the above extracts, however, there is conclusive evidence in the full transcript that the teacher is controlling the floor, not only in terms of nominating speakers verbally (A1, A4) or nonverbally (B1-3), but also explicitly excluding speakers other than those nominated and implicitly confirming the teacher's right to control the floor (A2). Such evidence takes nothing away from the general case made by these researchers for the need to attend to the Follow-up move, but it does suggest that claims about conversational interaction in the classroom are far from substantiated.

This paper will argue that such interaction does occasionally take place in the classroom but that in order to understand it the descriptive apparatus proposed so far needs to be extended to include aspects of identity. However, the failure of analysts to provide convincing evidence of such talk to date has prompted at least one writer to question the conceptual coherence of the 'classroom conversation'. Because this argument raises important issues concerning the nature of classroom talk, it will be addressed as a necessary preliminary to developing an alternative descriptive model.

Is classroom conversation possible?

Before offering examples of teacher-student interaction as a basis for identifying the necessary conditions for classroom conversation, it is important to establish that the

notion itself is not conceptually contradictory. This is a position that has been advanced by Seedhouse (1996) as part of his important and timely re-evaluation of the IRF pattern. In this section I argue that his case is not quite what he takes it to be and that, even though at the conceptual level it is based on unduly restrictive definitions of 'conversation' and 'lesson', during the course of his argument the author identifies two highly significant features of conversational interaction which direct attention to the possibility of the very activity his paper seeks to call into question.

Seedhouse argues that 'it is, in theory, not possible for teachers to replicate conversation (in its precise sociolinguistic sense¹) in the classroom as part of a lesson' (1996: 18), basing his case on two related claims. The first is a definition of conversation from a relatively obscure source (Warren 1993) that identifies it as a speech event located outside 'institutionalized' settings (presumably settings that are parts of institutions where 'institutional' business is done). Although these oddly restrictive parameters exclude conversation from the classroom on a priori grounds and therefore grant Seedhouse his case, they do so in the face of overwhelming contradictory evidence: people simply *do* have conversations in classrooms, waiting rooms, offices, etc. His second, more convincing, argument explicitly concedes that conversation is possible within the physical setting but denies that it can be part of a 'lesson':

As soon as the teacher instructs the learners to 'have a conversation in English', the institutional purpose ['to teach English'] will be invoked, and the interaction could not be a conversation as defined here. To replicate conversation, the lesson would therefore have to cease to be a lesson in any understood sense of the term and become a conversation which did not have any underlying pedagogical purpose, which was not about English or even, in many situations, *in* English. (1996: 18)

Presented in this way, the argument is at least plausible: experience confirms that the instruction to 'have a conversation' belongs in a special category of self-defeating injunctions which includes 'act naturally' or 'be spontaneous'. However, Seedhouse's claim rests on a definition of 'lesson' that seems unduly restrictive. It is, of course, possible to define a lesson solely in terms of the teacher's 'pedagogical purpose' but this would exclude the many unanticipated, incidental and spontaneous interpolations – including those directly flouting the teacher's purpose – that provide educationally valuable diversions and sometimes important learning opportunities. While nobody would wish to deny that teaching is and should be a goal-directed activity, this does not mean that interactional legitimacy is determined solely by pedagogic purpose.

In raising this issue, however, Seedhouse also highlights an important but neglected challenge to the analyst of classroom discourse, and especially of language lessons: how to deal with the relationship between 'official' and 'off-the-record' business (see Markee 2004a and 2004b for an analysis of the interactional construction of shifts between the two). Van Dam van Isselt (1995) offers an approach to this issue based on the recognition of 'laminative features of classroom talk' (1995:128). His paper focuses on the relationship between 'the lesson proper' and 'other business' which may briefly intrude, treating lessons as vulnerable 'frames for the interpretation of events' (Goffman 1974). For the purposes of illustration he takes the example of the arrival of a wasp interrupting a lesson, where students treat the teacher's initial comment on its arrival as a 'frame break' and the teacher joins in, authorising time-out. However, when some students react as though all 'lesson' constraints have been removed, the teacher reminds them that some parameters of the lesson frame are still in force: 'even when something other than 'lesson business' has the floor, inherited higher-order classroom and cultural constraints on the coordination of utterances

and interactional behaviour can be shifted back to.' (p.128) It is perhaps the presence of this higher order 'lesson' frame that Seedhouse has in mind when he refers to conversation, mindful of the fact that it would not be possible to invoke such constraints outside institutional settings. However, this is not to say that other equally potent constraints might not be introduced in other settings. A parent, for example, might be having a perfectly ordinary conversation with their child in which the child steps suddenly well beyond the limits of what the parent considers acceptable, at which point the latter shifts into a 'reprimand' frame in which power asymmetry becomes immediately relevant and where turn, topic and tone may all be explicitly determined by the parent ('Don't interrupt me while I'm talking to you, don't try to change the subject and you can take that sarcastic tone out of your voice!').

Seedhouse in fact seems to recognise this when he identifies the following two conditions as necessary for an 'an ELT lesson to 'become identical to conversation': that the learners should 'regard the teacher as a fellow-conversationalist of identical status rather than as a teacher' and that teacher should not 'direct the discourse in any way at all' (1996:18). This recognition undermines his earlier attempts to exclude conversation a priori, but raises the interesting question of how such a situation might arise in the classroom. The rest of this paper will examine the conditions under which this might occur. A clue is to be found in a discussion by a leading conversation analyst on the subject of institutional talk:

So the fact that a conversation takes place in a hospital does not ipso facto make technically relevant a characterization of the setting, for a conversation there, as 'in a hospital' (or 'in the hospital'); it is the talk of the parties that reveals, in the first instance *for them*, whether or when the 'setting in a/the hospital' is relevant (as compared to 'at work,' 'on the east side,' 'out of town,' etc.). Nor does the fact that the topic of the talk is medical ipso facto render the 'hospital setting' relevant to the talk at any given moment. Much the same points

bears on the characterization of the participants: For example, the fact that they are 'in fact' respectively a doctor and a patient does not make those characterizations ipso facto relevant (as is especially clear when the patient is also a doctor); their respective ages, sex, religions, and so on, or altogether idiosyncratic and ephemeral attributes (for example, 'the one who just tipped over the glass of water on the table') may be what is relevant at any point in the talk. On the other hand, pointed use of technical or vernacular idiom (e.g. of 'hematoma' as compared to 'bruise') may display the relevance to the parties of precisely that aspect of their interaction together. It is not, then, that some context independently selected as relevant affects the interaction in some way. Rather, in an interaction's moment-to-moment development, the parties, singly or together, select and display in their conduct which of the indefinitely many aspects of context they are making relevant, or are invoking, for the immediate moment. (Schegloff 1987: 219)

Schegloff's claim suggests that conversation is indeed possible in institutional settings and his example of the spilt water raises the important issue of speaker identity. Analyses of classroom talk to date have concentrated on the discourse features of such talk, drawing pedagogic conclusions on the basis of these, but the remainder of this paper will suggest that the failure to consider the issue of identity in the context of such talk has obscured important interactional possibilities. In order to understand how such possibilities arise, it is necessary to look at particular stretches of talk and those aspects which are made relevant by the participants through the talk's development.

Discourse and social identities

The analysis that has so far been offered of classroom talk has treated the categories of 'teacher' and 'student' as analytically given, with the result that it has framed its questions and conclusions in terms of what a 'teacher' or a 'student' might achieve, given the institutional differences between them. However, other traditions of analysis, such as conversation analysis, argue that such premature categorisation imposes potentially distorting constraints on subsequent analysis and prefer instead

to see how categories are the products of the interactional work of participants (see, for example, Jacoby and Gonzales 1991 on the way in which expert-novice relations are interactively constructed). Viewed in this light, some forms classroom interaction yield interesting insights into the social processes at work within lesson boundaries.

An approach to analysis which has proved increasingly popular in recent years is that of Membership Categorisation Analysis (e.g. Sacks 1992a & b, Hester and Eglin 1997, Psathas 1999, Lepper 2000). Deriving from the work of Sacks², this explores how membership of particular categories (e.g. 'teacher', 'mother', 'caller') is made relevant in talk through the use of Membership Categorization Devices (MCDs) and related rules. The explanatory value of this approach is now generally acknowledged, although it does not seem to have featured prominently in the analysis of classroom discourse. One reason for this may be the dominance of the Standardised Relational Pair 'teacher' and 'student' within the classroom setting and a consequent restriction on the extent to which issues of membership are actually negotiated in relevant exchanges.

In order to explore why this might be and to identify potentially important pedagogical implications, this paper will adopt an analytic perspective related to but not formally within MCA. Zimmerman's proposal for different categories of identity (1998) establishes a useful foundation for linking previous discourse-based studies with more micro-interactional analyses. His particular interest lies in the relationship between particularities of the talk and the social context in which it is set (1998: 88):

...how oriented-to identities provide both the proximal context (the turn-by-turn orientation to developing sequences of action at the interactional level) and the distal context for social activities (the oriented-to 'extra situational' agendas and concerns accomplished through such endogenously developing sequences of interaction).

Zimmerman proposes three aspects of identity that are relevant to the analysis of interaction:

Discourse identity This is 'integral to the moment-by-moment organization of the interaction' (op cit. 90) and relates to the sequential development of the talk as participants engage as 'current speaker', 'listener', 'questioner', 'challenger', 'repair initiator', etc.

Situated identity This is relevant to particular situations and refers to the contribution of participants 'engaging in activities and respecting agendas that display an orientation to, and an alignment of, particular identity sets' (ibid.). In the classroom, relevant situated identities would be teacher and student.

Transportable identity This is perhaps the least predictable of the categories, referring as it does to 'identities that are usually visible, that is, assignable or claimable on the basis of physical or culturally based insignia which furnish the intersubjective basis for categorization' (op cit. 91). In my case, for example, I might make relevant in the talk the fact that I am a white, middle-aged, English male, or the fact that I am a father of two teenage daughters, or perhaps that I am an art lover.

The analyses that follow will reveal the potential of these distinctions to deepen and enrich our understanding of teacher-student talk in the classroom. First, though, I should like to introduce a small refinement of Zimmerman's model by proposing the concept of a 'default' identity and associated discourse identities. A default identity derives entirely from the context in which the talk is produced and applies where there is a generally recognised set of interactional expectations associated with that context, to the extent that there are recognised identities to which participants in talk

would be expected to orient, other things being equal (so while the default identities in the classroom might be teacher and student, those in a common room would be colleague and colleague). In Schegloff's hospital example, the default identities are those of doctor and patient, and relevant discourse identities would be questioner and responder, advice-giver and advice-receiver, etc. As Schegloff notes, such identities are not binding, but it nevertheless seems analytically relevant to recognise their pre-eminent position within the range of possible options.

In classroom talk, the relevant default identities are teacher and student and it is perhaps not an exaggeration to suggest that previous discourse-based research in this setting has worked entirely from the default position, taking these situated identities as given and exploring how discourse identities can be manipulated to pedagogic advantage. There is, of course, nothing wrong with this, and in practical terms it can deliver useful insights, but it is necessarily limited and may fail to identify some of the interactional possibilities available in the classroom situation. The analyses that follow will reveal how the nature of interaction in this context changes significantly when changes are made along each of Zimmerman's three dimensions.

Option 1: Default position

The default position is characterised by orientation to situated identities, realised through their characteristic discourse identities and with no evidence of transportable identity. Extract 1 is a paradigm case: student and teacher identities are omnipresent. It is the teacher who, as teacher, controls the floor, asks questions, issues instructions, prompts, and evaluates, while the students, addressing their responses to the teacher, respond directly to these turns. The only exception to this, where S3 whispers the answer to S2, is marked as outside the main exchange by the quietness with which it is uttered, and even here the contribution is designed to

facilitate a successful response to the teacher. The IRF pattern, in this its most unmitigated form, serves to reinforce situated identity and the institutional realities which it represents.

This is best illustrated by a brief consideration of examples where attempts are made to introduce aspects of identity which might subvert the relational norms implicit in the default position. In the first example (Extract 1.1) the teacher exercises his right to insist on the form of the reply provided by students, so that when S1, who has not understood the textual referent of the teacher's instruction, attempts to identify the relevant character, the teacher rejects the legitimacy of the inquiry on the basis of its linguistic form. The student is not allowed to take on the discourse identity of questioner instead of his required identity as responder.

Extract 1.1

01 T Who could make a sentence about Perry ..
02 or about- yeah make a sentence about
03 Perry please
04 S1 Perry who?
05 T No we won't ask any questions yet. Just
06 make a sentence.
07 S2 Which one?
08 T No .. no questions.
09 S2 Ah .. it's Barry?
10 T Tell me something about Perry.
11 S2 He wash ...

(Bye 1991)

Extract 1.2 provides a more poignant example of a student seeking to introduce an aspect of his transportable identity (ll.06-07), only to have this rejected (arguably after a perfunctory acknowledgement, though the tone used makes even this interpretation questionable) as the teacher insists that he maintain his student identity as 'responder to V's question', using the appropriate formula for this.

Extract 1.2

01 T: Ask erm Socoop, being erm a father
02 Socoop, being a father, can you ask him?
03 V: Er yes, er yes. Do you like er being a
04 father?
05 T: Um hm.
06 S: Yes, I ((pause)) ((proudly)) I am er
07 father of four children.
08 T: Yes. ((referring tone)) Listen to her
09 question, though. Say again. Say it
10 again.
11 V: Do you like er being a father?
12 T: Um hm.
13 S: ((No response))
14 T: Do you like being a father? Do you like
15 being a father?
16 S: Yes I like being to be...
17 T: Um hm.
18 S: ((No response))
19 T: Yes I
20 S: Yes I like ... being
21 T: Yes I do. Yes I do. I like being a
father. Mmm

(Willis 1992, format adapted)

An important distinction that needs to be drawn at this point is that between referring to a transportable identity and invoking it in talk. Student S has invoked his identity as a 'father-of-four-children' and thereby opened up the possibility that other participants will orient to him as this rather than as a fellow student. As we shall see later, the interactional consequences of such a move can be significant, but it is also possible to introduce information of this sort without moving away from the default position. For example, if in line 8 the teacher were to say, 'Yes and I'm a father of two. Listen to her question, though...' this would *refer* to a particular transportable identity but explicitly not *invoke* it: participants would be expected to orient to the speaker as teacher (i.e. in terms of the relevant situated identity) and not as father-of-two.

What I have described as the default position, with all its associated implications regarding institutionalality, power, control, etc., was perhaps more than anything else the target of criticism from communicative perspectives and has remained a site of contention ever since. It might be argued in the case of Extract 1.2, for example, that by introducing his fatherhood into an otherwise decontextualised linguistic drill, S has provided an authentic response in an otherwise inauthentic dialogue, but the issues are by no means this straightforward. Quite apart from the conceptual complications of such a comparison arising from definitional problems with the term 'authentic', simple binary distinctions of this sort, while rhetorically powerful, can easily serve to muddy the interactional waters. In what follows there will be no assumption that transportable identities are any more or less authentic than institutional identities, though it should become fairly clear that the two offer very different interactional possibilities.

Option 2: Change in discourse identity

The point is often made that classroom interaction is essentially asymmetrical and, as Drew has noted, this is a characteristic of talk in many institutional settings, where 'there may be quite striking inequalities in the distribution of communicative resources available to participants' (1991: 22). Arguably, though, the defining characteristic of the classroom is an asymmetry of knowledge, at least in so far as it is the foundation of its most basic relationship, that between teacher and learner. Despite the considerable attention given to this in the seminal works of the communicative movement and in the subsequent development of task based approaches to language learning, it would nevertheless be unwise to assume that a reversal of the standard classroom relationship would ipso facto de-institutionalise the interaction taking place. As the extracts in this section and the next demonstrate,

a polar reversal in knowledge asymmetry may or may not affect situated identity, but in the absence of transportable identity the fundamental teacher-learner relationship remains.

Extract 2 (from an intermediate class in Thailand) contains a clear example of a situation where a student knows something that the teacher does not, a likely enough occurrence where the first language and culture of the two parties differ.

Extract 2

01 S1: we discharge into the klong
02 T: what is a klong
03 S1: a klong is typical Thai
04 T: OK because I:: don't know ((laughs))
05 this word=
06 S1: = its erm
07 S2: it's a small canal
08 T: OK yes (thank you)
09 S1: a small canal for garbage
10 T: OK like an open an open sewer
11 S: yes yes it is not possible to take a bath
12 ((laughs))
13 T: no:: ((chuckles)) no
14 S1: in Bangkok there are many klongs it's a
15 quadrillage
16 T: yeah quadrillage would be a GRID SYSTEM
17 S1: this is a grid system of canal
18 T: OK And they use it for sewage and er::
19 S1: yes and rain water but er:: waste water
20 too

(Jonathan Clifton: Unpublished data)

When S1 uses a term unknown to the teacher (l.01), the teacher initiates a repair sequence with a request for a definition (l.02), and from this point on S1 and S2 take on discourse identities not normally associated with their situated identities. They provide information, much of it unsolicited (e.g. l.03, l.11, l.14) rather than solicited (l.07), they joke (l.11), they even confirm correctness and provide completion (l.19). However, beyond this there is no evidence of any shift in situated identity and plenty

to suggest the contrary. The teacher's explicit admission of a lack of knowledge in line 4, for example, accounts for the student's response in line 3 by indicating that the latter is based on the assumption that additional information – rather than a definition – is required. The formal 'thank you' in line 8, while polite, is also uncharacteristic of conversational interaction but not atypical in institutional settings where one of the parties is working to a particular agenda, and this is further reinforced by the 'yes' that precedes it. The teacher's frequent use of 'OK' in a turn-initial position serves a similar function and has been identified by Sinclair and Coulthard (1975) as a 'framing move' characteristic of teacher talk.

The changes in discourse identity here may seem small enough, but the difference between this and Extract 1 is nevertheless striking and the potential for productive linguistic exploration while maintaining situated identity should be acknowledged – indeed, this is effectively the claim made by much of the recent research into the IRF pattern already discussed. And, as the next extract shows, when situational identities are reversed the potential increases yet further.

Option 3: Change in discourse and situated identities

The differences between Extracts 2 and 3 below are in some respects relatively minor, but whereas the teacher in the above extract formally 'accepts' the new information as a teacher and maintains control of the development of the interaction, in Extract 3 the teacher's willingness to take on the situated identity of 'learner' marks an interesting development in the interactional patterning of the lesson.

The class is again a group of intermediate students, this time from Japan and in England as part of a six week summer academic exchange arrangement. The teacher has just introduced 'expressions followed by -ing' and her second example is 'It's no

use crying over spilt milk.' She asks whether the students know this (11.01-02) and when she interrupts one of those who respond positively in order to confirm her response (1.05), the student supports her claim by pointing out that there is a similar saying in Japanese. At this point the teacher not only invites the student to provide the saying, but when the students say it in Japanese she attempts to repeat it, thus reversing the normal student/teacher relationship, an interesting example of the distinction that Keppler and Luckmann draw between teaching done by 'institutionally defined instructors' and that, 'done by situationally selected "teachers"' (1991: 145). It would be excessive to claim that this transforms the interaction, but it does mark a shift away from the situated identities of the classroom and the asymmetries associated with them, towards a more equal encounter in which the parties involved explore the meanings of and relationships between associated sayings in their respective cultures:

Extract 3

01 T: ... do you know the expression IT'S
 02 NO USE CRYING OVER SPILT MILK
 03 S2: yes=
 04 S1: =ah yes I've heard=
 05 T: =you have heard this?=
 06 S1: =yes we have (0.5) a similar saying in
 07 Japan=
 08 T: =aah what is it in Japanese?
 09 S1: er
 10 ((The Japanese students say it in
 11 Japanese with T attempting to repeat))
 12 T: and how does that-
 13 S1: it's no it's no use it's no point- it's
 no
 14 use (1.0) aah=
 15 S3: =the water which spilt over
 16 (1.0)
 17 S1: over tray?=
 18 S3: =tray=
 19 T: =aah ha you [mean
 20 S3: [doesn't come back=
 21 T: =aah ha it's no use trying to get it
 22 ba [ck the water that is]=

23 S3: [yeh the water spolt]
24 T: =spilt [on the tray]
25 S3: [spilt mm] °on the tray°
26 T: aah ha yes yes yes it's the same thing IF
27 YOU SPILL THE MILK (1.0) There's none
it's
28 no use trying to put it back in the jug
29 (1.0) so IT'S NO USE CRYING over spilt
30 milk you won't YOU CAN CRY AS MUCH AS YOU
31 LIKE you WILL NOT GET THE MILK BACK INTO
32 THE (0.5) JUG THE MILK [IS
33 S5: [mmm we use this for
34 people who talk a lot always talk talk
35 (0.5) chat and want to
36 (1.0)
37 T: you say they are spilt milk?
38 S5: NO we use this proverb fo[r people]
39 T: [aah ha] who
40 talk too much=
41 S5: =TOO much and er=
42 T: =aah=
43 S5: =if you talk something that is not good
44 (0.5) and er you can
45 hurt another person [and] if
46 T: [yes]
47 S5: if you hurt them it doesn't matter what
48 you can SAY to forgive YOU but you have
49 just hurt=
50 T: =hurt them.
51 S5: [yes
52 T: [yes so there's there's n-yeh (1.0) AAH HA
53 yes (0.5) yes (0.5) yes
54 you mean (0.5)
55 S5: it means that [it's not the same
56 T: [a word spoken can't be
57 taken back
58 S5: yes
59 T: erm yes (0.5) once you've spoken it's
60 spoken yeh
61 S5: even if you ask for=
62 T: =yeh [yeh I have a feeling we] have an=
63 S5: [((unint)) forgive you]
64 T: =expression for that too but it won't
come
65 to my mind at the moment (1.0) yeh (1.0)
66 it's no good yes it's no use=
67 S6: =we have a saying the train passed next
68 station it won't come °again°=
69 T: =[aah yes yes [yes]
70 S6: =[((laughs)) | | the train passed=
71 S2: [mmm]

72 T: =you can't catch the train that's gone
yes

A glance at the physical presentation of the text with its latched turns and overlaps suggests immediately a high level of involvement and a detailed reading reveals the extent of this. One might highlight, for example, the way that S1 and S3 jointly construct their explanation in lines 13-18, or the willingness of students to constructively interrupt the teacher (an interesting exception to the practices described in Murata 1994) and overlap her talk, S3's contributions between line 19 and line 25 providing a clear example of this as teacher and student work together to establish the meaning of the Japanese expression. Students are happy to volunteer information unprompted (e.g. S6 in l.67), even interrupting the teacher to do so (S6 in l.33), and there is an unusual example of an unmarked dispreferred response in line 38, where S5 rejects the interpretation offered in the teacher's question. Far from being treated as a face-threatening act, this serves as a repair initiation the trajectory from which is only finally completed in line 62. Particularly interesting here is the way in which the speakers co-construct the repair, repeating one another's talk (e.g. S5 repeats T's 'too much' in l.41 and T repeats 'hurt' in l.50), completing or extending the other's turns (e.g. T in l.50 and l.56; S5 in l.55 and l.61) and providing supportive feedback (the word 'yes'/'yeh' occurs 12 times between l.46 and l.62). There are, in fact, striking similarities between the interaction here and that characteristic of Tannen's high-involvement style, which is typical of informal rather than institutional settings (Tannen 1984).

The fact that all this is possible derives not from any brief reversal of identity, significant though this may be, but from a subtler shift that occurs around this point. When the teacher asks 'do you know the expression...' (l.01), the referent of 'you' is clearly the class, and is understood as such, enabling S1 and S2 to self select, the

former casting her response in terms of the first person. The teacher's use of 'you' in her reply to this may be addressed to either or both S1 and S2, or to the class as a whole, but in any case is a normal part of classroom routine. But when S1 uses 'we' in the next turn (l.06), the identity set to which she refers is not the class but 'we in Japan', and in doing so she introduces an aspect of her transportable identity: the fact that she is Japanese. This MCD is what the other participants orient to in the succeeding exchanges. When S5 says 'we use this for people who talk a lot' (ll.33-4) or S6 explains that 'we have a saying the train passed next station it won't come again' (ll.67-8) they are speaking as Members, as is the teacher when she asks in l.37, 'you say they are spilt milk?' Reciprocally, the teacher orients to the MCD English native speaker, pointing out that 'we have an expression for that too' (ll.62-4).

That nationality is an aspect of transportable identity goes without saying, but I have not characterised it in this way because in the language classroom context it has a special place which at the very least renders its status ambiguous. Since the subject matter of lessons is language, language identity might be said to be, at least in some sense, situated and therefore deserving of special status, but there are at least two reasons for resisting a priori categorisation. The first is that the picture is, in practice, nowhere near as straightforward as it may at first appear. For example, the exchanges that feature in Extract 3 would not have been possible (dissimulation aside) if the teacher had been either Japanese or a fluent Japanese speaker – a debate *about* different sayings would have been very different. However, a more compelling reason is that because the status of language identity within the language classroom in relationship to the situated identities of teacher and student is not something that needs to be negotiated interactionally, it differs in a fundamental respect from the ways in which transportable identity normally functions. As the final extract

(discussed in the next section) demonstrates, it is this element of negotiation that makes orientation to transportable identity such a potent aspect of interaction.

Option 4: Orientation to aspects of transportable identity

It is at least conceivable that Extract 3 could occur in exactly this form outside the classroom in an encounter between group of Japanese visitors to England and a local resident, but the same might be said of many classroom extracts with the application of sufficient imagination and ingenuity. As ‘conversation’ it is demonstrably unusual. It could be argued that it is really little more than an extended repair sequence with a transparently pedagogic orientation (albeit in more than one direction) and an essentially one-to-group orientation. Where students do talk to one another, their exchanges are part of a jointly constructed contribution to the talk designed for the benefit of the teacher, who is the focus of the exchanges. There are no occasions where schismatic talk occurs, cutting across the essential teacher/class axis, none of the subtle shifts in focus or interactional sparring that are so much a feature of conversation, with its equal participation rights and openness of topic. It is only the transformative potential inherent in the introduction of transportable identity to the classroom that makes such exchanges possible, as Extract 4 will show.

The next extract is chosen because it too involves asymmetry of knowledge and includes a repair sequence, but one which is realised very differently from that in Extract 3. Again we are in an intermediate class, this time in Taiwan, where the teacher has mentioned the swastika, an ancient symbol but one with dark associations in the west. We join the talk at the point where Wi has pointed out that that many boys in Taiwan actually like the swastika. The extract is followed by a detailed analysis of how transportable identities are negotiated interactionally in the exchanges.

Extract 4

01 Wi: But in fact, in Taiwan, many, many boys
02 like the swasti-, swastika
03 T: But I feel like they don't really
04 understand.
05 Wi: No, we understand. You know why? After,
06 after...
07 Ch: Really? ((sceptically to Wi))
08 Wi: Yeah, like me, you know, I played, no I
09 made, the, the, the model. You know? The
10 war models 'muo shin'
11 An: Game.
12 Wi: Yeah
13 An: Game. World War II game
14 Wi: no, no, no, not game, muo shin. You know?
15 T: A model.
16 Wi: Yeah, to make a tank, to make a jeep...
17 T: Airplane...
18 Ss: Ahhhh
19 Wi: Yeah, so, we know the German swasti-
20 swastika
21 T: Uh-huh

(Lori Redman: Unpublished data)

Wi begins by suggesting that the category of boys who like the swastika in Taiwan is a large one. The teacher, placing himself outside this category and working within his already-established category of 'Westerner (who therefore understands the darker significance of this sign)', accepts Wi's claim but suggests that liking and understanding are not identical:

01 Wi: But in fact, in Taiwan, many, many boys
02 like the swasti-, swastika
03 T: But I feel like they don't really
04 understand.

Wi's response is to identify himself as a member of this group ('we understand') and to offer an explanation as a privileged insider. This generates a critical response from a fellow student, potentially more damaging than the teacher's challenge because it

comes not from a Western adult but from a Taiwanese teenager, categories also relevant to 'boys who like the swastika':

05 Wi: No, we understand. You know why? After,
06 after..
07 Ch: Really? ((sceptically to Wi))

Wi now offers himself as a typical member of this group, citing the making of military models as an example of a relevant activity. The correction of 'played' to 'made' seems at first merely linguistic, but from the point of view of the group the choice has particular significance, as the subsequent exchange reveals:

08 Wi: Yeah, like me, you know, I played, no I
09 made, the, the, the model. You know? The
10 war models 'muo shin'
11 An: Game.
12 Wi: Yeah
13 An: Game. World War II game
14 Wi: no, no, no, not game, muo shin. You know?

When An offers 'game' as a translation of 'muo shin', Wi at first accepts this, but amplification by An provokes an emphatic rejection. Implicit in Wi's response is the assumption that war models represent 'serious business' and that 'muo shin' is more than a mere game. Hence his earlier self-correction. Examples serve to underline his membership of a model-making, rather than a wargaming group. It is this, with its attendant specialist knowledge base, that allows him to claim 'knowledge' of the German swastika, which the teacher accepts:

15 T: A model.
16 Wi: Yeah, to make a tank, to make a jeep..
17 T: Airplane..
18 Ss: Ahhhh
19 Wi: Yeah, so, we know the German swasti-
20 swastika
21 T: Uh-huh

The significance of this exchange lies in the interactional effort which student Wi invests in establishing his membership of the group who understand the swastika. The management of this requires considerable interactional subtlety and an awareness of the implications of the linguistic choices he makes. The direct engagement with the teacher's position involves him a variety of interactional moves designed to establish the legitimacy of his claim through membership of the MCD 'military model-makers' and the relevant qualifying condition (Cuff 1993), 'understanding the swastika'. Challenges need to be dealt with (ll.05, 08-10), repairs strategically formulated (ll.08-09), definitions negotiated (ll.10-16), and listeners brought onside (ll.16-21) if his claim is to hold water. This is the stuff of conversation and is not simply matter of fluency rather than accuracy, or a focus on content rather than form: for those directly and fully engaged in the business of talk and the construction of shared understanding, these are all resources to be used, important elements in the interactional endeavour. There is no evidence here of situated identity and nothing 'institutional' about the talk as such, though this is not to deny that all talk is influenced to some extent by the context in which it occurs. The claim to special knowledge made on the basis MCD 'Western adult' is rejected through the establishment of an alternative identity with equally privileged access to relevant understanding, and what the speakers therefore choose to make relevant in the talk render its institutional setting a matter of mere accident.

Issues of implementation

The brief analyses offered above for illustrative purposes suggest that classroom interaction might be usefully characterised in terms of the three aspects of identity proposed by Zimmerman, producing the options summarised in Table 1. As a model for analysing classroom interaction, this might have some value (in the context of

teacher education and development, for example), but underlying it is the stronger claim that introducing transportable identity in the language classroom – engaging as ‘nature lover’ or ‘supporter of the English cricket team’, for example – and encouraging students to do the same may have the power to transform the sort of interaction that takes place in the classroom.

[INSERT TABLE 1 NEAR HERE]

In straightforward pedagogic terms, if introducing transportable identities into the language classroom adds an important interactional dimension to that setting, this would seem to support a case for teacher self-revelation in language teaching. However, if there is indeed a compelling case to be made for conceptualising our interactional work as teachers in ways that engage both the discursal and the personal, we must also recognise that any actions arising from this will involve an investment of self, with all the emotional, relational and moral considerations that this invokes. With the possibility of new and potentially more productive forms of teacher-student interaction come associated responsibilities, and although it is not possible to list all the considerations that might be relevant here, there are at least three dimensions which might be considered: practical, pedagogic and moral.

There might be all sorts of *practical* reasons why teachers would prefer to avoid engaging in forms of classroom interaction privileging transportable over situated identity. The most obvious of these is that of discipline: with certain classes, it may be possible to yield asymmetrical advantage while retaining situated identity, but moving away from this might be seen by some as also removing access to essential mechanisms of control. For good or ill, teachers in these situations might prefer to rely entirely on more carefully policed group work. Similar considerations might

apply with teachers who are unsure of their grasp of the target language, while in some situations the extent to which teachers are permitted to engage with broader issues might be formally circumscribed.

	Discourse	Situated	Transportable
Extract 1	–	–	–
Extract 2	+	–	–
Extract 3	+	+	(–)
Extract 4	+	+	+

Table 1: Overview of non-default identity features in extracts

(+ = present; – = absent)

Practical objections are always susceptible to remedial action, but *pedagogic* objections might prove more intractable. The principles that inform teachers' beliefs and professional actions are usually deep-seated (Elbaz, 1983) and may have developed from their own days as students (Lortie, 1975), and there is perhaps nothing more fundamental than what counts as teaching – or what doesn't. This is illustrated by the following response from an MA student to a fellow contributor on an email list who had advanced the case for engaging students in topical debate while maintaining professional detachment along the lines of broadcasters:

I think a teacher must hold herself or himself to a much higher standard in which the 'emotion' is used only as a motivator to get students working on the task in hand. If you start becoming involved in the topic you have lost sight of what you are supposed to be doing as a teacher. (Darin Bicknell)

For this teacher, at least, personal involvement – and the associated emergence of aspects of transportable identity – is not pedagogically justifiable: the professional compromise involved outweighs potential interactional benefits.

At the heart of such objections is the thorny issue of authenticity. The interactional, pedagogic and moral legitimacy of the sort of engagement I have proposed depends on the authenticity of the encounter: a person who feigns aspects of their transportable identity (except when explicitly assuming a different identity as in role play situations or on stage) is guilty of deception. This is the third kind of authenticity that Montgomery refers to when discussing the concept in the context of broadcast talk: 'talk that is true to the self/person' (2001: 404). It is one of the reasons why some teachers might have pedagogic objections to personal involvement in classroom exchanges. However, there may be *moral* reasons why such engagement has to be at least circumscribed. It may be, for example, that I hold certain beliefs that are incompatible with my role as a responsible teacher or with the culture in which I

have chosen to live and work. As long as I keep such views to myself, they do not interfere with the exercise of my professional responsibilities, but if I put myself in a situation where such views might emerge, either directly through personal expression or indirectly through an explicit refusal to respond, then I have failed in my professional responsibility. Such moral considerations are fundamental to the sort of interaction we are concerned with here, for as Buzzelli and Johnston have noted, (2001: 876), 'moral beliefs, values, and understandings are played out at the critical point of contact between the private, individual sphere and the social realm.' (For a more extensive discussion of moral issues in teaching, see Johnston 2003.)

Conclusion

Issues of morality and teacher belief cannot be resolved by simple recourse to features of classroom talk, but if we hope to deepen our understanding of the complex interplay of personal and technical in the process of language teaching we need to find ways of understanding the construction of talk that overcome conventional divisions. Important work in this area is already being done, often drawing from a conceptually and methodologically eclectic palette (see, for example, Rampton's powerful and subtle questioning of the distinction between 'natural' and 'instructed' language learning, 1999; or papers in Zuengler and Mori, 2002), and this in its turn needs to be set in the context of a long-established tradition exploring the social construction of knowledge in the classroom (for a useful overview, see Green and Dixon, 1994). The focus and purpose of this paper is much narrower than this and it offers no insights into broader interpretive practices within the language classroom. What it does offer, though, is an approach to classroom interaction that highlights the very important relationship between discourse features and aspects of personal and institutional identity. The self, as Kerby notes, is 'a social and linguistic

construct, a nexus of meaning rather than an unchanging entity' (1991: 34) and it seems almost perverse to assume – let alone insist – that it is something that should properly be left at the classroom door.

Notes

1. Conversation is, in fact, notoriously difficult to define and conversation analysts generally prefer to use the term 'talk-in-interaction to cover both conversation, 'a form of sociability' (ten Have 1999: 4), and talk designed with specific purposes in view (usually institutional). For the purposes of the discussion in this paper, Wilson's defining characteristic of conversation (1989: 20) offers a valuable point of orientation:

In defining conversation as a specific speech event we begin by arguing that conversations may be distinguished by an equal distribution of speaker rights. This does not mean that speakers contribute an equal number of speaking turns, but rather that any individual has an equal right (within conversation) to initiate talk, interrupt, respond, or refuse to do any of these.

2. Sacks' interest in social interaction was directed to two complementary aspects, one focusing on sequences and the other on procedures for categorisation. The former developed into conversation analysis, while the latter was largely ignored until relatively recently, when a growing interest in the reflexive relationship between talk and social identity led researchers to turn their attention to this aspect of his work. Sacks defined membership categories as classifications or social types that could be used to describe persons, distinguishing between 'members' (participants in the talk) and 'Members', who occupy particular categories ('judge', 'slob', 'father-of-two', 'art lover', 'mentor', etc.). The fact that some categories recognisably go together means that, when combined with appropriate rules of application, they can form a Membership Categorisation Device (MCD). 'Family', for example, will include mother, father, daughter, cousin, etc., but not 'mayor' or 'wicket keeper'. A standard relational pair (SRP) such as teacher and student is a particular type of MCD.

These fundamental concepts Sacks combines with a number of rules and maxims governing the ways in which categories are understood. For example, if I see an adult with a group of children, one of whom is introduced as 'my star pupil', I may then categorise the rest as pupils, whereas if she is introduced as 'my daughter Jo' I may then categorise the rest as family members. A further dimension is provided by category-bounded activities, which represent 'one whole range of ways that identifications get picked' (Sacks 1992a: 588). For example, if I look through a window and see an individual standing at the front of a room and pointing to someone in a seated group, some of whom have their hands up, I may identify the activity as a lesson and the people involved as teacher and students. This will, of course, enable me to predict other likely actions.

MCA has provided a tool for rich analyses of how talk is constructed and understood, extending into a number of different areas (for references to key work, see Hester and Eglin 1997). However, I locate Zimmerman's work outside mainstream MCA for a number of reasons, primarily because it focuses on identity and uses pre-set categories which can be applied to interaction, rather than examining the work of participants in interaction to see how *they* use membership categories. The use of the word 'device' in MCD is therefore not accidental but a deliberate attempt to represent the fact that this is used in interaction as a participant resource. Zimmerman's categories are analyst's resources and I have used them as such (for a list of similar identity categories, see Tracy 2002: 17-20) because I believe they best highlight the relatively simple points I wish to make about classroom talk. However, MCA provides a means of explicating members' actions that offers a potentially deeper understanding of the interactional processes at work in the classroom.

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Appendix 1: Transcription conventions

Extracts 1, 2, & 3

.	falling intonation contour
,	'continuing' intonation contour
!	animated tone
?	rising intonation contour
:	lengthening of preceding syllable
-	abrupt cut-off
<u>underlining</u>	emphasis
CAPS	louder than surrounding talk
◦ ◦	quieter than the surrounding talk
> <	quicker than surrounding talk
[]	onset and end of overlap
=	latched utterances
(1.5)	Silence, timed in seconds and tenths of a second
(())	additional information, e.g. non-verbal actions
(XXXXX)	Unclear talk

Extracts 1.1, 1.2 & 4

...	pauses of varying lengths
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