

# Dancing K-Pop with Chinese and “English in Class Please”: Policy Negotiations as Relational-Languaging Episodes

Harrison, S. & Chen, Y-H.

**Author post-print (accepted) deposited by Coventry University’s Repository**

**Original citation & hyperlink:**

Harrison, S & Chen, Y-H 2021, 'Dancing K-Pop with Chinese and “English in Class Please”: Policy Negotiations as Relational-Languaging Episodes', *RELC Journal*.  
<https://dx.doi.org/10.1177/00336882211022123>

DOI 10.1177/00336882211022123

ISSN 0033-6882

ESSN 1745-526X

Publisher: SAGE Publications

**Copyright © and Moral Rights are retained by the author(s) and/ or other copyright owners. A copy can be downloaded for personal non-commercial research or study, without prior permission or charge. This item cannot be reproduced or quoted extensively from without first obtaining permission in writing from the copyright holder(s). The content must not be changed in any way or sold commercially in any format or medium without the formal permission of the copyright holders.**

**This document is the author’s post-print version, incorporating any revisions agreed during the peer-review process. Some differences between the published version and this version may remain and you are advised to consult the published version if you wish to cite from it.**

# **From Dancing K-Pop with Chinese and “English in class please”: English language policy negotiations as *relational-linguaging* episodes during classroom interaction**

**Simon Harrison**

Department of English, City University of Hong Kong, Hong Kong

**Yu-Hua Chen**

School of Humanities, Coventry University, UK

## **Abstract**

Pointing out that language policy negotiations in classroom discourse are an understudied kind of ‘language-related episode’, and proposing that Tim Ingold’s notion of ‘meshwork’ dissolves a boundary that typically encloses their analysis, this paper examines how a rich and indicative example of student group interaction on a British university campus in China becomes interwoven with multiple threads, including: different languages, Korean pop dance moves, coffee from the campus Starbucks, and the teacher’s repeated attempts at EMI policy enforcement. Our example was discovered in corpus recordings of group activities during English for Academic Purposes, then transcribed for embodied activity (primarily speech and gesture) and further explored in relation to the multiple threads which visibly and audibly became involved. Analysis of the episode shows how students’ *relational-linguaging* behaviors must negotiate, respond, and adapt to the policy enforcement, illustrating some of the tensions immanent to the transnational higher education experience.

## **Keywords**

EMI language policy; policy negotiation; L2 group interaction; language-related episodes; languaging; meshwork; gesture

## **1 Introduction**

In a recent analysis of student group interaction observed on a British university campus in China, Chen et al. (2019) observed a familiar paradox taking place in one group: they saw that students’ “languaging practices, such as codeswitching and speaking in the L1... may constitute deviations

that teachers often try to fix in the classroom context” even though, and here is the paradox, such practices might be “used to resolve language issues among students” (n.p). How might these Chinese students (in this case all women) trying to resolve a language-related problem respond to their teacher, who was interrupting with a reminder to speak English only? They basically ignored him!

This kind of language policy negotiation can offer valuable insights to English Medium Instruction (EMI). In a review of research on transnational higher education universities, De Costa et al. (2020) point to such interactions as valuable to understanding “the pedagogical practices that are enacted in the EMI classroom” (p. 6), and more generally, to shedding light on the impact of language ideologies and forces of marketisation on the ecologies of EMI universities (Fleming & Harrison, 2020; Han et al., 2019; Pennycook, 2018). These real-time policy negotiations are also a type of ‘language-related episode’, that is, “part of a dialogue where the students talk about the language they are producing, question their language use, or correct themselves or others” (Swain & Lapkin, 1998: 326). As we know from two decades of second language acquisition (SLA) research, language-related episodes open up critical moments for negotiating linguistic knowledge and meaning in classroom discourse (Edstrom, 2015; Leeser, 2004; Ohta, 2001; Williams, 1999). From our psychogeographic and ecological-enactive perspectives (Fleming & Harrison, 2020; Harrison, 2020), we see student group interactions as *meshworks* or *knottings* of “entangled lines of life, growth and movement” (Ingold, 2011: 63). In the EMI classroom, language policy negotiation is interlaced through such knottings and may tighten or loosen depending on the situation.

We approach this Special Issue’s task of problematizing EMI by investigating language policy negotiation during an EMI encounter. More specifically, we analyse a rich and indicative language-related episode in group interaction observed on a British university campus in China to inspect what *becomes* when teachers attempt to enforce a language policy in situ.<sup>1</sup> Our example was discovered in the Multimodal Corpus of Chinese Academic Written and Spoken English

---

<sup>1</sup> For concepts of entanglement and *becoming* in studies of language and communication, see Thibault’s (2020) relational languaging, Ingold’s (2011) meshwork/knotting ontologies, Streeck’s (2017) self-making man/gesture by autopoiesis, Di Paolo et al.’s (2018) linguistic bodies, and Harrison’s book in preparation on The Body Language Myth.

(MuCAWSE; Chen et al. 2019; Stevens et al. 2020), then transcribed and analysed for embodied details of spoken and gestural movements with the environment.

We continue this introduction by building empirical and theoretical perspectives on policy negotiations and language-related episodes. We start to reframe these situations ecologically as *linguaging*-related episodes, then after evoking Ingold's (2011) notion of meshworks and Thibault's (2020) notion of linguaging, regard them as *relational-linguaging* episodes (to be defined below). Our methods section describes the data collection, identification, transcription, and analysis. We then immerse readers in a micro-analysis of the selected interactive sequence as "a tangled mesh of paths of coming and going, laid down by people as they make their way from place to place" (Ingold, 2007: 160). Salient moments provide take off points for a closing discussion.

## 2 Background

To begin with some broad brush strokes, we point out with Spolsky (2004) that language policy consists of the interplay between language practices, language ideologies, and policy interventions/management (pp.4-5). Language policy *negotiations* refer to this interplay and have been observed and theorised by Mortensen (2014), who, building on Spolsky's distinctions with observational-ethnographic data from an international campus in Denmark, aimed to conceptualise relations between practice, policy, and management as interacting along vertical axes. Whereas posters around the campus reminding students about speaking English were seen to "relay language ideological imperatives... 'from above'", and in doing so "reflect the presence of a strong pro-English language ideology in the environment", Mortensen (2014) also pointed to "language policy that evolves through – and is manifest in – language practice, i.e. language policy 'from below'" (p. 427).

Other researchers have adopted ecologically-oriented perspectives on students' negotiation of language policies. Ou, Gu & Hult (2020), for instance, analyse an episode of informal interaction from different socio-cultural and linguistic backgrounds interacting on the campus of an international university in China. Rather than perceiving policy-practice interactions as intersecting vertically, they shift our attention to a more horizontal modelling of students'

multilingual and embodied repertoires that, during interactions, form partially-overlapping and mutually adaptive translanguaging spaces (see also Hult, 2018). The researchers' excerpt of interaction between two students on campus illustrates such spaces dynamically expanding when, having begun talking only in English and later integrated their mother tongue (Mandarin Chinese), the students discover a shared interest in Korean language, which subsequently rises to the level of an available linguistic resource in their conversation. For Ou, Gu & Hult (2020), these students illustrate how "configurations of resources shifted according to the perceived spatial relations", which in this case referred to "the interlocutor's repertoire and preference of language use" (p.13). Such translanguaging practices problematize EMI policy and practice, furthermore, because they unfold within a context aiming to immerse such students primarily in English.

Introducing a further dimension or axis to these spatial modellings of policy negotiation, and noting the salience of language policy and ideology to the ecological framework of the Douglas Fir Group (2016), Han et al. (2019) extended ecological approaches in Second Language Acquisition (cf. Van Lier, 2000) to examining the policy/practice interface in terms of a situated, spatial trajectory. By acknowledging "the embodied aspects of language learning and the crucial role that the ecology in which a learner is situated plays in shaping learning" (p. 67), Han et al. (2019) examined the language policy negotiations of an Uighur student, Alim, acquiring Mandarin Chinese in China. Alim's trajectory and encounters with policy were grounded not only in relation to the embodied and material realities of different settings (such as group projects, classroom interactions, and schools) but also with respect to wider historical, geographical, and political realities.

Multiple intermeshing reals were similarly evoked in Fleming and Harrison's study of millennial forms of consumer culture in China and their impact on Chinese subjectivities, societies, and cities (Fleming & Harrison, 2020). *Chinese Urban Shi-nema* aims to enframe the broader horizon of a modernising Chinese city and its inhabitants microinteractions into one dynamic picture, which includes the city's Sino-foreign venture and EMI teaching policies. By adopting what they call a critical 'Vertigo Effect' (a technique drawn from the cinema that combines a focusing zoom and a backtracking dolly movement, to bring figure and field into dynamic moving relationship within a single shot; pp. 10-11), Fleming and Harrison's discussion of EMI education (Ch. 5) exposes "interleaving scales of assembly" (p. 140) that range from globally distributed UK

higher education models and multinational corporates (such as Starbucks and Subway) to the more local, changing topology and functions of Chinese higher education, all the way down to singular embodied classroom interactions and the subjective experiences of staff and students.<sup>2</sup>

Shifting to a different line of research, real-time language policy negotiations between students can be recognized as a ‘language-related episode’, which based on observations (unrelated to language policy) were defined by Swain and Lapkin (1998) as “any part of a dialogue where the students talk about the language they are producing, question their language use, or correct themselves or others” (p. 326). Subsequent research into Second Language Acquisition and Development has shown that such episodes are important moments of meta-linguistic talk in which students challenge, develop, and otherwise negotiate their knowledge of the ‘target’ language (Edstrom, 2015; Leiser, 2004; Swain & Lapkin, 1998; Williams, 1999). The notion of a ‘target’ language for ‘acquisition’ evokes for us a view of English as pressurized and commodified that fits well with this Special Issues concerns about EMI/TNHE (see Fleming & Harrison 2020: Ch. 5). Studies of peer dialogue help illuminate the importance of language-related episodes for collaborative learning. In a study of American students learning L2 Japanese, for instance, Ohta (2001) observed that rich moments of negotiation occurred when students made mistakes or visibly struggled, illustrating how these critical moments sparked peer-to-peer collaborative discourses that help the struggling student by co-constructing, explaining, initiating, and providing repair (Ohta, 2001: 89). Williams (1999) found language-related episodes based on negotiating problems with vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation, while Leiser (2004) observed the factors influencing whether negotiations would be “solved correctly..., left unresolved or abandoned..., (or) resolved incorrectly” (Leiser, 2004, 65-66; Swain & Lapkin, 1998). Other studies of collaborative learning have further highlighted how students’ gestures and other embodied resources are mobilized when negotiating linguistic problems and co-constructing linguistic knowledge (Gullberg, 2014; McCafferty & Stam, 2008).

Noting that the word ‘language’ in the term ‘language-related episodes’ has referred almost exclusively to linguistic aspects of a spoken language system, studies of video recorded L2

---

<sup>2</sup> We hope that *Chinese Urban Shi-nema*’s interleaving scales of analysis enfolding microcosms and macrocosms will be appreciated by applied linguists striving for what Blommaert (2010) called for as a “descriptive apparatus... capable of reading infinitely big features of society from infinitely small details of communicative behaviour” (p. xiv).

interaction have recently demonstrated how moments of breakdown and repair can arise to negotiate aspects of the wider ecological setting, including students' embodied actions not usually classed as 'linguistic', such as their gestural depictions (Harrison et al. 2018; Stevens, 2021), and coupled-interactions with the environment of learning materials and drawings (Stutzman, 2017). As the scope of analysis has been expanding to include interactants' embodied and environmental relations, the previous categories for types and resolutions of breakdown repair are being challenged to account for an embodied, world-involving view of peer-interaction (Harrison and Stutzman, 2020).

Shifting to such a view requires recognizing that *what* students are negotiating in interaction (often pronunciation, lexis, grammar, but also embodied and environmental relations) is not something separate from *how* they are negotiating in interaction (with pronunciation, lexis, grammar, but also embodied and environmental relations). This recognition is an outcome of adopting ecologically-oriented approaches to language as environmentally-embedded, embodied behavior, or as we might now prefer to say, approaches to *linguaging* (Di Paolo et al., 2018; Jensen, 2014; Thibault, 2020). The term 'linguaging' has several versions with overlapping uses and meanings, the one most relevant here being articulated by Thibault (2020) as referring to "a meshwork of multiplicity of entangled living pathways forged through co-action, co-orientation, co-presence, and co-sensing between persons and other living beings and artefacts in the human ecology" (p. 85). Indeed, rather than a 'multimodal' or networked view of embodied language, what we prefer to take as our guiding image for approaching breakdown repair and policy negotiation is anthropologist Ingold's (2011) notion of entangled lines and knottings in the 'meshwork' – a notion that also plays a crucial role in the approach to linguaging by Thibault. Ingold introduces the notion of *meshwork* using the example of a house, which we could easily replace with a classroom, as being:

a place where the lines of its residents [students & teachers] are tightly knotted together. But these lines are no more contained within the [classroom] than are threads contained within a knot. Rather, they trail beyond it, only to become caught up with other lines in other places, as are threads in other knots. Together they make up what I have called the *meshwork*. (Ingold, 2011: 149; cf. Ingold, 2007).

If bodies, languages, interactions, classrooms, and Sino-foreign campus can be perceived as knottings in meshworks, then we might ask, to what are students' languaging-related episodes in classrooms related? "Rather than an already given and totalising system of linguistic forms and meanings from which we select", Thibault (2020) might say, "languaging is a simultaneous multiplicity of interwoven and forever becoming sense-making trajectories" (p. 85).<sup>3</sup> To view language policy as threads within this meshwork is therefore not to relate separate phenomena but to implicate language policy as embedded in *relational-languaging episodes*. While the former task would aim to show how policy enforcements may intersect and relate (e.g. 'top-down' and 'bottom-up'), we will here work to show how their interweaving becomes tighter or looser depending on the situation. In other words, rather than setting out to identify or characterise the elements involved and describing their interplay, we approach the EMI classroom as a meshwork in which students, teachers, languages, learning materials, and the EMI language policy are already deeply entangled. Our work aims to appreciate how this meshwork adapts and responds to – or affects and is affected by – what can be recognized as a 'policy negotiation'.

## 2 Methods

Our example was discovered in the Multimodal Corpus of Chinese Academic Written and Spoken English (MuCAWSE: Stevens et al., 2020). As part of a wider project collecting samples of language events (or rather *languaging behaviors*) from a Sino-British campus, this video-recorded corpus was dedicated to examining interactive classroom 'task-in-process' activities defined by Stevens et al. (2020) in their corpus meta-paper as any "activity involving any number of students for which they were given prior instruction, and for which English is used to achieve the goal of the activity" (p. 392; cf. Bygate et al., 2001). These activities took place in classrooms where undergraduate and Master students (of Chinese nationality for the most part) were being taught English for Academic/Specific Purposes as offered to students' entering the university's degree

---

<sup>3</sup> Consistent with relational-languaging and meshworks is the notion of participatory sense-making, which according to Di Paolo, Cuffari, and De Jaegher (2018) "explains how one's cognition and meaning-making involve the activity of others" (p. 3). More specifically, participatory sense making is the "dynamic and intricate entanglement of adaptive, metabolic, physiological, emotional, and intercorporeal dimensions of bodily existence (that) explains how and why things matter to us and generates many of the productive tensions that fuel our sense-making" (*idem*).



programs, filmed with video and audio recorders zoomed in on pairs or groups in the interaction (Stevens et al., 2020). The example to be analyzed here jumped out from one of the university’s Masters pre-sessional classes, which are required for students whose level is lower than entry requirement (IELTS 6.5.) but also open to postgraduate students above this level “who are interested in improving their academic English language and study skills” (institution’s website). In most recordings of these classes, students were seated in groups around tables and being taught by an extensively experienced tutor who regularly sets the class pair and groupwork activities. In our specific example, the tutor happens to be a man originally from England. The particular group of students in this example are all Chinese women and we can assume they are either at or very close above/below IELTS 6.5 level. Building on our previous discussions of this example (Chen et al., 2019; Fleming & Harrison, 2020: Ch.5), we aim to perceive how language policy threads might interweave with a relational-linguaging episode on the micro-scale of sense-making behaviors. The richness of this example warrants a single case analysis, leaving other forms of discourse analytical and corpus research for future endeavours.

To perceive the details of our relational-linguaging episode, a number of methodological croppings, zooms and focuses were needed. We identified its start as a perturbation in the interaction when one student began to struggle or make mistakes (Ohta, 2001). When deciding where to end our analysis for this paper, we looked for change-of-state markers (e.g. “oh ok”) that suggested that the language issue had been better understood by the person who was initially struggling (Leeser, 2004). Details of speech within this boundary were then transcribed following a system for spoken language transcription developed for the MuCAWSE corpus (Chen & Zhou, 2017). Specific gestures were identified and singled out for treatment with the help of Kendon’s (2004) transcription conventions for gesture units, which show relations between speech and gesture through the temporal phases of gestural action (Table 1).

*Table 1.* Transcription conventions for speech and gesture

<b>Speech</b>		<b>Gesture</b> (in line underneath speech)	
1	Turns are indicated on numbered lines		Onset or offset of gestural action
abc	Conventional orthography for speech	~~	Preparation phase of gesture

ABC	Capital letters indicate verbal stress	**	Stroke phase of gesture
abc:::	Colons show elongated sounds	-.-.	Retraction of gesture
(1)	Timed pause between parentheses	^^	Head nods (above speech)
(.)	Micropause (less than one second)	[1]	Associated framegrab of video-feed
°abc°	Markedly soft or loud pronunciation	((writes))	Action between double parentheses
=	Latching across turns		
[	Overlapping talk		
/abc\	Rising/falling intonation		
ha	laughter particle (hahah)		

By attempting to circumscribe and unpack the details of a relational-linguaging episode, we inevitably risk undermining its flux and becoming. While these methods for identifying an object of study help to identify interesting micro-features of policy negotiation, what we also work to show is that “the creeping entanglements of life will always and inevitably triumph over our attempts to box them in” (Ingold, 2011: 125). As we hope to show, for example, a given policy negotiation may not conform to clear start and end parts or involve only the specific interaction, people, and classroom observable in the recorded data.

### 3 Analysis

Before diving into a detailed analysis of the meshwork’s responses and adaptations to an evolving policy negotiation, which we base on embodied languaging behaviors that we aim to specify through our transcription of speech and gesture (cf. Table 1), an overview of the entire episode might offer a useful background. Having completed a reading activity designed to “expand (their) vocabulary”, a group of five female students in this EMI Masters pre-session class are discussing their answers to a ‘match the words definitions’ exercise (Figure 1).



Figure 1. The activity and group (pseudonyms) setting for our case of relational-linguaging

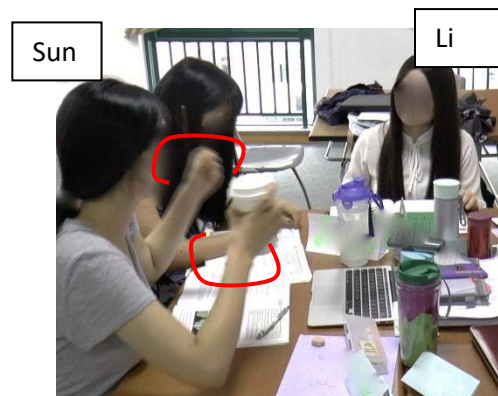
Because the words are numbered and the definitions are lettered, one student will share her answers to the group by enunciating the letters she has written down. When she hesitantly pronounces the letter ‘g’ (/dʒi/) as ‘j’ (/dʒeɪ/), her peers immediately orient to this as something in need of correcting (there is no letter ‘j’ in the activity), and we recognize an intensity in relational-linguaging as the group collaborates to resolve tensions that the student’s uncertainty has introduced. As their collaboration begins to channel new flows of embodied and environmental matter (including Mandarin Chinese and various gestures), we will hear the teacher in the background reminding these students of the English language policy, which introduces further tensions to the dynamics of group interaction. Of particular interest is an interplay between how the students’ relational-linguaging engages the teacher’s requests, and respectively, how the teacher engages with the way his students are responding (e.g. by repeating, upgrading, and reframing his policy enforcement). Specifically, the teacher initially seems to disapprove of and interrupt the students’ efforts, but they defiantly resume and resolve their negotiation, on which their teacher interestingly comments much later in the interaction. Later in the recording, the teacher subsequently picks up on and comments on. A more detailed account of this co-regulation will now be presented through a series of transcriptions.

Transcript 1 shows the episode beginning to occur when Li (the student who is reading out her answers) hesitantly pronounces the sound ‘j’ (/dʒeɪ/) with a markedly soft volume (hence the degree symbols around ‘j’ in the transcript, line 1). The peer to Li’s left, Bai, immediately orients

to this as in need of remedying and she initiates repair by latching with ‘g’ (line 2), which a third peer, Sun, repeats more forcefully (i.e. upgrades) as she also says in Chinese “J shen me gui” (*J what on earth?*, line 3). In response, Li repeats ‘gee’, but with a rising falling intonation suggestive of further uncertainty, thereby questioning ‘g’ as the repair (line 4). Sun responds to Li “gee gee gee” (line 6), accompanying these “gee” sounds (/dzidzidzidzi/) with a gestural dance that involves her moving the upper body in a kind of jogging motion [1]. At the same time, the teacher – who has obviously overheard this exchange – can be identified (though not visible) in the recording saying “English ladies, English” (line 5).

*Transcript 1.*

- 1 Li i a e ʔj° c=
- 2 Bai =g  
j what on earth ha?
- 3 Sun G:::! j 什么鬼 ha? (shen me gui)
- 4 Li g/ee:::\
- 5 T English ladies (.) English
- 6 Sun gee gee gee gee=  
|~\*\*\*\*\*-.-.| [1]



[Figure 2]

With our goal of considering aspects of this interaction as threads in a meshwork, we could begin by acknowledging Sun’s “gee gee gee” sounds and jogging movements as reproducing a chorus and dance move from the song “Gee gee baby” by Korean pop sensation Shào nǚ shí dài, allowing us to identify the so-called “Korean wave” being interlaced in this interaction.<sup>4</sup> This Kpop dance move is itself entangled, because the Starbucks coffee cup in the students’ hand would be another thread, following the trail of which would take us to the campus Starbucks, and from there to the wider interpenetration of China’s coffee markets (replete with ‘coffee wars’).<sup>5</sup> Coming back to the

<sup>4</sup> See Girls’ Generation 소녀시대 ‘Gee’ MV here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=U7mPqycQ0tQ>

<sup>5</sup> In evoking the ‘coffee wars’, Peter De Costa draws amusing and insightful parallels between international universities and their students aspiring to only Western-based models for both English language (‘Standard’

Kpop dance move, Nguyen and Pennycook (2018) also report on students in their data dancing, which based on interviewing Vietnamese students at universities in Australia concluded were deployed as “communicative strategies to ensure they are understood” (p. 7). As per one of Nguyen and Pennycook’s (2018) interviewees, for instance, “it seems like I’m dancing to illustrate my idea, because my English is not good. Sometimes the teacher doesn’t understand, I have to even draw and explain” (p. 7). However, the students in our example seem to understand each other perfectly well, so the gesture is not a strategy to make up for proficiency or fluency. Rather, the dancing student is sense-making or ‘self-making’ (Streeck, 2017), creatively engaging materials from her local socio-material and cultural context with the goal of helping her peer to resolve the pronunciation issue.

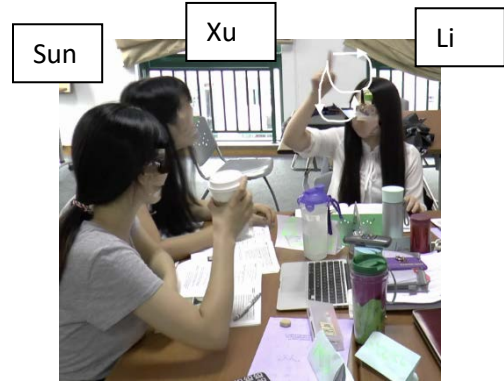
Moving to a subsequent stage of the interaction (Transcript 2), without explicitly addressing the teacher’s policy reminder and her peer’s pedagogical dance moves, however, Li asks Sun in Chinese “*na zhe ge ne*” (*what about this one*, line 7). She is referring to her own gesture that she is performing by tracing a letter ‘j’ with her index finger in the space between herself and her addressees [see Figure 3]. She prepares this gesture with “*na zhe ge*” so that with “*ne*” (question particle) she is gazing at her hand tracing ‘j’, this particular coming together of embodied behaviors or praxis focusing mutual attention on the gesture (Streeck, 2009: 85). Holding this gesture in space and gazing to her addressees is evidently experienced as a partial act requiring others’ attention and creating a ‘pull’ in the environment (Di Paolo et al., 2018), as all four other students respond in unison saying “J” (lines 8-11). The student Xu sitting immediately next to Li accompanies her “J” with a tracing gesture that mirrors Li’s, except more precisely because she is holding a pen [see Figure 4]. After a short pause (line 12), Li says “Oh Ok” whilst raising her eyebrows (line 13), apparently confirming her understanding.

---

English) and campus coffee shops (Starbucks), when as he puts it, “there are many other local alternatives (e.g. Luckin Coffee) that might be more appropriate models for domestic audiences” (personal communication). De Costa’s playful musing has transpired to be somewhat prophetic, with Forbes running an article in 2019 claiming that “Starbucks worst nightmare in China—competition from fast-growing start-ups like Luckin Coffee—is coming true” (Mourdoukoutas, 2019). The intrusion of Starbucks logos, music, milk, and sugar to the Sino-foreign university experience (and promotional materials thereof), however, suggest to us that ‘Planet Starbucks’ will not be so easily invaded (see Fleming & Harrison, 2020: Ch. 5).

Transcript 2.

6 Sun gee gee gee gee=  
 |~\*\*\*\*\*-.-.| [1]  
*this one then?*  
 7 Li =那这个呢 (na zhe ge ne)  
 |~~~~\*\*\*\*\*[\*\*\*\*\*-.-.| [2]  
 8 Sun [J::  
 9 Bai [J::  
 10 Jo [J::  
 11 Xu [J::  
 |~\*\*\*\*\*-.-.| [3]  
 12 (1)  
 ^^  
 13 Li oh ok



[Figure 3]



[Figure 4]

The chorus of “J’s” is worth lingering on here as a particular entanglement of threads or salient moment of sense-making. In his enactivist critique of mainstream views that separate speakers as distinct entities, joint speech researcher Cummins (2018) helps us to perceive this chorus of J’s as one of the very real ways in which students materially “come together” in group interaction, and by “voicing as a single subject”, they become “relieved of the tension of negotiation that characterizes dialogue and conversation” (p. 172). We certainly feel this unified subject’s release of energy when watching the clip, and so it would seem that Li’s “oh ok” responds to such tensions (among other things) being relieved.

Indeed, since Li’s “oh ok” is a ‘change of state’ marker, researchers of language-related episodes might be tempted to conclude that the episode is now resolved (following Leeser, 2004; cf. Harrison & Stutzman, 2020). However, the next phase of this interaction (Transcript 3) shows why this conclusion would be premature. The episode continues to unfold as Sun now repeats her K-pop melody and upper body dance routine, explaining “ni jiu ji zhu na ge gee gee na ge

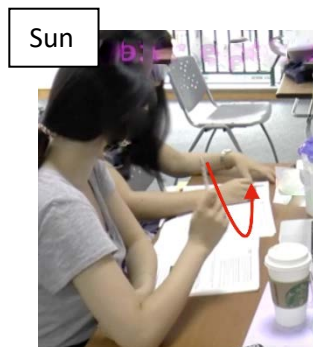


next part of the transcript, which shows how the participation framework continues to respond and adapt, as the knotting of policy enforcement begins to tighten (Transcript 4).

As Li is saying “yeh yeh yeh” (line 19), Sun also says very articulately “yes” and puts down the Starbucks coffee cup that she has been holding onto the table, this action resounding in the audio feed (it is not ‘slammed’ down, but rather firmly set). Sun now repeats her response “yes” much louder (note full capitals, line 21), and in a one-second pause following this response, she performs a gesture that involves bowing her head and imitating the beat of a baton with her pen [Figure 5]. Her peers are seen smiling to this performance (line 22). The teacher upgrades his reminder of the English language policy to a reprimand, saying “right guys come on I said after week one I shouldn’t have to remind you about this English in class please” (lines 22-23). Note that his reprimand now includes a critique of the students’ disobedience (“I shouldn’t have to remind you about this”) and is reframed to address the whole class as “guys”. Our video clip forecloses the chance to see the other students’ reactions, but since our own sense-making behaviors are unavoidably engaged by the embodied behaviors of this example, we can certainly *feel* other students becoming implicated in their neighboring groups relational-linguaging, “swept up in the generative currents of the world” (Ingold, 2011: 214). With “right ok”, he segues from this reprimand immediately into a whole-class elicitation exercise to check the answers to the reading activity, asking his students to “give it to me then” (line 24).

*Transcript 4.*

19 Li [yeh yeh yeh  
 20 Sun [yes ((audiably puts coffee cup down))  
 ^^  
 21 YES (1)  
 |~\*\*\*-.-| [4]  
 22 ((peers smile))  
 21 T Right guys come on I said (.) after week one  
 22 I shouldn’t have to remind you about this  
 23 English in class please  
 24 right okay so lets right ok give it to me then



[Figure 5]

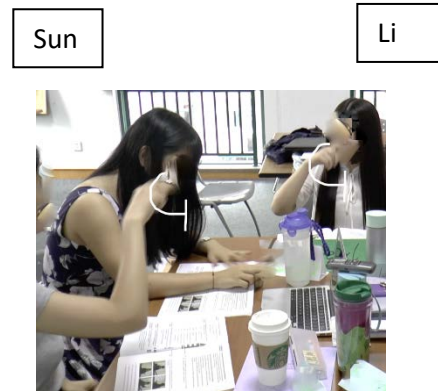


The student's beat of a baton with her pen [Image 4] reminds us of the 'forefinger beat gesture' described by ethologist Morris (1994) who compares this gesture to "a miniature club with which the speaker symbolically beats the companion over the head" (p. 80). Not irrelevant to our example was the observation that finger beats are "a gesture much favored by headmasters, politicians and other speakers in a strongly authority mood" (Morris, 1994: 80). Our student may be performing the forefinger qua pen beat to creatively and critically satirize her teacher's reprimand. Making a character viewpoint gesture (McNeill, 1992), but also posturing her own body into one of disciplined subject, she comically likens the teacher's "I shouldn't have to remind you about this" (line 22) reprimand to a 'club' over the head for his students (comical to us at least, but also apparently to her peers who begin smiling). This embodied caricature sheds light on how policy enforcements might be experienced by students, while offering a gesture that potentially captures the tension between policy enforcement and learning.

As the teacher's elicitation exercise is now underway, we see one last exchange in the video that we feel compelled to note, not least because our earlier suspicion is confirmed that the student's original misunderstanding had not been resolved. Communicating in parallel to the elicitation exercise (or 'schisming'; Egbert, 1997), Li – the student who originally struggled – seeks a final clarification check from her peer Sun. She does this by engaging Sun in an exchange in which she checks the pronunciation of the letters 'g' and 'j', again tracing the letters with gesture whilst pronouncing the sounds that she associates with each one (this time accurately as /dʒi/ for 'g' and /dʒeɪ/ for 'j'), whilst her peer Sun repeats and confirms each of Li's speech and gestures in lockstep (lines 25-26, see Figure 6). At the end of this sequence, Li nods (^^) and Sun takes a swig of her Starbucks (line 28), before both students join back in with the teacher's ongoing elicitation activity.

### Transcript 5

24 [right okay so lets right ok give it to me then  
25 Li [G J ^  
|~\*\*\*\*\*/\*\*\*-.-.| [5]  
26 Sun [ G J  
|~\*\*\*\*\*/\*\*\*-.-.| [6]  
27 T ((continues to drill answer))  
28 Sun ((swig of coffee))



[Figure 6]

This last stretch of our transcript marks an end or at least partial resolution to the relational-linguaging episode, a resolution which may be projected by Sun swigging her coffee rather than initiating further negotiation (Laurier, 2008). To close our analysis, we borrow the teacher’s own words, for upon completion of the elicitation exercise, he alludes to the original pronunciation issue which triggered the whole episode. In a passage that supports our earlier claim that the teacher had overheard the students’ discussion of a language pronunciation problem, he says “there is no j, guys don’t get your j’s and your g’s confused, ok, don’t confuse your j’s and your g’s”. This speaks, we feel, to the remarkable awareness with which people in co-presence surreptitiously monitor and understand each other’s behaviors as well as the different cycles and scales on which intersubjective understanding clearly operates, or the *entanglements* inherent to relational-linguaging episodes like this.<sup>6</sup>

## 4 Discussion and conclusion

Students interacting in (with/through) classrooms at English Medium Instruction institutes may draw on different languages to resolve language-related episodes, such as we observed in video recordings collected from an English for Academic Purposes class filmed on the Masters pre-session course at a Sino-British university. In the context of EMI, however, speaking in a

<sup>6</sup> An “entanglement between the bodies of the participants” is what we would expect to find in a meshwork, “the presence of deep correlations between processes at multiple time-scales in each body, making the coupled systems impossible to analyze in isolation” (Di Paolo et al., 2018: 77).

language other than English may violate the official language policy and provoke a response from the teacher *qua* policy enforcer (Chen et al., 2019; Mortensen, 2014). Micro-analysing exactly this situation as a living meshwork (Ingold, 2011), our paper has shown how the various threads of a group of students' relational-linguaging episode were intertwined with those of the teacher's policy enforcement, whilst also trailing of beyond the interaction or 'translinguaging implementational space' (Ou, Gu, & Hult, 2020). As students and their teacher adapted and responded to each other's sense-making behaviors, the 'knotting' of these different threads appeared to tighten and draw on increasingly diverse aspects of the languaging environment. Specifically, a palpable tension emerged in the embodied negotiation of linguistic understanding and language policy, which became interwoven not only with different languages (English, Chinese) but also with embodied dance moves, gestures, coffee cups, coffee, pens, and other students in the room. While some approaches to multimodal interaction might work to establish these different aspects as separate (students negotiating the language issue on one level, teacher interjecting the policy and introducing a side interaction on another, environment of cups and pens as resources afforded by the context or backdrop), the notion of a meshwork, we feel, justifies seeing them instead as more fundamentally and messily interrelated and entangled. These findings have highlighted a number of features of such episodes, including their multimodality, mutlidirectionality, and temporal-spatiality.

Firstly, policy negotiations may be multimodal, even manifest in certain gestures, as well as in subtle sense-making behaviors i.e. ways in which people modulate their relation to each other and to their environment (Di Paolo et al., 2018). To recall a clear example of this, consider the way one student responded to a policy enforcement by replying "yes", posturing her own body into that of a disciplined subject, and, with the pen in her hand, performing a 'baton gesture' to comically liken being 'clubbed' over the head. Secondly, students' negotiation of language policy through languaging in classrooms (such as speaking multiple languages, alternating languages, code-switching and mixing) are not only established 'bottom-up' (Mortensen, 2014) but are multidirectional in nature and include cultural replicators coming through informal social networks, screen media, and trendy influencers (DeLanda, 2000; Fleming & Harrison, 2020), as well as sources of energy flows in the immediate environment, such as other people. In our example, thus, the teacher's policy enforcement can be seen interrupting the students' negotiation of a pronunciation issue, which one of the students is proposing to resolve by combining English

with Mandarin and a Korean pop dance move – and this is the multidirectional languaging behavior through which the policy negotiation begins to intertwine.

Thirdly, policy negotiations (in relational-languaging episodes) extend in both time and space well beyond their seemingly punctual occurrence in the classroom data. Although we can use pre-established methods to suggest a ‘trigger’ and a ‘resolution point’ to such episodes (Ohta, 2001; Leiser, 2004), and we can use transcription techniques to get a sense of the languaging behaviors through which these episodes are negotiated, clearly the single camera angle, cropped video clip, and analytical transcript struggle to capture and contain the events that occur in real classroom situations. At the very least, we showed how such episodes can undergo several phases of resolution past the first change-of-state marker and that policy negotiations create a ‘dragnet’ that expands beyond the students/group/class being recorded, perhaps dredging what Hult (2018) refers to as the “muddy waters” of policy negotiation (p. 254). Policy negotiations between students doubtfully start and end with the languaging-related episodes that we can pluck from a given corpus of recorded data.

As a final point, and to risk stating the obvious, when teachers enforce an “English only” policy, opportunities to discover the diversity and creativity of the linguistic, cultural, and material resources that students use to learn language become threatened, disciplined, and branded. The privileging of policy enforcement over a potentially beneficial dialogue seems to support De Costa et al.’s (2020) claim that “language policies have failed to take into consideration the multilingual resources available to teachers and students to unpack academic content and develop intercultural awareness” (p. 5). This is why researchers like Hult (2018) offer workshops urging teachers to become “active interpreters and critical thinkers not blind policy adherents” (p. 253). But proposing alternative guidelines for when policy should or should not be enforced based on the current study would be premature. What we can recommend, at the very least, is to initiate English tutors in China to the sounds and dance moves of K-Pop!

To end, we clearly need a better understanding of the impact of policy enforcements on collaborative discourse, the situational factors that influence them, and ideologies implicit in our own tools to analyze them. In the meantime, the impact of policy enforcements on relational-languaging dynamics must be included among the tensions inherent to the transnational higher education experience.

## Acknowledgements

We thank first and foremost the participants of this research. We also thank Anonymous, Anonymous, and Anonymous for providing numerous opportunities to develop this work and receive rich feedback, including their own. Our approach to student group interaction and language-related episodes has also benefited from fruitful discussions with Anonymous and Anonymous. Last but not least, we are indebted to Anonymous for commenting on drafts of the manuscript.

## References

Blommaert, J. (2012). Sociolinguistics and English language studies. *Working Papers in Urban Language & Literacies*, Paper 85.

Bygate, M., Skehan, P. and Swain, M. (2001). Introduction. In: Bygate M, Skehan P and Swain M (eds) *Researching Pedagogic Tasks: Second Language Learning, Teaching, and Testing*. Routledge, pp.1-20.

Chen, Y-H, Zhou, Q. (2017). Transcription conventions for the spoken subcorpus [v.1]. Available at: <https://cawse.transcribear.com/pdf/transcription-conventions-spoken-data.pdf>

Chen, Y-H, Harrison, S, Weekly, R (2019) "I don't have communicate ability": Deviations in an L2 multimodal corpus of academic English from an EMI university in China – errors or ELF? In Parviainen, H, Kaunisto, M, Pahta, P (eds) *Corpus Approaches into World Englishes and Language Contrasts*. Varieng, Vol. 20. Available at: [https://varieng.helsinki.fi/series/volumes/20/chen\\_harrison\\_weekly](https://varieng.helsinki.fi/series/volumes/20/chen_harrison_weekly)

Cummins, F. (2018). *The Ground From Which We Speak. Joint Speech and the Collective Subject*. Cambridge Scholars Publishing.

De Costa, P., Green-Eneix, C. and Li, W. (2020). Problematizing EMI language policy in a transnational world: China's entry into the global higher education market. *English Today*: 1-8.

DeLanda, M. (2000). *A Thousand Years of Nonlinear History*. New York: Swerve.

Di Paolo, P., Cuffari, E., & De Jaegher, H. (2018). *Linguistic Bodies: The Continuity Between Life and Language*. The MIT Press.

Douglas Fir Group (2016). A transdisciplinary framework for SLA in a multilingual world. *The Modern Language Journal*, 100(S1), 19–47.

Edstrom, A. (2015). Triads in the L2 classroom: interaction patterns and engagement during a collaborative task. *System* 52: 26-37.

Egbert, M. (1997.) Schisming: The collaborative transformation from a single conversation to multiple conversations. *Research on Language and Social Interaction* 30(1): 1–51.

Gullberg, M. (2014). Gestures and second language acquisition. In: Müller C, Cienki A, Fricke E, Ladewig, S., McNeill, D. and Teßendorf, S. (eds) *Body – Language – Communication*. Berlin, Germany: Mouton de Gruyter, pp.1868-1875.

Han, Y., De Costa P. and Cui, Y. (2019). Exploring the language policy and planning/SLA interface: Ecological insights from an Uyghur youth in China. *Language Policy* 18(1): 65–86.

Harrison, S., Adolphs, S., Gillon Dowens, M., Ping, D., Littlemore, J. (2018). All hands on deck: Focus on gesture form during collaborative discourse. *Lingua* 207: 1–22.

Harrison, S. (2020). Through the magical pink walkway: A behavior setting's invitation to embodied sense-makers. *Frontiers in Psychology* 11:1576.

Harrison, S, Stutzman, L. D. (2020). Gesture in collaborative learning: A multimodal corpus study of language-related episodes. Presentation in online seminar series of the International Society for Gesture Studies – Hong Kong. Available at: <https://isgshkhub.wixsite.com/home/event>

Hazel, S. and Mortensen, J. (2013). Kitchen talk: Exploring linguistic practices in liminal institutional interactions in a multilingual university setting. In: Haberland H, Lønsmann D and Preisler B (eds) *Language Alternation, Language Choice, and Language Encounter in International Education*. Springer, pp. 3-30.

Hult, F. (2020). Engaging pre-service English teachers with language policy. *ELT Journal* 72/3, 249-259.

Ingold, T. (2011) *Being Alive: Essays on Movement, Knowledge and Description*. Routledge.

Jensen, T. W. (2014) Emotion in languaging: Languaging as affective, adaptive, and flexible behavior in social interaction. *Frontiers in Psychology* 5 [720].

Jullien, F. (1995), *The Propensity of Things: Towards a History of Efficacy in China*. New York: Zone Books.

Kendon, A, (2004), *Gesture: Visible Action as Utterance*. Cambridge University Press.

Leeser, M. J. (2004). Learner proficiency and focus on form during collaborative dialogue. *Language Teaching Research* 8(1): 55-81.

McCafferty, S. and Stam, G. (2008). *Gesture: Second Language Acquisition in Classroom Research*. Routledge.

McNeill, D. (1992) *Hand and Mind: What Gesture Reveals about Thought*. Chicago University Press.

Morris, D. (1994). *Bodytalk: A World Guide to Gestures*. London: Jonathan Cape.

Mortensen, J. (2014). Language policy from below: Language choice in student project groups in a multilingual university setting. *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development* 35(4): 425-442.

Mourdoukoutas, P. (2019). Starbucks worst nightmare in China is coming true. *Forbes*. <https://www.forbes.com/sites/panosmourdoukoutas/2019/01/21/starbucks-worst-nightmare-in-china-is-coming-true/?sh=6dc1a69a17ec>

Nguyen, B.T.T. and Pennycook, A. (2018). Dancing, Google and fish sauce: Vietnamese students coping with Australian universities. *Asia Pacific Journal of Education* 38(4): 457-472.

Ohta AS (2001) *Second Language Acquisition Processes in the Classroom: Learning Japanese*. Lawrence Erlbaum.

Ou, W.A., Gu, M.M., & Hult, F.M. (2020). Translanguaging for intercultural communication in international higher education: transcending English as a lingua franca. *International Journal of Multilingualism*. DOI: 10.1080/14790718.2020.1856113

Pennycook, A. (2018). *Posthumanist Applied Linguistics*. Routledge.

Spolsky, B. (2004). *Language Policy*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Stevens, M P, Chen, Y-H, Harrison, S (2020). The EMI campus as site and source for a multimodal corpus: Issues and challenges of corpus construction at a Sino-British university. In: Čermáková, A, Malá, M (eds), *Variation in time and Space: Observing the world through corpora*. Berlin, Germany: De Gruyter Mouton.



Stevens, M. P. (2021). *The interactive ecology of construal in gesture: A microethnographic analysis of peer learning at an EMI university in China*. [Unpublished doctoral dissertation], University of Nottingham Ningbo China.

Streeck, J. (2009). *Gesturecraft. The Manufacture of Meaning*. Amsterdam and Philadelphia: John Benjamins.

Streeck, J. (2017). *Self-Making Man: A Day of Action, Life, and Language*. Cambridge University Press.

Stutzman, L. D. (2017). Multimodal corrective feedback and interactional moves within language-related episodes and inscription-related episodes: An Analysis. [unpublished master's dissertation]. University of Nottingham Ningbo China.

Swain, M. and Lapkin, S. (1998). Interaction and second language learning: Two adolescent French immersion students working together. *The Modern Language Journal* 82(3): 320-337.

Thibault, P. J. (2020). *Distributed Linguaging, Affective Dynamics, and the Human Ecology Volume I: The Sense-making Body*. Routledge.

Thibault, P.J. (2011). First-order languaging dynamics and second-order language: The distributed language view. *Ecological Psychology* 23: 210–245.

Van Lier, L. (2000). From input to affordance: Social-interactive learning from an ecological perspective. In Lantolf JP (ed) *Sociocultural Theory and Second Language Learning*. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, pp.245–259.

Williams, J. (1999). Learner-generated attention to form. *Language Learning*, 49(4): 583-625.