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## Journal of Pragmatics

journal homepage: [www.elsevier.com/locate/pragma](http://www.elsevier.com/locate/pragma)

# Teacher smiles as an interactional and pedagogical resource in the classroom

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## ARTICLE INFO

### Article history:

Received 12 February 2019

Received in revised form 31 March 2020

Accepted 14 April 2020

Available online 12 May 2020

### Keywords:

Smiling

Classroom interaction

Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL)

Conversation Analysis

Laughter

## ABSTRACT

In classroom settings, laughter and smiles are resources for action that are available to both teachers and students. Recent interactional studies have documented how students use these resources to deal with trouble of various kind, but less is known about the sequential and activity contexts of teachers' laughter-relevant practices, as well as their pedagogical functions. We use multimodal conversation analysis (CA) to investigate the interactional unfolding and pedagogical orientations of teacher smiles during instructional IRE (initiation–response–evaluation) sequences in a corpus of 37 bilingual lessons collected in schools in Finland and Spain. In analysing the focal smiles, we pay attention to their temporal relationships to students' preceding and subsequent facial expressions and the unfolding of on-going talk. We argue that smiling can index teachers' affiliative and pedagogical responsiveness to troubles and competences implied by prior student actions. The analysis of selected data fragments shows how smiling is part of multimodal action packages through which teachers manage momentary action disalignments and restore a sense of students as competent actors. The findings contribute towards recent CA research on the embodied and interactional nature of teaching and learning by showing some ways in which smiling is a situated practice used for professional purposes.

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## 1. Introduction

Research on laughter in everyday and institutional interaction has a long tradition in Conversation Analysis (CA), going back to Harvey Sacks' early observations (1995, Lecture 14, Fall 1967) and Gail Jefferson's (e.g. 1979, 1984) foundational work. These and subsequent CA studies have shown that laughter is an interactional and sequentially unfolding phenomenon that is amenable to detailed microanalysis. As Glenn and Holt (2013, p. 2) point out, in broad terms, laughter appears in two kinds of interactional environments, "celebrations and trouble". Thus, laughing (and smiling) are not only ways to construct and index humour, jocularity and play, but perhaps surprisingly often they feature as resources in situations where interactional trouble, delicate topics and sensitive actions are managed in everyday and institutional interaction. Typically, laughter displays emotional affiliation or disaffiliation and modulates or mitigates actions and turns-at-talk with which it co-occurs (see e.g. Glenn and Holt, 2013). However, its exact functions and local sense to participants are "highly context-sensitive" (Haakana, 2010, p. 1502), to be found in the particularities of the occasions where it is deployed.

So far smiling has received less analytical attention than laughter, and although both phenomena co-occur in many social situations, their relationship can be complicated. In some social situations, the order in which they unfold can configure the actions and social relations that emerge through them (see Haakana, 2010). On the other hand, it is not always analytically easy to distinguish the borderline between smiling and laughing (see also André and Cekaite, 2016). While smiling is often

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thought of as a visual phenomenon, it can also be audibly available to recipients through smile voice: smiling and laughing are thus both embodied and verbal phenomena (see e.g. Ford and Fox, 2010; Glenn and Holt, 2013). Recent CA studies have begun to explore the ways in which speakers and hearers orient to smiling as an emotional stance display. For example, Kaukomaa et al. (2013) showed that a speaker's smile that begins just before their verbal utterance and continues into the utterance can foreshadow the emotional stance of the utterance. Such pre-beginning smiles can thereby also constitute the first observable interactional work for accomplishing an emotional transition (from neutral to positive) in conversation. The fact that in Kaukomaa et al.'s (2013) data, pre-beginning smiles were also routinely attended to and quickly reciprocated – sometimes already before the verbal utterance – suggests that participants are sensitive to each other's facial expressions, and that smiling can on its own suffice to propose an emotional stance transition.

In this article, we build on such recent work that has investigated the laughter-relevant practices in everyday and institutional settings as we explore practices of smiling in the classroom. We hope to expand the existing classroom studies of smiling, which have focused more on student smiles, by exploring how smiling also serves as a resource for teachers to construct multimodal instruction-relevant action packages. Our aim is thus to gain insights into how teachers deploy smiles to do instructional work. Before the analysis, we review existing conversation analytic classroom studies on laughter-relevant practices and identify areas for further research.

## 2. Laughter-relevant practices in classroom interaction

It is only in recent years that systematic CA studies focusing on the interactional organization and functions of laughing and smiling in classroom settings have begun to emerge, focusing particularly on students' deployment of smiling and laughter (e.g. Degoumois et al., 2017; Hasegawa, 2018; Jacknick, 2013; Matsumoto, 2018; Petitjean and González-Martínez, 2015; Sert and Jacknick, 2015). One prominent strand in this literature has explored smiling and laughter within situations that involve humour and (language) play (e.g. Cekaite and Aronsson, 2004, 2005; Hasegawa, 2018; Liang, 2015; Matsumoto, 2014; Reddington and Waring, 2015). Many such studies have been conducted in second language (L2) classroom contexts, exploring among other things how humour and play can offer resources for language learning (e.g. Hasegawa, 2018) and what kinds of L2 interactional competencies humour demands from students (e.g. Matsumoto, 2014).

Humour itself is a broad phenomenon, which does not always have the celebratory sense referred to by Glenn and Holt (2013) but may sometimes involve teasing and 'banter'. This is tangible in situations where smiles or laughter are used to manage normative transgressions in the classroom, as a way to modulate the actions/turns-at-talk they accompany. For example, sometimes teachers smile or laugh to mark their responses to incongruous, 'cheeky' or otherwise disruptive student actions as sarcastic (Hazel and Mortensen, 2017; Lehtimaja, 2011; Piirainen-Marsh, 2011) or to playfully tease students for different kinds of transgressions (İçbay and Yıldırım, 2013; Jakonen, 2016; Looney and Kim, 2018). In these kinds of activity environments where the moral order of classroom-based education becomes questioned by students, smiling or laughing can be a way for the teacher to "build on the humour and relational work that such exchanges involve, but also accomplish evaluations which mark student actions as going too far", as Piirainen-Marsh (2011, p. 373) argues is the case for irony. Therefore, as Looney and Kim (2018, p. 68) also highlight, a potentially relevant feature in trying to analytically understand the purpose of teacher smiles is to look at how students' prior turns align or disalign with the on-going activity and its demands for locally appropriate student conduct.

As a student's resource, laughter-relevant practices can be employed for a range of actions in environments involving interactional, institutional or epistemic trouble (e.g. Andrén and Cekaite, 2016; Degoumois et al., 2017; Jacknick, 2013; Petitjean and González-Martínez, 2015; Sert and Jacknick, 2015). Petitjean and González-Martínez (2015, p. 102) argue that laughter and smiling are economical resources because they allow "students to simultaneously index interactional trouble and minimize it" (see also Looney and Kim, 2018). An uninvited laughter or smile alongside a student's verbal response turn can be a way to pre-empt (in turn-initial position) and modulate (in mid-turn or post-turn) its problematic nature (Petitjean and González-Martínez, 2015) or soften the sensitive action of student-initiated challenges presented to the teacher (Jacknick, 2013; Merke, 2012). A student's smile can also be treated as an action in its own right. This is the case when a smile with no verbal accompaniment in response to the teacher's question is treated as a display of lack of knowledge or unwillingness to participate in instructional talk (Sert and Jacknick, 2015; see also Matsumoto, 2018).

When classroom participants deal with such trouble-oriented instances of student laughter or smiles, they simultaneously manage norms related to institutional roles and asymmetries. One interactional mechanism through which this kind of management takes place relates to the degree to which the teacher reciprocates a student's 'first' laugh or smile and thereby aligns with the action that it is part of and/or affiliates with the student's conveyed emotional stance (on invitations to laughter, see Jefferson, 1979). The existing research suggests that teachers do not always reciprocate student laughter or smiles, and when they produce laughter in sequences where students do so, they tend to do so briefly and more discreetly. For example, Degoumois et al. (2017) observed that in their lower secondary classroom data, teachers typically ignored student responses that were overtly marked as humorous (for example by way of smiles or laughter) and thereby treated them as sanctionable. Interestingly, in their upper secondary data, this was no longer the case, and students' humorous turns were a more "legitimate" part of classroom activities (ibid., p. 52).

As this suggests, the sense and prevalence of laughter-relevant practices may vary considerably across classroom cultures and communities (see also Reddington and Waring, 2015), and the maintenance of a teacher's institutional role may sometimes involve a kind of 'rationing' of smiling and laughter. Some of students' smilingly or laughingly produced actions that orient to or invoke trouble may also demand more face-work than others, and teachers can attend to this by calibrating the degree and 'quality' of their reciprocated smile or laughter. Thus, in certain situations, withholding a smile or laughter may orient to the professional demands of doing 'being a teacher' by displaying a neutral emotional stance towards a prior action or emotion that a student has constructed

with a smile/laughter. Examples of such situations include when a student laughs to display embarrassment after his own error (see [Tainio and Laine, 2015](#)), smiles to convey epistemic trouble ([Sert and Jacknick, 2015](#)) or challenges the teacher's epistemic authority ([Jacknick, 2013](#)). In interactional environments such as these, teachers' reciprocal smiles can thus constitute a form of "mild affiliation" (see [Haakana, 2010](#)) with the student who has just laughed or smiled. Others have observed how teachers may also attempt to conceal a smile by placing their hand in front of the mouth ([Matsumoto, 2018](#)) or laugh "in a somewhat forced manner" ([Pirainen-Marsh, 2011](#), p. 376). Thus, the distinction between whether or not a teacher reciprocates a student smile/laughter may involve balancing the sometimes competing demands for affiliation, in-group solidarity and the institutional role of a teacher (see also [Jacknick, 2013](#); [Lehtimaja, 2011](#); [Roth et al., 2011](#)).

Overall, the existing classroom studies highlight the reflexive relationship between laughter-relevant practices and participants' orientations to institutional roles and social norms in the classroom. An observation that emerges from the studies discussed so far is that smiles and laughter are interactional resources which involve asymmetries in classroom settings, and that there may be institutional constraints in relation to when and in what manner their deployment by teachers is treated as fitting. However, there seems to be a lack of systematic scholarly attention on the interactional unfolding of teacher smiles and laughter from a CA perspective. The purpose of this article is therefore to shed light on the ways in which teachers use smiles for pedagogical purposes. In line with [Glenn and Holt \(2013, p. 12\)](#), who point out that "[i]n order to explore the role of the laughter it is necessary to consider its relationship to its laughable", we investigate the pedagogical work that gets done as teachers mark things as 'smileable' in classroom settings where the instruction takes place through a second language (L2).

Besides the pedagogical functions of teacher smiles, another gap in the classroom literature concerns the fundamentally multimodal and temporal nature of smiling and laughter. Not much is known about the relevant "multiple temporalities" ([Mondada, 2019](#)) of teacher smiles by reference to the typical instructional IRE sequences (teacher Initiation – student Response – teacher Evaluation) and students' smiles or other kinds of facial expressions that precede, co-occur or follow teacher smiles. Thus, we aim to expand the classroom literature presented above by exploring i) the (temporal) relationships between teacher smiles, students' embodied conduct, and the sequential unfolding of the on-going instructional activity, and ii) the pedagogical orientations and tasks of teacher smiles as part of their instructional "multimodal Gestalts" ([Mondada, 2016](#)) – i.e., action packages composed of multiple simultaneously deployed resources.

### 3. Data and method

The interactional data examined here come from an international corpus of 37 Content and Language Integrated (CLIL) lessons video-recorded in primary and secondary schools in Finland and Spain between 2000 and 2016 as part of various research projects. The corpus totals c. 32 h of recordings and includes lessons in a range of school subjects taught in English, a second language (L2) to the students and the teachers. The socioeconomic contexts of the schools where recordings were made range considerably from those located in highly disadvantaged neighbourhoods to those in middle class areas. All video data were collected with the informed consent from the teachers, students and their parents.

For the purposes of this article, we have created and analysed in detail a collection of 50+ interactional episodes of teachers' smiles. These smiles occurred during different types of classroom instructional activities, i.e., in whole-class interaction, group work, and one-on-one instruction during task activities. In this paper we have selected five extracts from the data collection to illustrate our broader observations on the interactional organisation and functions of teacher smiles within instructional (IRE) sequences. Extracts 1 and 5 come from a 6th grade CLIL Chemistry lesson (Finland); extract 2 comes from a 9th grade CLIL Math lesson (Spain); extract 3 comes from a 9th grade CLIL Music lesson (Spain); and Extract 4 comes from a 6th grade CLIL PE lesson (Finland). The extracts have been transcribed following standard CA conventions for talk ([Jefferson, 2004](#)) and multimodal conventions for representing participants' embodied actions ([Mondada, 2014](#)). Turns that contain students' first language (Finnish or Spanish) have been translated into English. All names are pseudonyms and students' faces have been blurred in screenshots if they have so requested as part of their informed consent to participate in the research.

### 4. General analytical remarks

As a general observation, our classroom corpus contains both idiosyncratic variation (i.e., how often a particular teacher smiles) and variation in terms of the 'quality' of a smile (e.g., how long the smile is sustained, how broad or open it is, whether it is audible, etc.). As [Mondada \(2019\)](#) notes, social action understood in a multimodal sense is constituted through simultaneous bodily conducts and "multiple temporalities that go beyond the relative linearity of talk" (p. 3). This is also the case for classroom smiles: they can co-occur with talk, take place in moments of turn transition or begin in such moments and continue parallel to turns-at-talk; they also co-occur with other embodied actions such as pointing. In what follows, we describe teacher smiles as a temporally unfolding resource that contributes to and shapes multimodal action packages.

In our data, teacher smiles are not limited to any particular position within the IRE sequence. They occur routinely in the Evaluation move of IRE, as part of evaluative actions such as praising a correct answer or mitigating the rejection of an incorrect answer. Smiles can also be part of the multimodal design of actions that take place in and through different kinds of insertions to the IRE, such as turn-allocations or corrective actions that suspend the progressivity of the IRE. The subsequent analysis is organised with respect to smiles in the context of two different kinds of pedagogical work done by teachers: managing disalignments in student participation (extracts 1–2) and constructing a sense of the student as a competent actor in moments of evaluation (extracts 3–5). On the basis of these analyses, we argue that smiling can be a way to conduct such pedagogical work in a way that is responsive to students' displayed concerns, trouble or competences.



## 5. Smiling as a resource for managing disaligned actions during instructional activities

Just before extract 1, the (6th grade Chemistry) class has been reviewing different gases found in the atmosphere, including molecular oxygen (O<sub>2</sub>). The extract shows how the teacher smiles as she manages the disalignment between her actions and those of a student to whom she is allocating a turn by pointing. As Kääntä (2012) has shown, embodied turn-allocations are achieved via an insertion sequence that follows a teacher initiation, or the 'I' move of an IRE sequence. Such insertion sequences typically involve a student bid to respond by hand-raising and the teacher's turn-allocation by nodding or pointing at the bidding student to give them the subsequent response turn. However, here a student raises a hand to bid after the teacher's question but suddenly withdraws her bid nearly simultaneously as the teacher points at her to allocate the response turn (line 9). This constitutes a momentary action disalignment, which the teacher manages by redoing the nominating action verbally and smilingly (line 10).

### Extract 1. Smiling when managing a problematic turn-allocation

(Key: F=facial expression, G=gaze, H=hand)

```

01 TEA  but there is actually a1nother one that is really (.)
02      really important?
03      (1.5)
04 TEA  do you already know what that is
05      (1.4)
06 TEA  other form of oxygen.
07      (0.6)
08 TEA  that is really important to earth.
09      (1.0)+ (1.9) #+(0.1)*(0.8)+(0.2)##(0.7) = (4.7)
mar      +raises hand+lowers hand+pulls corners of mouth downwards-->
teaH     *points-----*brings hand against body-->
fig      #fig1.1 #fig1.2a/b

fig1.1  fig1.2a  fig1.2b
10 TEA  Mar*#jo, (.) [what we]re you n°thinking,°#
11 MAR  [ei. ]
         'no'
         teaH  -->*
         teaF
         fig  #fig1.3a/b #fig1.4

fig1.3a  fig1.3b  fig1.4
12      (0.9)+
mar      -->+
13 MAR  °>ei mitää.<°
         'nothing'
14      (0.4)%(1.0)¤(0.2) = (1.6)
         teaG  %gaze away from mar>>
         teaF  -->¤
15 TEA  Krisu

```

During the 4.7-s silence follows the teacher's incrementally produced question, an intricate embodied choreography for managing turn-taking takes place (line 9). Marjo raises her hand (visible in fig. 1.1) 1 s into the silence, but, having held it up for 1.9 s, lowers it just before the teacher allocates a turn to her by pointing (see fig. 1.2a/b). The lowering of



the hand is accompanied by a facial expression that can be described as tense and awkward: Marjo pulls the corners of her mouth downwards (see fig. 1.3a) and sustains the expression until the end of line 12.

The teacher orients to Marjo's embodied behaviour as a sign of emerging trouble regarding turn-allocation. Almost immediately as Marjo lowers her hand at line 9, the teacher begins to withdraw her pointing by bringing her hand against the body (visible in fig. 1.3b). She subsequently re-does the turn-allocation by verbally nominating Marjo to take the next turn. This nominating action is characteristically different from the earlier 'unmarked' embodied pointing (or what would be its verbal equivalent of uttering a student's name alone) in that it is verbally framed as an enquiry of what Marjo was "thinking" (line 10).<sup>1</sup>

Towards the end of the verbal turn-allocation, the teacher begins to smile (fig. 1.4). It is a moderate and 'gentle' smile revealing her teeth, a smile that she sustains well beyond turn transition as she first waits and then receives Marjo's response. The smile together with the verbal turn increment ("what were you thinking") constitute a nominating action that places fewer constraints on the type of projected response than the earlier embodied pointing following the turn increment at line 8. Because a question about what one "was thinking" can be met with a variety of responses, the teacher in effect reconfigures the terms of the question to make the student less accountable for producing a knowledgeable response with these resources (talk and the smile).

The pedagogical work conducted by the teacher's multimodal action package of the second nomination thus concerns i) displaying a recognition of the student's reluctance to respond, and ii) conveying that the teacher is herself doing a socially problematic action by inviting participation from an observably unwilling participant (see also *Sert and Jacknick, 2015*). The specific interactional work of the smile is to enact a transition of emotional stance set by the student's 'tense' facial expression and the refusal to participate (line 11). The fact that the smile is sustained through the projected response slot (lines 12–13) suggests that it is a way to display a stance with which Marjo's invited response will be received, a way to show that a 'friendly' face is waiting for whatever she has to say. And although Marjo again affirms her reluctance to respond (line 13), the alleviated pressure for a 'correct answer' is visible in that at no stage Marjo orients to a need to account for the lack of response to the original question, and neither does the teacher pursue it further from her but instead withdraws gaze (line 14) and nominates another student (line 15).

Another kind of action disalignment is managed by way of smiling in extract 2, in which a group of 9th grade students is working on a Maths revision task. They have a handout with three pairs of equations (or "systems" as the teacher calls them at line 18) and a series of steps for discussing the equations in their group. Before the extract begins, the teacher and the students have discussed the first pair of equations, and at line 1, the teacher moves ahead to the "second" pair of equations. However, instead of following Ignasi's response, Roger continues to write down the prior answer in his task sheet. The teacher reacts to this by suspending the transition (from "I" to "R" of the IRE sequence) and by initiating a side sequence in which she smilingly reorients Roger to follow the shared activity.

### Extract 2. Smiling when managing disaligned conduct at the onset of a student response

(Key: F=facial expression, G=gaze, H=hand, W=walk)

```
01 TEA well. (.) eh (.) ↑what about the ↓second
02 (0.7)
03 IGN *I ↑thi:*$nk [the*:, ]&
04 TEA [ Ro*ger ]&$ e::h-* (.)
teaH *lh point at ign*lh point at rog* *rh point at rog-->
teaG $gaze to rog-----$gaze to ign-->
ign >>gaze to desk&gaze to tea-->
05 >you-< maybe you have f& to ^$wait #Roger hh#
rog f&gaze from desk to tea-->
ign -->&gaze to rog>>
ait ^gaze to rog-->
teaG -->$gaze to rog>>
teaF #smiles-->
fig #fig2.1a/b
```

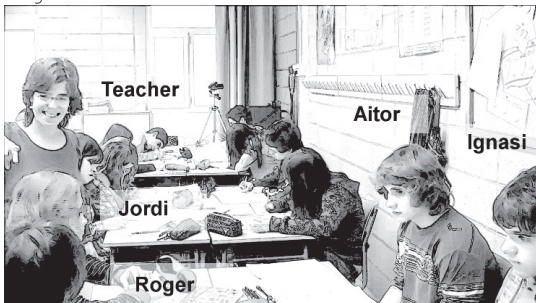


fig2.1a



fig2.1b

<sup>1</sup> Notice that the teacher does not utter "Marjo" with a falling intonation. However, Marjo's overlapping bald refusal (in L1) shows that she treats the nominating action as a complete action as soon as the teacher has uttered her name.

```

06 ROG  yeah* [ ( ) ]
07 TEA  [>bef$cause,<]
      teaH  -->*
      rog   -->fgaze to desk-->
      jor   $gaze to rog-->
08      (0.6)

09 TEA  he's finishing:::,¤
      teaF  -->¤
10      (0.2)^%(0.3) = (0.5)
      ait   -->^
      teaW  %walks behind rog and looks over his shoulder-->
11 ROG  every[(thing)]
12 TEA  [okay ]$Roger,] [have you fini]shed?#
13 AIT  [a:h ] (.) ] (we) have to [write? ]
      jor   -->$
      fig

```

#fig2.2



fig2.2

```

14 AIT  (°the steps°)
15 JOR  [we %need to write, (.)] I think sof [( ) ]
16 ROG  [( ) to finish]
17 TEA  [okay] but- (0.5)
      teaG  -->%
      rog   -->£
18 TEA  let's let's try now discuss these systems.

```

At line 3, Ignasi self-selects to answer the teacher's question just as the teacher is about to allocate a turn to him by pointing. However, shortly after the onset of his response, the teacher orients to Roger's on-going action as problematic: She withdraws her pointing from Ignasi so that for a brief moment along the trajectory it points at Roger, and simultaneously interrupts Ignasi's turn-in-progress by saying Roger's name aloud (line 4). Switching hands, the teacher resumes pointing at Roger with her right hand so that she repeatedly taps her index finger in the air towards him (visible in fig. 2.1a) and asks Ignasi to "wait Roger" (line 5).<sup>2</sup>

The teacher begins to smile (line 5, fig. 2.1b) just as she utters Roger's name. It is a fairly broad smile that also involves an audible outbreak. The smile is a 'first' smile in that it does not appear responsive to any salient facial expression by any of the students, whose gaze either shifts to the teacher (Roger) or Roger (Ignasi, Aitor) during line 5 or remains on the handout on the desk (Jordi). The teacher sustains the smile for some time, so that it slowly peters out by the end of her turn at line 9, after which she engages in dyadic interaction with Roger. No student reciprocates the teacher's smile (as can be seen in fig. 2.1a).

The smile is part of a delicate action of singling out the conduct of one student in a group and identifying it as disaligned. The issue is not that Roger's conduct would amount to a disruption or a challenge in light of classroom rules, but that it constitutes an instance of inability to keep up with an activity in locally appropriate ways, which can create implications of being a 'slow' student. This implication becomes tangible not only in the smile but also in how the teacher accounts for the suspension of the ongoing activity (lines 7, 9) by naming the action ("finishing") Roger is doing – or which he perhaps ought to be doing. Despite this, Roger does not seem to provide any overt display of finishing writing, and the teacher moves toward him to look at his handout (line 10) and query whether he is ready (lines 12, fig. 2.2).

<sup>2</sup> The verbal design of line 5 could be ambiguous in that it could be heard as either a request addressed to Roger to wait or, as it is understood here, a request for Ignasi to wait (for) Roger. The teacher's gaze is on Ignasi as she begins to utter the turn and shifts to "Roger" at the onset of his name. Moreover, the later continuation of the turn ("because he's finishing") also disambiguates further that she is addressing Ignasi, not Roger.

Interestingly, the work towards re-aligning Roger's conduct occasions a parallel exchange between Aitor, who questions whether students *are* indeed supposed to write answers down before moving ahead (lines 13–14), and Jordi, who responds to him at line 15. It may be that such an orientation to clarifying what to do next is related to the teacher's description of what Roger is doing as “finishing”, which can be heard to imply that the to-be finished action (i.e. writing) is an expected part of the main activity.

In sum, extracts 1–2 demonstrate how smiling offers embodied resources for coordinating disaligned actions in the transition space between teacher questions and student responses in IRE sequences. In extract 1, the teacher smiles as she is managing the aftermath of nearly simultaneous divergent actions in the context of allocating a turn to a student who suddenly withdraws her bid. In contrast, in extract 2, the teacher smiles as she puts a student's response on hold to ensure that another student (Roger) follows the ongoing activity sufficiently. Neither smile is part of doing ‘being humorous’, nor do they precede or follow a student smile or any kind of verbal marker of jocularity. Thus, the extracts illustrate how teacher smiles can occur in interactional environments that may involve other salient facial expressions by a student (such as the ‘awkward’ grin in extract 1) or in situations where students maintain a relatively neutral facial expression (such as in extract 2). It is in such moments that the pedagogical functions and sense of the smiles is discernible in a clearer way.

## 6. Smiling as a way to acknowledge and frame students' displayed competences

Another pedagogical concern that teacher smiles attend to is the construction of students' competences by way of providing emotionally positive feedback, praise for locally correct answers and encouragement for incorrect ones. This may be particularly needed in moments when the presence of competence and correctness is uncertain. In extract 2, the teacher's smile could be seen as a way to realign Roger without undermining the competence implicated by his actions. In extract 3, Pol and Beatriz, two 9th grade students, are doing pair work on music composition. As Beatriz asks the teacher, who is circulating in the class, to help with the concept of tempo, the teacher begins to lead the students towards self-discovery (Waring, 2015) as opposed to providing the answer directly. When Pol, after a visible effort, finally produces a candidate definition, the teacher smiles broadly and provides what seems like an almost too jubilant evaluation of its correctness.

### Extract 3. Smiling when praising a correct answer

(Key: F=facial expression, G=gaze, H=hand)

```

01 BEA I do:::n't remember the::: >tempo,<
02 (0.6)
03 TEA ye[ah t]tempo ↑do you %remember tempo.
    teaG %gaze to pol-->
04 BEA [°(wha-)°]
05 (0.4)
06 TEA what's tempo.
07 (0.6)
08 TEA Pol (.) [what is tempo.]
09 POL [tempo,:: ] (.) pff:::
10 (1.0)
11 TEA now time you told me %about the <bea:ts,> (0.3) o[ke?]
12 POL [yes]
    teaG -->%gaze to bea-->
13 BEA (°yes°)
14 TEA but what% is tempo.
    teaG -->%gaze to pol-->
15 (1.3)
16 POL temp[o::, ] (is the)%# >:spe%ed<
17 BEA [°(ah )°]
    teaG -->%gaze to bea%gaze to pol-->
    fig #3.1a/b

```



fig3.1a



fig3.1b

```

18 ** (0.3)
    teaF %smiles-->
    teaH *points at POL-->

```

19 TEA a:h: (.) +[that's]% lovely.  
 20 BEA +[°ah:° ]%  
 bea +smiles faintly, nods repeatedly-->  
 teaG -->%gaze to bea-->  
 21 # (0.3)  
 fig #3.2a/b



fig3.2a

fig3.2b

22 TEA %oke:?? [(.) that's]+ the speed,\*  
 23 BEA [° (tempo)° ]  
 teaG -->%  
 teaF -->%  
 bea -->+  
 teaH -->\*  
 24 ((T continues explanation))

The teacher receives Beatriz's help request (line 1) by treating tempo as an already familiar concept (line 3) and by redirecting the query back to the students (line 6). No response is forthcoming from the students during the 0.6-s silence, and the teacher pursues it by nominating Pol to answer (line 8). Pol is observably facing trouble in explaining the asked-for concept, hearable in the emphatic outbreath that follows his stretched repetition of “tempo” and the ensuing silence (line 9). The teacher orients to these as signs that Pol needs a further hint and reformulates the question by referring to “time” and “beats”, two other concepts of musical composition that the class has been studying, and then repeats her question about “tempo” (lines 11, 14).

Pol's answer finally arrives after further delay at line 16. The teacher accepts the answer in an overtly positive manner, which begins to unfold with a broad ‘ear to ear’ pre-beginning smile and pointing at Pol during the silence at line 18. The teacher's smile, which she sustains until line 22, is reciprocated by Beatriz (see fig. 3.2a and b) and repeated nods. Moreover, the design of the teacher's subsequent verbal turn (line 19) does more than a mere confirmation or disconfirmation of Pol's answer in that it includes a verbal celebration of the answer. Beatriz also appears to quietly utter the explainable at line 23 in overlap with the teacher's ratification of Pol's answer (line 22).

The teacher smile in extract 3 is a part of the action of assessing a student's response – the Evaluation move within an IRE sequence – in a situation where the production of a ‘correct answer’ takes considerable interactional and pedagogical work. Much like the pre-beginning smiles described by [Kaukomaa et al. \(2013\)](#), here the smile and the jubilant evaluation sparks off an emotional transition and contributes towards a relaxation of the mood. This is discernible if one compares the teacher's and Beatriz's serious facial expressions while waiting for the answer to come at line 17 (visible in fig. 3.1a and b) to the shared smiles during the Evaluation move (shown in fig. 3.2a and b). Noticeably, the teacher's smile constitutes, alongside pointing, the first observable indication of ratified correctness of Pol's answer, which allows Beatriz to interpret the valence of the evaluation and reciprocate the smile already before the teacher's “lovely” explicates it. From the perspective of pedagogical work, the smile thus contributes towards giving (emotionally) positive and caring feedback to students and towards restoring a sense of competence where such sense is observably vulnerable in the form of extensive trouble in answering.

Similarly, extract 4 also shows a case where a sense of student competence becomes momentarily vulnerable during an IRE sequence because of a delay in the production of the student's response. In contrast to extract 3, here the threat of non-competence is much more short-lived as the student waves off any uncertainty concerning her proficiency with a smilingly uttered claim of competence, displaying full self-confidence. The teacher reciprocates and upgrades the student smile as part of an action that acknowledges and teasingly celebrates the student's claimed competence. The extract comes from a 6th grade PE lesson, just as the teacher is individually sending students off to do orienteering by marking a control point (flag) on each student's map. At line 1, the teacher lets the student choose which of two control points, both on a “cliff”, she wishes to take.



**Extract 4. Appreciating a knowledgeable answer with a reciprocating smile**  
 (Key: F=facial expression, G=gaze, H=hand)

01 TEA you can choose (.) which one.  
 02 (1.1)  
 03 TEA both are %cliffs.  
 teaG %looks at student-->  
 04 (1.0)  
 05 TEA do you remember w+[#hat is cliff]  
 06 STU +[#I can do] both,  
 stu +smiles-->  
 fig #fig4.1



fig4.1

07 (0.2)%π(0.1)+  
 teaG -->%lowers gaze on the map-->  
 teaF %opens mouth, raises eyebrows-->  
 stu -->+  
 08 TEA #£↓a[ww ]::%↑ka::#:y (you're-) %[thi- ] (.) this is-£  
 09 STU [>may+be.<] %[he he]  
 stu +smiles, raises eyebrows-->>  
 teaF -->%smiles broadly-->  
 teaG -->%gaze to student----%gaze on the map-->>  
 fig #fig4.2#fig4.3



fig4.2

fig4.3

10 TEA it's easy (then)π  
 teaF -->π  
 11 ((T begins to mark the flags on the student's map))

A response indicating the student's choice of flag is first due at line 2 and then again at line 4, after the teacher describes the terrain where the flags are found. By initiating an insert sequence to check whether the student “remembers” what the (English) word “cliff” means (line 5), the teacher shows that she treats these delays in response production as an indication that the student may possibly be encountering linguistic trouble. However, in overlap, the student responds (line 6) by offering to do both flags and smiles subtly, almost coyly, during her utterance (fig. 4.1). The student's use of the construct “can do” is not only hearable as an expression of indifference (i.e., a way to say that she does not mind which one to take), but it also constitutes a claim that she is *able* to collect both flags on one go. Thus, it amounts to – and is treated as – a more general claim of competence at orienteering, perhaps even self-praise, which the student frames as jocular by way of smiling.

The student's smile is visible to the teacher, who has been looking at the student throughout lines 3–6, and who begins to attend to the competence claim and the implied self-praise. Alternating her gaze between the student and the maps on her desk, the teacher reciprocates the student's turn with a facial expression displaying surprise (open mouth and raised eyebrows, fig. 4.2) that develops into a broad smile (fig. 4.3) as she produces the acknowledgement token “okay” with a highly marked prosody (heavy elongation, the fall-rise pitch and smile voice) at line 8. In overlap, the student mitigates her claimed competence with a smilingly produced increment (“maybe”) and laughter tokens (line 9).

Despite the multiple instances of self-repair in the teacher's turn at lines 8 and 10, the Evaluation move of the IRE, it is clear that it affiliates with the student's display of self-confidence through its combination of verbal elements, prosody and facial expression. These resources achieve more than mere factual acknowledgement of the student's choice or a confirmation of correctness of her understanding of what a “cliff” means. Instead, showing surprise and reciprocating the student smile in an upgraded manner so that the smile is even audible in the teacher's voice quality are ways to build a sense of awe or admiration of the student's orienteering skills into the teacher's “okay”, and to do so in a somewhat teasing manner. As part of such an ambivalent action that a tease is, the teacher's smile can be seen as a way to secure a sense of affiliation and to ascertain that the turn does not question the student's claimed orienteering skills: a way to authenticate the positive feedback. Note that the student's resumption of smiling at a point when the teacher's “okay” is still in progress suggests that she attends to the teacher's pre-beginning display of surprise (line 7). The student's continuation of smiling and the mitigating “maybe” are ways to orient to the teasing elements in the teacher's facial expression.

In the final extract (5), smiling is a part of a corrective action that the teacher produces after a student (Simo) answers a question incorrectly (see also [Looney and Kim, 2018](#), for how teachers playfully receive students' uncertain responses). The extract comes from the same 6th grade Chemistry class as extract 1. Here, the teacher smiles as she reformulates a question for Simo to try again after his incorrect answer and thereby marks his just-prior error as a momentary lapse in thinking rather than a reflection of more enduring competence. The problematic response comes at line 11 and is also promptly oriented as such by Simo's peers Kalle, Alma and Soile.

#### Extract 5. Smiling to mark a student mistake as a lapse

```

01 TEA and (0.3) ↑protons ha:d (.) ↓what kind of charge.
02 (1.2)
03 TEA negative or positive.
04 (2.1)
05 TEA mmh+ Milja
    sim +raises hand-->
06 (0.9)
07 MIL °positive°=
08 TEA =posi↑tive+ (.) protons, (.) a::nd how about electrons+ °then,°
    sim -->+ +hand up-->
09 (0.9)
10 TEA Simo
11 SIM positive,
12 (0.8)≡(0.2) = (1.0)
    teaF ≡smiles faintly-->
13 KAL #posi+≡*[tive?]
14 TEA +≡*[n o t]# ≡posi↑tive *but,#
    teaF -->≡ ≡smiles-->
    teaH *swings arm down and up*
    sim +smiles-->
fig #fig5.1 #fig5.2a/b #fig5.3

```



fig5.1



fig5.2a



fig5.2b



fig5.3

```

15      &(0.8)
alm    &turns to simo-->
16 ALM  °(negative)°
17      (0.7)&(0.2)π = (0.9)
alm    -->&
teaF   -->π
18 TEA  e:+[: : : ]rr& [>Soile.< ]
19 SIM  +[(e(h)i o(h)o(h)) hh]
        '(no oops)'
20 KAL  [hh °he he°=]
sim    ->+does facepalm gesture, smiling-->
alm    &smiles faintly-->
21 SOI  &[ nega#ti[ve.]
22 KAL  &[°hh he# [he ] he he [he he ].hh .hh he he° ]&
23 SIM  [°h ]hh he [hhh° ]
24 TEA  [negati]ve. (0.4) so, (0.3)]&
alm    ->&turns to face simo, smiling-----&
fig    #fig5.4

```



fig5.4

```

25      ↑protons are positive and electrons are, (.) >|negative.<
sim    -->+

```

Asking about the charge of electrons “then” (line 8), i.e., after the charge of protons has just been established, can be seen as a way to promote students’ self-discovery (Waring, 2015) instead of stating what might seem like obvious. Nevertheless, it frames the question with a sense of obviousness that electrons’ charge is the other one of the two options that the teacher has given at line 3. However, Simo’s response at line 11 does not demonstrate such a situated inference (or what he might even accountably be expected to know about these particles during such a review activity) but instead provides the very same answer as Milja earlier at line 7. A 1.0-s silence indicating trouble ensues, towards the end of which the teacher begins a short and very subtle smile in a pre-beginning position (visible in fig. 5.1). Kalle, the student next to Simo, also orients to the response as problematic by repeating it to Simo with a questioning intonation (line 13). At line 14, the teacher offers Simo another chance to answer a reformulated version of the question with a designedly incomplete utterance (Koshik, 2002) that contrasts the two polar options.

The reformulated question is accompanied with a slightly more noticeable smile that the teacher begins with the word “positive” and sustains as long as she is still waiting for Simo to take a turn, until the end of line 17. The smile has a certain quality of tenseness of the mouth, as if the teacher were ‘biting her lip’ (visible in fig. 5.3). The teacher also does a gesture whereby she swings her bent arm first downwards and then upwards in front of her torso, a movement that provides a beat for her evaluation of Simo’s answer (“not positive”). Together, the smile and the gesture underscore the obviousness of the answer when all other alternatives have been eliminated and thus provide a slightly ironic framing to the action.

Simo reciprocates the teacher’s smile (visible in fig. 5.2b) but, despite the verbal hint, he maintains his gaze fixed on the teacher and does nothing to signal another try at answering, even though a student in front of him (Alma) turns over and whispers the correct answer to him at line 16. As the teacher stops waiting for Simo and re-allocates the turn to Soile (line 18), who has also treated Simo’s answer as incorrect by raising her hand up directly after it (visible in fig. 5.2a), Simo finally displays a ‘noticing’ (e.g. Käätä, 2014) of his mistake. At lines 19–20 he utters through laughter what sounds like a recognition of his error (*ei oho*, “no oops”, see also Tainio and Laine, 2015, p. 83) and buries his smiling face in his palm. Simo’s peers Alma and Kalle respond to the ‘noticing’ by laughing and smiling (lines 20, 22, 24) – unlike the teacher, who maintains a more neutral facial expression as she deals with Soile’s answer and moves to close the sequence (lines 24–25).

In extract 5, the teacher smiles before Simo ‘notices’ his own mistake, whereas Simo’s peers smile and laugh after it. This suggests that these laughter-relevant practices orient to different things. From a pedagogical perspective, the teacher’s smilingly produced reformulation of the question is a way to avoid producing an unmitigated negative evaluation of Simo’s incorrect first answer (see also Seedhouse, 1997). As part of this action, the teacher’s smile seems to attend to the difficulty of mitigating negative evaluation in a situation like this. However, it also embodies an orientation to Simo’s competence: By inviting Simo to take the mistake light-heartedly as a ‘silly’ one, the teacher treats this kind of a mistake as a momentary lapse and not a reflection of Simo’s enduring capabilities. Simo’s facepalm gesture is thus a way to affiliate with the teacher’s positioning and acknowledge that the mistake was something that he would not normally make. The facepalm makes Simo’s

stance towards the mistake visible and allows the silliness of the mistake be turned into a matter of shared smiles and laughter among peers.

## 7. Concluding discussion

In this article, we have investigated the interactional unfolding and pedagogical orientations of teacher smiles during instructional activities in IRE sequences. Our analysis shows that smiling is a flexible interactional resource that is available to teachers in a range of sequential positions and for a variety of pedagogical concerns. Smiling can both display an emotional stance towards its recipient or the on-going classroom instruction and respond to other such stance displays.

The empirical examples demonstrate that teacher smiles can occur both as a ‘first’ smile or as conduct that reciprocates a student’s smile, laughter or other kind of facial expression. Through this kind of basic reciprocity of facial expressions, we argue that teacher smiles manage the affiliative and pedagogical responsiveness of teachers’ actions. As [Koole and Elbers \(2014, p. 60\)](#) suggest, teachers’ utterances are responsive to the student when they are “contingent upon what the student has shown in the interaction so far”. Smiling can be one resource for building contingency into an action, but, for the teacher, achieving contingency is not always a matter of matching a student’s smile with another smile. As [Kaukomaa et al. \(2013\)](#) have shown, smiling is a way to initiate emotional transitions, and in the classroom, such transitions may be institutionally relevant in moments of observable tension and seriousness from the students’ part (extracts 1 and 3). In such contexts, providing a ‘gentle’ or ‘encouraging’ smile is a way to attend to students’ facial expressions in a pedagogically relevant and responsive manner, a way to relieve apparent emotional tension in the situation. And as extract 3 shows, such pedagogically responsive smiles can contribute towards relaxing the mood by inviting subsequent smiles from students, which indicates that their interactional work is seen and oriented to by students.

Even if smiles are routinely deployed together with talk to construct multimodal actions, they are embodied conduct that has its own temporal organisation that may not coincide with the sequential organisation of talk. This is particularly acutely visible in smiles that are sustained over several turns-at-talk. While teacher smiles can be observed across the three moves and the transition spaces that together constitute IRE sequences, different positions make different practical tasks relevant for the teacher, and smiles (as any other conduct) find their local meaning in relation to the sequential context and its relevancies. We have identified and examined in more detail two such overarching institutional concerns: managing participants’s (dis)alignment with instructional activities and framing students as competent actors.

At least in our data, the first of these institutional tasks seems to be a more pressing concern for participants during the Initiation and Response moves of the IRE instructional sequence, when there is a need to secure that participants’ actions are aligned towards a joint ‘teachable’ ([Eskildsen and Majlesi, 2018](#)). As extracts 1–2 show, smiling can be a way to orient to issues of accountability for problematic or divergent actions when managing alignment trouble, or as [Glenn and Holt \(2013, p. 2\)](#) point out, a resource “for aligning, modifying actions, and mitigating meanings” in such problematic moments. As for the second institutional concern, the existing classroom interaction literature has recurrently shown that once a student has provided a candidate answer to a teacher question, the participants typically examine the ensuing teacher talk, its timing (see e.g. [Macbeth, 2004](#)) and prosodic packaging ([Hellermann, 2003](#)) for clues concerning the correctness of the student answer. Along the same lines, smiling is another resource that teachers can deploy to manage ratify and correct student responses in relation to ‘teachables’. Instead of assessing the factual correctness of a student’s response to a teacher question, the smiles that immediately precede or accompany teachers’ evaluative turns analysed here display pedagogical responsiveness by orienting to the responding student’s competence. A smile can build this kind of responsiveness into an evaluation of a student response by attending to the student’s observable effort in responding (extract 3) or their confident epistemic stance (extract 4). When dealing with incorrect answers, a smile can be a way to soften negative evaluation and treat the incorrect response as a slip (extract 5). In these examples, the smile thus either displays an analysis of the student’s demonstrated competence or positions the student in an affiliative manner that contributes to the construction of such competence.

In analysing these extracts, we have attempted to convey in the transcript differences in the ‘quality’ of the teacher smiles. Across our corpus, there are obvious differences in, for example, the intensity and duration of a smile, the openness of the mouth, and so on, but it should also be noted that these differences intertwine with idiosyncratic variation. Methodologically, such differences in smile quality are difficult to represent in transcripts, and a certain impressionism may be unavoidable in analysing them. However, it is possible that the quality of a smile is interactionally consequential to participants – there may be moments, for example, when a smile is treated as fake or insincere. Beyond CA, there is ample psychological literature that has used experimental methods to establish different kinds of classification schemes for smiles (see e.g. [Ekman et al., 1990](#)), but there seems to be a need for more emic and naturalistic interactional research investigating whether and how participants orient to nuances in smiles.

To conclude, the present article has sought to show some ways in which teachers deploy smiles for institutional purposes in classroom settings. Insofar as a smile shapes the action which it is part of, and has the potential to invite subsequent affiliating smiles from recipients, it is fundamentally interactional conduct and an available resource for teachers to construct pedagogically relevant actions. In this way, ordinary instances of smiling also require and display situated, embodied and praxiological competences from teachers. Smiling in response to students’ expressions of uncertainty, joy and playfulness constitutes an intricate ‘dance’ of facial expressions with which teachers treat students’ emotion displays in institutionally relevant ways.



## Acknowledgements

We wish to thank the two anonymous reviewers and Olcay Sert for their insightful and constructive comments on previous versions of the article. Any remaining errors, omissions, and shortcomings are our own. The study has been funded by the Academy of Finland (Grant no. 310387), the Finnish Cultural Foundation, the Catalan Agency for Management of University and Research Grants (Grants no. 2014-SGR-1190 and 2017-SGR-1728), and the Research Collegium for Language in Changing Society (University of Jyväskylä).

## Appendix. Transcription conventions

Transcription of talk based on Jefferson (2004).

wo::rd	prolonged sound
(.)	silence less than 0.2 seconds
(2.0)	duration of a silence
(word)	uncertain transcription
( )	inaudible
wo-	cut-off
[ ]	overlapping talk
<word>	slower pace than in surrounding talk
>word<	faster pace than in surrounding talk
word	emphasised talk
.hh	an audible inbreath
=	latched utterances
°word°	quieter than surrounding talk
,	continuing intonation
.	turn-final intonation
?	rising intonation at the end of a prosodic entity
↑↓	change in pitch height
<i>italics</i>	English translation of a Finnish turn constructional unit

The multimodal transcription follows the system developed by Lorenza Mondada (2014), available at: [https://franz.unibas.ch/fileadmin/franz/user\\_upload/redaktion/Mondada\\_conv\\_multimodality.pdf](https://franz.unibas.ch/fileadmin/franz/user_upload/redaktion/Mondada_conv_multimodality.pdf)

**	two identical symbols (one symbol per participant) delimit descriptions of embodied actions, being synchronized with talk
->	embodied action continues across subsequent lines
->*	shows the end of the embodied action
>>	action begins before the excerpt's beginning
->>	action continues after the excerpt's end
tea	identifies the participant doing the embodied action when (s)he is not the speaker
teaW	annotation of walking
teaH	annotation of hand movements
teaF	annotation of facial expression
teaG	annotation of gaze
fig	displays the moment at which a screenshot has been taken
#	indicates the timing of the screen shot within talk

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