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A study of the playful use of English among learners on an intensive language course

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A study of the playful use of English among low-proficiency language learners on an intensive business English group course

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ABSTRACT

Humorous language play is integral to the building of many relationships. Research into its role in social interactions has tended to focus on native speakers in a shared cultural context, while the humorous language play of second language learners, especially in the classroom setting, has only recently attracted attention. The limited research to date has tended to focus on discrete episodes of humorous language play, neglecting its contribution to the building of rapport and the development of an in-group culture. This thesis focuses on lower-level learners from a variety of linguistic and cultural backgrounds, and investigates the ways in which they play with English for their own social ends, despite a lack of language proficiency and common socio-cultural reference points.

The setting for this investigation was an intensive English course for business people, run by a private training organisation. The participants were low-proficiency learners from various professional fields and nationalities. The classroom interactions of particular groups were audio or video recorded, with two learners being recorded over two continuous days of their three-day course. This enclosed setting allowed the opportunity to trace the role of humorous language play in the establishment and development of the learners' relationships with each other and with their teacher. Goffman's concept of frame and Bakhtin's ideas about the heteroglossic and dialogical nature of language inform the analysis of the data.

Findings show that the impulse to play can overcome the linguistic and cultural challenges the learners face. In order to have fun, they exploit the 'play' between the interpretative frameworks that a language classroom provides. They build a common pool of prior talk and reference points, alluding to them humorously to create rapport, to shape their learning environment, and to take ownership of the target language.

DECLARATION

I declare that this thesis is my own work. It has not been submitted for a

degree or other qualification to the Open University or any other university or

institution for examination.

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My thanks are due primarily to Guy Cook, without whose expertise and advice I would not have been able to complete this thesis. I would also like to express my heartfelt gratitude to my other supervisors who have so deftly guided me along the way - Kieran O'Halloran, Philip Seargeant and Maria Leedham. Furthermore, I am eternally grateful to my colleague Frank Monaghan who smoothed my path to registering for the PhD in the first place. Each of the supervisory team has brought their own insightful perspective to my work and all have done so with wit and good humour, making our discussions a pleasure rather than a chore. Indeed, they have proved that, even with the serious business of a PhD, a little play is not merely a distraction but a necessity.

I would like to thank the students of the organisation where I carried out my research who, despite the pressures of attending an intensive Business English course, were happy for me to add to those pressures by recording them. I would also like to thank their teachers who let me into their classrooms and provided perceptive comments about my data, informed by their wealth of professional experience. Particular mention must go to HM[1], whose enthusiasm and intelligent insights enriched my analysis considerably. Finally, I would like to say a special thank you to Jenny, my wife. She has been through the doctoral process and it was her continual encouragement that helped me make it over the finishing line.

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[1] I cannot give her full name because doing so might compromise the anonymity of my research setting.

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Introduction

1.1 The trigger for this research

I have been an English Language teacher for a large slice of my working life, first entering the second language classroom in 1982. After four years of teaching TEFL at home and abroad, I joined BizLang, a business communications, training organisation in London.[2] It was my experience of teaching groups on BizLang courses that first gave me the kernel of a research idea which eventually led to my undertaking this thesis. It often struck me, especially when taking over the teaching of a group of BizLang clients on an English-for-Business course, that language learners have a propensity for building up a repertoire of humorous in-group references which often mean little to me when I first enter the group as an outsider. Although there are exceptions, the social glue that helps BizLang groups to function smoothly as a cohesive whole seems, in large part, to be made up of humorous language play. This is particularly intriguing given that so much play among native speakers seems to involve competences that BizLang course participants do not generally possess when operating in English.[3] Native-speaker play often depends on mutually understood cultural

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[2] This is a pseudonym.

[3] The terms 'native' and 'non-native' are contested ones. Some view the term 'non-native' as pejorative e.g. Jenkins, J. (2000). *The Phonology of English as an International Language. New Models, New Norms, New Goals.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.Although such a debate is a valid one, it would side-track my focus to enter into it here. For the purposes of this research, I take a 'native speaker' - or L1 speaker - of English to refer to one who has used the language for communicative purposes since childhood whereas a '..non-native speaker is somebody who has an L1, or L1s, other than English' - Seidlhofer, B. (2011). *Understanding English as a Lingua Franca.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

references, prowess at manipulating the forms of the language, or indeed both (Carter, 2004; Chiaro, 1992; Cook, 2000; Crystal, 1998; Holmes, 2007; Norrick, 2006). Yet the learners who are the focus of this research have acknowledged difficulties in communicating in English (otherwise they wouldn't be attending such a course) and, at first sight, very few common cultural references on which to draw. So, my research was born out of my interest in finding out how they are able to overcome these challenges in order to satisfy the impulse to play.

The language classroom has, until recently, been neglected as a research setting and even more so as a cultural context (Rampton, 2007: 588). There is research to be found on play in the language classroom, but its focus is often on form (e.g. Broner and Tarone, 2001; Pomerantz and Bell, 2007) and, when it alludes to the social dimension of play, such as its collaborative nature (e.g. Cekaite and Aronsson, 2005; Sullivan, 2000), this tends not to be its main concern. As a result, the role that play has in the development of an emergent classroom culture is under-researched, something this current study intends, in part, to rectify.

The data on which my research is based comes from audio and video recordings of four BizLang classes which were taped between 2008 and 2012. The learners in these classes were all enrolled on English-for-Business Open courses which lasted between three and ten days. The participants came from a variety of countries and companies. Typically, they were middle management sent by their employers to improve their English for job-related purposes. They inhabited a working world where English as a Lingua Franca is becoming the usual medium of communication between

companies and within them. As such, they represent an increasingly important part of our globalised world (Seidlhofer, 2011). The BizLang organisation is one which I know well and which, at the time of the data collection, I had been a part of for many years. As will be explained in Chapter 3, it is a setting which is particularly advantageous for identifying the manifestations and development of language play and its role in the social dynamic of the classes observed.

1.2 My initial research questions

The main questions that I wanted my investigations to throw light on are set out below. They will be referred to again at appropriate junctures in the thesis and discussed again in full in the concluding chapter. They fall into four broad categories, although there is considerable overlap between them:

Research Question 1: How does humorous language play manifest itself among my research participants?

As alluded to in the previous section, it seems that the linguistic dexterity associated with the wordsmith or raconteur is beyond many second language learners. Research into play among native speakers suggests that they often engage in activities such as punning (e.g. Carter, 2004: 156) or playing with the rules of syntax (Chiaro, 1992). Furthermore, jokes, or at least those which are pre-scripted and pre-planned, often exploit the ambiguities of language, making them, as Sacks (1974) points out, a test of understanding to be passed or failed. Unsurprisingly, in the light of these challenges, the literature on second language acquisition (henceforth 'SLA') that focuses on humorous language play tends to view it as a barometer of

proficiency in the target language (e.g. Bell, 2005), something which undoubtedly holds true for certain manifestations of playful behaviour. [4] However, this does not necessarily mean that the further along the proficiency scale a particular learner is, the more he or she will play in the target language. Indeed, my experience in the classroom tells me that there is no correlation between language proficiency and a propensity to play. For this reason, I decided to focus on those learners with limited proficiency in English in order to throw light on whether they play in the language. To explore this, the conceptualisation of play needs to move beyond seeing it in purely formal terms, something which reduces it to the mere manipulation of form, and which, in any case, is particularly challenging for learners with limited knowledge of the language. Its definition needs to encompass the functions it fulfils in interaction. However, forms are not irrelevant to the research. In light of the linguistic constraints learners are labouring under, it is of interest to know how their play manifests itself and the ways in which it resembles and contrasts with the play of NSs. Do the learners use tropes, for instance? If a particular moment of play is revisited, does it change its form in any way? Furthermore, as language play has a subversive dimension, something which is explored in the next chapter, do learners ever sabotage the standard forms of the language that, on the face of it, they are aspiring to acquire? Does the learners' relatively fresh perspective on the language allow them to play with forms in ways which NSs might not even consider? In short, the research aims to explore the extent to which learners can

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[4] 'Second Language Acquisition', like 'non-native speaker' is a contested term. It has been pointed out that 'second' essentialises the concept of linguistic competence - Block, D. (2003). *The Social Turn in Second Language Acquisition.* Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press. However, even critics like Block revert to using SLA as a convenient shorthand for a particular research tradition.

overcome their own communicative limitations in order to play and, indeed, the extent to which play is one of the *means* by which such limitations can be minimised.

In addition to the linguistic challenges they face, the research participants come from different national cultural backgrounds, suggesting that they cannot exploit pre-existing common cultural reference points for playful purposes. This seems to disadvantage them further because shared allusions, as Norrick (1993: 69) points out, are an important social glue in playful interaction. When these can be drawn upon, meanings do not need to be spelt out and this generates a sense of communion between speaker and hearer, a feeling of being 'on the same wavelength'. Such possibilities, on the face of it at least, seem beyond newly-acquainted second language learners from different national cultures, so it is pertinent to know how they compensate for this lack. This issue of common ground leads to the second main question.

Research Question 2: What social functions does humorous language play fulfil?

Research among native speakers suggests that play, relying on in-group norms and knowledge, is most likely to occur between intimates and is a means of maintaining and strengthening relationships (Carter, 2004: 165; Coates, 2007: 29; Cook, 2000: 72). BizLang course participants who enrol on the English-for-Business course, do not usually know each other prior to the course itself. As will be seen in Chapter 3, they only have a matter of days in which to establish relationships with their fellow learners. Although the only thing which brings them together is the common objective of improving their

language skills in English, they nevertheless need to gel as a group in order to facilitate achieving that objective. In such circumstances, the role of language play in the socialising process interests me, particularly given the linguistic and cultural barriers outlined above. In addition, it could be argued that the learning group forms its own culture, however transient that may be. Holliday (1999: 248) argues that the classroom is a good example of what he calls a 'small culture' (I return to this in Section 3.2.3). The BizLang setting is a particularly enclosed one which provides an advantageous context for tracing the role of play in contributing to a group's developing culture and in establishing an individual's membership of the group. In this regard, it is vital to explore how this socialising process is achieved. For instance, is storytelling a context which attracts play and does it have a role in the search for common ground and the forging of a collective viewpoint?

As Chapter 2 will make clear, language play is ambiguous by its nature in that it can be seen as a manifestation of a lack of respect as much as a sign of solidarity. As such, does the play identified in the research serve to exclude as well as include? If so, who or what are the targets of such exclusion? This line of enquiry leads to the third main research question.

Research Question 3: Who instigates humorous language play, how is it sanctioned and what are its identifiable targets?

Although classrooms vary greatly in their procedures and practices, there are, nevertheless, identifiable features which most classrooms share. They have a teacher who, to a greater or lesser extent, is in charge of deciding or sanctioning what takes place within the classroom's four walls. In the light of this fact, the extent to which learners can and do initiate play is pertinent.

After all, as will be seen in Chapter 2, play can be subversive in nature and an investigation into playful behaviour in the language classroom needs to take account of the extent to which teachers allow it or, indeed, encourage it. An exploration of the nature of play also needs to consider any discernible targets it may have such as the teacher or the institution of which he or she is a part, fellow learners, the wider culture in which the group finds itself or, indeed, the play-makers themselves. Furthermore, it is worth looking at the extent to which language itself is a plaything for the learners. After all, children, when acquiring their first language, have a predisposition for playing with its semantic and phonological properties (e.g. Cook, 2000; Ely and McCabe, 1994; Kuczaj, 1983). The degree to which second language learners have a similarly fresh perspective on the language they are learning also forms a part of the investigation.

Research Question 4: With which types of classroom activities does play occur?

Talk is structured in particular ways in the classroom. Sinclair and Coulthard (1975: 21) identified much classroom interaction as being characterised by something they called 'IRF' - Initiation-Response-Follow-up. According to their influential model of interaction, a teacher will often initiate an exchange with a student by, for example, asking a question. The student then responds and the teacher provides a follow up, such as some form of feedback on the student's response. Needless to say, no class consists exclusively of such interactions and their prominence depends on the pedagogical approach being used and the particular phase a lesson is in. For instance, van Lier (1988) refers to 'language orientation' and 'activity orientation' phases which

are identifiable in most classrooms, where IRF would be more likely to occur in the former. Similarly, Seedhouse (2004) discusses how the structure of talk can be influenced by whether classes are in 'form-and-accuracy contexts' or 'fluency contexts'. Although no two groups and their respective teachers are identical, there are activities typical of the BizLang classroom which are characterised by exchanges which are structured in particular ways. Part of the research focus is on which types of activity attract play and which do not, and the impact of play not only on the socialising process (see Research Question 2: What social functions does humorous language play fulfil?) but also on the structure of talk itself.

Finally, the language classroom in particular is one in which play-as-rehearsal (Lantolf, 1997; 2000) is a prominent feature. Teachers create contexts from beyond the classroom so that learners can practise particular structures and functions within simulated scenarios as a means of rehearsing for such 'real' encounters in future.[5] An investigation into language play in such a setting inevitably throws light on the relationship between play-as-rehearsal and play-as-fun.

1.3 A question which is *not* part of this investigation

None of the above questions make direct reference to the role of play in the acquisition process. Given the limited time in which the learners attend BizLang English-for-Business courses (three days minimum to ten days maximum), any evidence of acquisition would be extremely tenuous and,

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[5] I have put 'real' in quotation marks here as the classroom seems to be implicitly regarded by some as a setting which is somehow divorced from the real world. My research findings suggest role-play interactions do have real social consequences.

furthermore, an attempt to tie that evidence to play would be open to question. In addition, unlike some proponents of play (e.g. Popescu, 2002; Prodromou, 1998), this thesis does not advocate incorporating it into the syllabus of the second language classroom. Indeed, the subversive and 'unofficial' nature of much playful behaviour (Section 2.5.4), suggests that any attempt in that direction might be self-defeating. However, the thesis touches upon ways in which playful interactions may help in the process of acquiring language. As such, the role of the teacher in encouraging or suppressing play is not without pedagogical significance. The teacher's contributions and role in relevant exchanges in the collected data is discussed and, in the concluding chapter, the implications of the research findings for classroom practice alluded to. However, the focus of the research remains the role of play in the socialising process rather than the acquisition process, although most teachers would recognise that a socially cohesive classroom is conducive to learning.

1.4 The structure of the thesis

Chapter 2 first investigates the various angles from which humorous language play can be viewed and defined. Play in general is looked at in relation to the other activities in which people take part, a comparison where Goffman's (1974) notion of the frame is particularly pertinent. Inherent properties of language are set out, including its potential for metaphorical and metonymic representation which allow the concepts of humour and language play to be natural bedfellows. In this regard, Bakhtin's ideas (1981. first published in 1935; 1984a, first published in 1929) about the heteroglossic and dialogical nature of language are particularly relevant. The

different ways in which play has been defined in the literature both in terms of its forms and its social functions are also discussed. In the course of exploring the various ways in which language play has been conceptualised, potential gaps in the research literature are identified in relation to my own research setting and concerns. The chapter goes on to look at some of the possible reasons why the playful behaviour of learners has generally been a neglected area of research in the language classroom setting. It also explores why such neglect represents a lost opportunity, especially given that engaging in humorous language play (henceforth 'HLP') presents the learner with benefits as well as risks and challenges.

Chapter 3 explains the setting for this investigation in detail. It shows how the context provides an excellent opportunity to look into the role of HLP in forging and maintaining relationships between non-native speakers on an intensive English course. It also explains the methodologies employed that can best answer the investigation's research questions which are revisited and revised in the light of discussions in Chapters 2 and 3. The chapters containing the data and findings begin with a look at the notion of framing in Chapter 4. Here, Goffman's ideas are an especially useful means of exploring how learners play with the various roles and frames of reference in which a language classroom, by its nature, is especially rich. Closely related to this is the concept of recontextualisation which is explored in Chapter 5. One of the striking features of the collected data is that learners often generate humour by re-accenting previously encountered language. This language often metonymically refers to previous experiences shared by the group members. Drawing on Bakhtinian notions of the dialogical and

heteroglossic nature of language, and the oppositional forces at work in it, the chapter explores this phenomenon and situates it in theoretical terms. Having identified salient patterns of HLP in Chapters 4 and 5, the following three chapters (6,7 and 8) are dedicated to a case study of a pair of learners and their teacher which traces the nature and development of the interactions between them over a couple of days. Chapter 6 looks in detail at how the challenges and risks of playing in the target language are manifest in the data, and the resources the learners use in order to overcome these. Chapter 7 focuses on the ways in which the participants use prior talk as a means of establishing and developing an in-group culture, while Chapter 8 explores the role of the teacher in play and the relationship between play and the classroom activities of which it forms a part. Chapter 9 discusses the implications of my findings and the useful avenues it opens up for further investigation.

2 The nature of play and its place in the second language classroom

2.1 Introduction

The human impulse to play is a universal one among people of all cultures. Johan Huizinga (1970, first published in 1944), the Dutch philosopher, coined the term 'Homo Ludens' to encapsulate this essential element in our nature. Indeed, the pervasive importance of play has been highlighted in recent times through corpus analysis which shows its presence in our everyday communications (e.g. Carter, 2004).

However, despite or maybe because of its ubiquity, attempting to define play, and specifically its manifestations in our oral communications, has proved difficult. This is not surprising, given its multi-functional and multi-faceted nature. Furthermore, as will become clear in the course of this chapter, play is inherently ambiguous, making any attempt to pinpoint its nature ultimately elusive. Swann and Maybin (2007: 492) observe that researchers have been lax in their interchangeable uses of terms such as 'play', 'humour', and 'creativity'. Other linked and overlapping concepts such as 'wordplay' and 'joking' could as easily be added to this list. Nevertheless, it is worth delimiting the concept from the outset. This thesis is interested in play that is conducted primarily through language. It is playing through language which, ostensibly, the low intermediate learners of English (see Section 3.2.4 for a precise definition of their proficiency levels) who form the focus of the research are at the greatest disadvantage in relation to native speakers.

After all, play is a means of showing prowess in a language (see Section 2.5.2). Furthermore, it is the play that arises in the to and fro of interaction rather than anything pre-planned or pre-scripted such as 'canned jokes' (see e.g. Chiaro, 1992; Norrick, 1993), which is the concern of this study. The challenges that learners face when attempting to take part in spontaneous play are both productive and receptive in nature. As will be explored in this chapter, they not only have to be able to actively produce playful language but also be able to react in kind when others do so. How they overcome or accommodate to such challenges forms part of the current investigation.

Given the complexity of human behaviour, attempting a neat and watertight definition of play would be a vain undertaking. However, there are useful characteristics of the phenomenon that can help in its identification. The process of looking at how others have conceived of and researched play among adults and children, and among native and non-native speakers (henceforth, NSs and NNSs) throws into relief those areas where the current investigation can contribute significantly to knowledge in the field.

2.2 The nature of play: stepping outside the norm

The higher animals, as Cook (2000:102) points out, share a proclivity for play. Anyone who has ever had a dog knows that it spends much of its time satisfying this impulse both in its interactions with other dogs but also, across species, with its owners. Although wild animals often have to channel their energies into activities more central to their survival such as searching for food or ensuring that they themselves do not become food, play is still an

important feature of their lives (e.g. Beckoff and Byers, 1998; Henig, 2008; Smith, 1984; Sutton-Smith, 1997).[6]

When playing, animals pattern their behaviour on primary activities such as fighting or hunting. It is important, therefore, that they are able to differentiate between play and the behaviours on which they are based, otherwise they could suffer physical harm. In this regard, it is worth drawing upon the ideas of twentieth-century sociologist Erving Goffman, himself influenced by the work of anthropologist Gregory Bateson's (1972) study of the play behaviour in animals. One of the many important concepts that Goffman uses to explain human interaction is that of the frame – a framework of interpretation – that allows us, at any given moment, to answer the question 'what is going on here?' (Goffman, 1974: 8). His notion of frame is conceptualised in terms of the individual's experience rather than in terms of society's wider structures (1974: 13). It is, therefore, a psychological construct in which context is not 'out there' but exists in relation to the individual's experience of it and is something which can also be created and shaped by the individual, much as a dog signals a play frame when it wags its tail as it pretend-fights. Furthermore, frames are a means by which we, as social actors, attempt to understand each other's actions and intentions. For the most part, this interpretation process is subconscious:

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[6] A phenomenon which memorably illustrates that the mammalian impulse to play can be found in interactions between seemingly the most unlikely of participants in the unlikeliest of settings can be witnessed on the frozen Canadian tundra. Polar bears and huskies, natural competitors for the scarce resources of their shared habitat, have regularly been witnessed playing together - see, for instance, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TtkzSaaO_As (accessed 11.02.13)

..observers actively project their frames of reference into the world immediately around them, and one fails to see their so doing only because events ordinarily confirm these projections, causing the assumptions to disappear into the smooth flow of activity. (Goffman, 1974: 39)

It is noteworthy that Goffman does not regard play as an activity within one of our primary frameworks for understanding the world around us. Rather, he sees it as something based on but different from such an activity:

..a given activity, one already meaningful in terms of some primary network, is transformed into something patterned on this activity but seen by the participants to be something quite else. (Goffman, 1974: 43-4)

As such, it becomes a conscious happening, both for the play-instigator who has to signal that he or she is in a 'play frame' at a given moment (this point will be revisited later), and for the audience, for whom the ordinary flow of events is somehow disrupted. This echoes Huizinga's assertion that play is not 'ordinary' or 'real' life:

It is rather a stepping out of 'real' life into a temporary sphere of activity with a disposition all of its own. (Huizinga, 1970: 26)

However, it would be unwise to extrapolate from this that play does not have consequences in the world beyond the play frame. The young, human or otherwise, who play-fight may not seriously hurt each other but this does not mean that their play has no effect on the power dynamics within their social group (e.g. Symons, 1978). As (Gordon, 2008: 324) citing Bateson (1972) observes, the play bite is not real but it is also NOT not real. This means that play gives its participants the leeway to do and say things which would not otherwise be allowed. That play is both integral to and an interlude in our ongoing existence (Huizinga, 1970: 27) gives it an ambiguity which, in turn, makes it a particularly powerful social tool (see Section 2.5), something which is evident in the research data to come.

It is worth reflecting on the notion of frame in relation to the language classroom. There is a striking parallel between the speaker who sets up a play frame as a fun diversion from the mainstream flow of interaction, and the language teacher who establishes a hypothetical frame in order to practise particular functional or structural features of the target language (henceforth 'TL'), such as 'giving advice' or 'the simple past'. In both cases, there are simultaneous frames which are in operation, what Goffman would call the 'primary' one (1974: 21 ff) which, in the classroom consists of the teacher teaching and the learner learning, and either the simulated or comedic one. In the simulated frame, the student may temporarily be a shopper, a neighbour or whatever the simulation demands in order to practise particular elements of the language. The play frame, as will be seen, can also create a wide spectrum of roles for the participants. A difference

between them, of course, is that the simulated frame forms part of the 'official' classroom business of learning and is initiated and managed by the teacher, whereas a play frame is 'unofficial' in that it forms an interlude in the main activity, even though it may be sanctioned by the teacher. In light of its unofficial nature, triggering a play frame seems like a risky undertaking for a learner. The relationship between the play frame and the simulated frame is an area of interest in this investigation.

Language always carries the potential for ambiguity, making it the perfect vehicle for play amongst humans and, given that the focus of the current research falls particularly on language play, it is worthwhile looking briefly at the nature of language and how it lends itself to play.

2.3 The playful potential in language

Although many of our fellow animals share with us a propensity for play, they lack an important resource upon which humans often draw when playing, the uniquely complex and sophisticated symbolic system of communication that we call language. Language allows us to bring together concepts in various ways, making it an excellent vehicle for humorous play. How it does this is explored briefly in the sub-sections below.

2.3.1 The metaphorical nature of language and thought

Huizinga sees language as intrinsically playful:

> In the making of speech and language, the spirit is continually 'sparking' between matter and mind, as it were, playing with [the] nominative faculty. Behind every abstract expression there lie the

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boldest of metaphors, and every metaphor is a play upon words.

(1970: 23)

The notion of the fundamental metaphorical nature of language finds a parallel in Lakoff and Johnson's (1980) work which sees language as reflecting the metaphorical nature of human thought itself. They assert that we naturally make mappings between conceptual domains which become so embedded in our language that we are usually unaware of the fact that everyday expressions like 'falling prices' are, in fact, metaphorical in nature. Although shortcomings have been found in Lakoff and Johnson's framework (e.g. Cameron, 2003; Gibbs, 1999), it nevertheless strongly suggests that much of our language, before it becomes conventionalised by use, starts life when a comparative link is forged between two conceptual domains. Thus, for instance, an adjective like 'tough', a word from the domain of physical properties, is transferred and applied to an abstract concept such as 'issue'. The initial transference of such a word to what is now a commonplace application in abstract domains suggests a figurative dimension to much of our innovative language use, although it would be misleading to suggest that all metaphorical language is playful. However, the fact that, at its birth, a metaphor forges novel conceptual connections may be one reason why research into language play among native speakers of English (e.g. Carter, 2004; Coates, 2007) shows that figurative language is a prominent feature of the data.

2.3.2 The potential of language to bring together different frames of reference

Metaphors are the means we use to portray one thing in terms of another, so as to highlight a particular quality or feature of the thing being described. This bringing together of concepts seems to be a characteristic both of language and of play's sibling, humour.

Humour, like play, is difficult to pin down as its essence often seems to lie in ambiguity. There are a number of theories of humour but one of relevance here encompasses the notion of combining ideas that are incongruous (e.g. Morreall, 1987; Raskin, 1985): we are amused at that which seems out of place in some way, which surprises us or destabilises our expectations. Although there are many things we laugh at which are not incongruous and, conversely, many things which are incongruous which we do not find amusing, there does indeed seem to be an out-of-place quality to much that is humorous. Language lends itself to combining incongruous elements, in part, because its symbolic nature (Saussure, 1959, first published 1916) allows words to be homonymous. This, in turn, means that, through language, we are capable of amalgamating two conflicting frameworks of interpretation in a word or phrase by, for example, punning on different meanings. Victor Raskin sees the combining of different elements as a condition for humour:

> ..any text should be partially or fully compatible with two different scripts and secondly, a special relation of script oppositeness should obtain between the two scripts. (1985: xiii)

What Raskin calls scripts, he defines in the following terms:

> scripts of "common sense" which represent his/her knowledge of
> certain routines, standard procedures, basic situations etc, for
> instance, the knowledge of what people do in certain situations, how
> they do it, in what order, etc. (1985: 81)

A simple everyday example of the combining of scripts for humorous intent illustrates Raskin's point. As I type these words, I have a coffee mug in front of me with a picture of a woman on the phone. A speech bubble next to her reads: 'Can you please hold?... ' The next line reveals the joke: '..Incontinence Hotline, can you please hold?'. Expectations of a particular script as set up by the use of formulaic telephone language. These are then suddenly subverted by the following lines which activate another script where the verb 'hold' takes on a rather different meaning, triggering humour (at least for some). It is worth noting here that instigating such humorous play in spontaneous interaction depends not only on a knowledge of the multiple semantic meanings of particular words, but also the dexterity to draw upon that knowledge at a given moment, a challenging task, especially for someone who is not speaking their L1. In the light of these difficulties, one of my investigative aims is to see whether the research participants can bring together conflicting schema without access to play based on a semantic knowledge of the TL.

Raskin's definition of scripts shows them to have a close affinity with Goffman's frame (see Section 2.2 above) which we use to help us decide what is happening at any one moment. The term 'script' is itself closely

related to 'schema' (Cook, 2000: 75), the expectations we bring to any situation in order to make sense of it. The term 'schema' was given currency in the field of psychology by Bartlett (1932) who saw memory as constructive in nature rather than being a mere passive receptacle. We do not come to an experience with a blank slate, but make sense of events through our expectations of them. Language play can be a means of disrupting these conditioned expectations. This, in turn, may lead to changes in them, something which Cook (1994) calls 'schema refreshment'.

The concepts of schema and frame need differentiating as both will feature in the course of this thesis. I will make a distinction along the lines of that in Tannen and Wallat (1993: 59-61) where schemata are to do with our general expectations about people, places, events and things which help us make sense of the world. Frames, on the other hand, are to do with what is going on at any particular moment. As will be seen, it is within the power of interactants to shift and play with frames during their communicative exchanges, manipulating their interlocutor's schemata as they do so. To take an everyday example, a child may have particular schemata for a visit to the dentist, either based on their own experiences or on what they have gleaned from others. These expectations may include sitting helplessly in a chair while a masked man or woman probes between his or her teeth with a pain-causing implement of some sort. For the child's sake, the dentist may frame this potentially unpleasant experience as a hunt for hidden treasure and, when examining or repairing the child's teeth, address the child as a fellow adventurer in the quest. This frame or scenario conjures up very different schemata which may (or may not) alleviate the patient's anxieties.

2.3.3 The contextual dimension to the figurative use of language

Raskin's (1985) book on language humour significantly has the word 'semantic' in its title. Although this is not the place to air the long-standing debate on the distinction between semantic and pragmatic meaning, it is telling that much of his data comes from joke books, language which is essentially divorced from a particular interactional context of use. However, it is important, when considering its potential for playfulness, to remember that language does not exist in a vacuum. It both shapes and is shaped by its use in our interactions. Mikhail Bakhtin (1981) roots language firmly in its socio-cultural milieu. He sees it as heteroglossic – many voiced - in nature, its meanings forged and altered by usage, so that words carry within them previous intentions, connotations and contextual flavours.

The idea of words evoking previous usages and settings is an important one and takes us back to the figurative nature of language alluded to in the last two sections. In play among native speakers at least, it is not only language's metaphorical nature which is important with regard to play, but also its metonymic dimension. To quote Chandler (2002: 130):

> While metaphor is based on apparent unrelatedness, metonymy is a function which involves using one signified to stand for another signified which is *directly related* to it or *closely associated* with it in some way. (author's italics)

To illustrate this, Chandler gives various examples including 'Number 10' where the place stands for the person, that is, the place where the Prime Minister officially resides is used to refer to the Prime Minister him or herself. Similarly, when we indulge in play with friends, we often evoke an episode or scenario from our shared history with a word or phrase which is associated with that moment and which comes to stand for it. Although it may not usually be thought of as such, I would maintain that such usage is metonymic and, therefore, figurative in nature. The language used comes to mean something beyond its mere denotation but represents the whole of which it was originally just a part. An example illustrates the point. Below is a snippet from a long-running and popular BBC radio programme *Just a Minute* where contestants have to speak on a subject allocated to them for a minute without hesitation or deviation. In the following extract, Nicholas Parsons, the host of the show, is about to read out the points totals to his guests who include the comedian, Paul Merton:

> Nicholas Parsons: What a fair result!
>
> Paul Merton: What did Will get?
>
> (Audience laughter and applause)

(BBC R4 *Just a Minute*, first broadcast 22nd November 2010)

On the face of it, there is nothing funny about Merton's line at all. In fact, it makes no sense to someone tuning into the programme at that moment. In order to understand the significance of what Merton has said, you would need to listen to the broadcast from the beginning. In fact, the thread which

he exploits had started early in the game with an unsolicited intervention from a member of the audience (Will). This is then referred to and played with by members of the game panel on various occasions throughout the show. By the end, the name of Will not only refers to a member of the audience but also metonymically stands for a collective experience. The pleasure and humour here seems to come from two characteristics of the exchanges: firstly, the references are shared and inclusive; secondly, there is an incongruity that lies in the fact that an unsanctioned intervention is treated as an official contribution to the game. These themes of inclusiveness and incongruity are revisited in the analysis of the research data. Although, in this case, the particular significance of Will's name is fleeting and dies with the end of the radio broadcast, such play can provide an important social glue which contributes to the building of an in-group culture, and can be related to Bakhtin's notion of the dialogical nature of language. Utterances both respond to and are infused with previous meanings, as well as anticipating responses to come. In his own words:

[t]he living utterance [...] can not fail to brush up against thousands of living dialogic threads (1981: 276-7).

The ideological and dialogical nature of language can partly be explained by the struggle between forces of authority attempting to unify the language – the centripetal – and those which are pushing it apart – the centrifugal (Bakhtin, 1981: 270-2). Grammar books, for instance, could be seen as the embodiment of the former: they provide and (consciously or not) promote a 'standard' of the language, resisting change. In contrast, an example of the centrifugal might be the talk that characterises particular subcultures which

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deliberately mark themselves out from the mainstream through their language as well as through other forms of expression, such as dress or music. Bakhtin sees the tension between the centripetal and centrifugal as a natural state of being for any living language. It seems obvious that learners will aspire to a recognised standard of the TL. Yet, given that play is a disruptive influence on the normal flow of activity (Section 2.2) and, as will be discussed in Section 2.5.4, is potentially subversive in nature, the degree to which learners attempt to adhere to or undermine native-speaker standards is far from clear.

The metonymic and centripetal/centrifugal dimensions of language are crucial for play, as will be seen later, because they lend themselves to expressing both its incremental and subversive nature.

2.4 Defining humorous language play (HLP) in formal terms

Most people encountering the phrase 'humorous language play' would probably associate it with wordplay, that is, the clever manipulation of a language's forms and meanings as manifest, for example, in punning. As already mentioned, the homonymous and metaphorical nature of language allows such play. Indeed, much of the literature exploring language play dedicates significant space to just such phenomena (Carter, 2004; Chiaro, 1992; Crystal, 1998; Norrick, 1993). At the beginning of his book called simply *Language Play,* Crystal (1998: 1) states:

We play with language when we manipulate it as a source of enjoyment, either for ourselves or for the benefit of others. I mean 'manipulate' literally: we take some linguistic feature – such as a word, a phrase, a sentence, a part of a word, a group of sounds, a series of letters – and make it do things it does not normally do. We are, in effect, bending and breaking the rules of the language.

Belz (2002: 16) too, in the SLA field, defines language play partly in terms of form: 'Language play is the conscious repetition or modifications of linguistic forms such as lexemes or syntactic patterns'. In his more comprehensive definition of the term, Cook (2000: 123) includes three linguistic features that, although not always present, help identify the phenomenon of language play: patterning of forms, repetition, and emphasis on exact wording, such as is needed in the telling of a joke which relies on a pun. However, a purely formal definition of language play in terms of such manipulations would exclude many language users, more especially those who are learning the TL as adults and can be expected to have less command of it than L1 speakers. Yet, this present research and my own experience of teaching classes of language learners indicate that they too can play to humorous effect. Therefore, the definition needs to be taken beyond looking purely at the ways in which it plays with form. Indeed, the investigations already cited implicitly recognise that without investigating the social functions of play, research in this area is no more than the meaningless classification of particular language features. Crystal's definition above includes reference to its function, '..as a source of enjoyment, either for ourselves or for the benefit of others' (1998: 1). Belz (2002: 16) too acknowledges the importance of the

emic (speaker-sensitive) aspect of attitude, while Cook (2000: 123) refers to socially significant criteria such as notions of performance, intimacy, solidarity, and antagonism.

From the research perspective, another means of defining play is through pinpointing the identifiable behaviour around it rather than attempting to determine its essential features. As already discussed, play tends to be realised in discrete episodes which need to be signalled and understood clearly in order to be successful. The dog assumes the 'play bow' (Henig, 2008) and the cat retracts its claws to show their playmates that they mean them no harm. Human beings have their own ways of communicating play frames that Gumperz (1982: 131) calls contextualisation cues. These recognise that context is not a static setting in which communication takes place but that it is, at least in part, something that both shapes and is shaped by the language and behaviour of those within it. Thus, the line 'I'm going to kill you', if accompanied by a broad smile, is rarely an indicator that homicide is on the speaker's mind. Other contextualisation cues include prosody (Holmes, 2007: 531; Straehle, 1993: 214), unusual lexical choices such as neologisms (Broner and Tarone, 2001: 371), overlapping speech (Coates, 2007: 38-41) and exaggerated gestures (Davies, 2003: 1373). In a second language context, these indicators of play may well be more crucial than in NS interactions because participants cannot rely on each other's linguistic and socio-cultural antennae for intended play being particularly fine-tuned.

A further indicator of play is laughter which can happen in and around the play frame. Unsurprisingly, researchers who are interested in language play among NSs (Coates, 2007: 31; Cook, 1997: 227) and among NNSs (Bell,

2005: 196; Belz and Reinhardt, 2004: 328; Cekaite and Aronsson, 2005: 174; DaSilva Iddings and McCafferty, 2007: 33; Davies, 2003: 1363; Sullivan, 2000: 122) usually have the notions of 'amusement', 'humour' or 'fun' at the forefront of their definitions. The presence of laughter is a common method used by researchers to identify play episodes (Bell, 2005: 198; Cekaite and Aronsson, 2005: 174; Pomerantz and Bell, 2007: 563; Rogerson-Revell, 2007: 12). This does not mean, however, that laughter is merely a reactive phenomenon. It can itself be a signal of playful intent (Glenn, 2003: 28). In this sense, as Coates (2007: 44) asserts, laughter is not only a response to humorous talk but is itself talk. It is, of course, not a foolproof method of identifying humorous play as laughter can, among other things, function to cover embarrassment.

As already mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, play involves stepping outside the norm. Thus, in the language classroom setting, any disruption of the 'official' classroom agenda has the potential to signal a playful episode.

This issue of identification will be revisited in Chapter 3 where my research methodology is discussed in detail.

2.5 Defining play through its social functions

Playful and amusing communicative behaviour cannot be identified merely from the forms that it takes. Glenn (2003: 33) highlights that its accomplishment is jointly negotiated. In light of this, an analysis of language play would mean little if the only thing it did was to explore its formal properties. Accepting that, as Bakhtin points out (1981; 1984a), none of our communicative activities take place in a void because they are rooted in the

context of their use, the various social functions that language play fulfils are explored in the sections that follow.

2.5.1 Play as a form of rehearsal

It is not surprising that play has commonly been regarded as a means for the young animal to hone its skills for the challenges of later life (e.g. Dawkins and Krebs, 1978; Fagen, 1984). In the field of child development, this notion can be seen in the approach of the influential psychologist, Lev Vygotsky (e.g. 1978; 1986) who gives rehearsal prominence in his sociocultural theory of learning and development. This approach, to put it in Goffmanian terms, sees the secondary framework of play as a means of rehearsing for the activities within the primary framework on which it is patterned. Vygotsky regards play-as-rehearsal as a way through which children gain control over their own social and cognitive activities. In terms of language, he also views children's private speech as a means of rehearsal that has a vital role in their maturation. Lantolf (e.g. 1997; 2000), among others, has taken Vygotsky's ideas into the sphere of second language studies. He clearly and explicitly differentiates the idea of play as fun and play as rehearsal (Lantolf, 1997: 4-5). This is not to say, of course, that fun and rehearsal do not coincide when, for instance, children create simulated worlds where they take on the roles of 'grown-ups', such as teachers, shopkeepers or soldiers. Nevertheless, it is useful for the context of the present research to differentiate the two: in the language classroom, and especially in the specific research setting of this thesis (see Chapter 3), role-play is such an important part of the learning experience that incorporating it within the concept of play in the investigative remit would blur the focus of the research. Nevertheless, despite the need to

differentiate between play as rehearsal and play as fun, this does not preclude the possibility that they might occur together in the research context. The relationship or the 'interplay' between play and the typical frameworks that are operative in the particular setting of the language classroom is one which is explored in the data analysis chapters.

2.5.2 Showing prowess through HLP

Language play is one of the means by which we assert ourselves. By exploiting such features as homonyms, homophones and synonyms (Carter, 2004; Norrick, 1993), a speaker can show their command of the language code itself. Such language use can have a competitive edge, as seen in verbal duelling, where speakers (usually male) fire rapid and ritualistic insults at each other (e.g. Cook, 2006: 41-2; Dundes et al., 1970; Labov, 1972a; Schwebel, 1997), behaviour that can be witnessed in the exchanges seen and heard in settings as diverse as parliamentary debates and rapping contests. As Cook (2000: 68) points out, from an evolutionary perspective, a demonstrable mastery of language may attract mates: like the lyre-bird's tail display, it symbolises the ability to defend and provide.[7]

It is significant, given the linguistic and cultural dexterity needed to play in this way that sources which investigate such play tend to concentrate on NSs (Carter, 2004; Chiaro, 1992; Crystal, 1998; Norrick, 1993). Of course, for the second language learner, such *dis*play presents particular problems because he or she has only a partial command of the language (although whether

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[7] The lyre bird example would be, by Darwin's account, 'sexual selection' rather than 'natural selection'. The bird's display is, in utilitarian terms, a waste of resources but is simply there to attract a mate (Bowler, P. J. (1984). *Evolution: The History of an Idea.* Berkeley: University of California Press: 196).

anyone has a *full* command of it is a moot point). For instance, the kind of mastery of the TL's semantic properties needed for the simultaneous evocation of two or more of Raskin's 'scripts' (1985: 111) would be beyond many language learners. Indeed, it is significant that Raskin himself frames the notion of wit in terms of the native speaker's productive and receptive competence (1985: 51). It is not surprising, therefore, that much of the research into play among language learners seems to analyse it in terms of the extent to which it provides evidence of competence in the TL. For example, Bell (2005: 212), in her research into the language play of three NNSs of English living in the USA, found that the most proficient of her participants was able to draw on a greater variety of linguistic resources than her fellow participants, and she concludes that '.. the ability to engage in humorous language play is linked to proficiency'. In a similar vein, Belz and Rheinhardt (2004) demonstrate how a NNS of German was able to use language play to demonstrate his mastery and awareness of the multi-functionality of the language (albeit in computer-mediated communication rather than face-to-face interaction).

To date, what is missing from the literature about language play among second language learners is an exploration of how play, rather than being viewed as a mere barometer of linguistic competence, can, in fact, be one of the means by which speakers cope with the challenges of operating in the TL. One of the motivations for this research is an interest in how play is used to perform vital social functions despite a lack of linguistic prowess in the language in which the participants have to operate.

2.5.3 Finding and maintaining common ground through language play

2.5.3.1 *Language play as a sign of intimacy*

Evidence of native speakers' use of language play indicates that it is far more prevalent among people who are on familiar terms than it is with those whose relationships are more formal (Carter, 2004; Straehle, 1993). This comes as no surprise, especially considering that one of its functions is to explore the nature and constraints of our social world (see Section 2.5.4 below). Rather like the pretend-fighting of young mammals, playing among friends and family rarely has serious consequences. Even at the aggressive end of the spectrum, verbal duelling, and teasing are often a sign of bonding as much as they are of competition (Bongartz and Schneider, 2003; Carter, 2004; Holmes, 2007; Norrick, 1993; Straehle, 1993). In language play, there seems to be the distillation of what Tannen (1986) sees as the innate paradox that it encodes: play simultaneously shows solidarity and a potential lack of respect. Naturally, therefore, it tends to be used among those who feel comfortable in each other's company. Consequently, investigations in the field have focussed on relaxed settings (Carter, 2004; Crystal, 1998; Straehle, 1993). Even in more formal contexts, such as the office, analyses have come from interactions between long-established colleagues during in-house meetings and conversations (Holmes, 2007). My own research setting is very different in that play has to grow and flourish among participants who have to initiate and establish relationships with each other in a very brief time span (see Chapter 3).

In the field of SLA research into language play, a focus on the informal can be found in Bell's (2005) study of the learners' interactions with their native-speaking friends. Research in the institutionalised setting of the classroom usually focuses on speakers who share a first language (Pomerantz and Bell, 2007; Sullivan, 2000) or whose primary interaction is with first-language speakers of the TL (Davies, 2003). In the case of the former, the learners may well already have established a relationship with their classmates through their L1 and, if not, can do so outside the language classroom. Indeed, there is evidence to suggest that, within the class itself, combining the learners' common L1 with the TL can be exploited to build rapport through play (Pomerantz and Bell, 2007). Secondly, the fact that speakers have a shared cultural background is significant in terms of the play opportunities open to learners. Much of the pleasure derived from jokes and the humorous exploitation of other texts and references comes from the fact that the audience is left to fill in the gaps from its own socio-cultural knowledge. This is a central reason why language play is such an effective means of including and excluding others and also why, as Chiaro (1992: 122) points out, certain types of verbal humour do not travel well.

With regard to the literature investigating learners' interactions with native speakers, almost inevitably, play shows a primarily assimilatory function to the dominant culture (Bell, 2005) or emphasises the role of native speakers in instigating or 'scaffolding' the learners' appreciation of language play (Davies, 2003). However, it would be highly instructive to see how speakers who do not share a common cultural background can use play without recourse to commonly understood reference points or, indeed, a common

communicative code other than the TL. In addition, it is likely that people who

have not met previously. such as those in the research cohort, would be

interacting initially within what Nessa Wolfson (1988) calls 'the Bulge' – that

non-intimate social framework where participants are, ostensibly at least, on

an equal footing and where identities, relations and meaning have to be

negotiated with great care. Carter (2004: 165) would see such a scenario as

one within his taxonomy of context types which is less likely to produce

creative and playful language. Speakers would need to build their

relationships from scratch and the research context (see Chapter 3) is

particularly useful in interrogating the extent to which the emergent group is

defined and reinforced through the incremental accumulation of in-group

references and the role of HLP in that process. As Pope (2005: 56) states:

> the art of common talk is not simply a matter of the use of puns,
>
> metaphors and other kinds of overtly playful language, but also the
>
> ways in which group identity may be extended and enriched through
>
> kinds of communal pattern building and transformation.

It is to this communal pattern building which we now turn.

2.5.3.2 *Play as an incremental phenomenon*

It has already been noted (see Section 2.3.3) that language can accumulate

meanings and associations which allow words and phrases to metonymically

stand for a shared experience. This cumulative dimension to language play

remains under-investigated. In fact, how humour builds up and coagulates

into reference points that both promote and reflect a social group's identity is

indicative of a wider process in word-meaning development. In a Bakhtinian

framework, meanings accumulate and change with use and are part of the social process of forming group identities along various significant dimensions (Bakhtin, 1981: 290):

> In any given historical moment of verbal-ideological life, each generation at each social level has its own language; moreover, every age group has as a matter of fact its own language, its own vocabulary, its own particular accentual system that, in their turn, vary depending on social level, academic institution (the language of the cadet, the high school student, the trade school student are all different languages) and other stratifying factors. All this is brought about by socially typifying languages, no matter how narrow the social circle in which they are spoken.

In research into the language play of NSs, Carter (2004: 100-108) identifies the importance of what he calls 'pattern-forming' and 'pattern-reforming' choices, the former building on previous contributions to the interaction and the latter breaking with them, but both helping in the collaborative activity of weaving an often humorous conversational tapestry. However, Carter's findings are constrained by the fact that he draws on CANCODE corpus data and, thus, the conversations he looks at appear as discrete episodes, lacking the perspective which allows one to look beyond the immediate conversation to how humorous language and references might have developed over time. Coates (2007) focuses on the importance of humour derived from shared knowledge and in-group norms within all-female social networks, norms which are established, in part, through the stories the women tell each other. Norrick (1993) too notes the importance of humorous personal anecdotes

and in-group mocking in maintaining and developing relationships, where particular stories and ritualised behaviour become part of a group's culture, while Tannen (2006) shows how past arguments can be referred to and framed humorously to defuse tension.

In SLA research, there are a number of longitudinal studies of language play phenomena. Bell (2005) recorded her three research participants over a two-year period. Although it is true that the language play discussed includes evidence of the learners' growing socio-cultural knowledge of their host country (Bell, 2005: 202-3), the data provide snapshots of language play rather than revealing an incremental dimension to it. In other SLA studies, the focus is on play's possible role in the cognitive and linguistic development of the research participants, not its part in any development of an in-group cultural identity (Bongartz and Schneider, 2003; Broner and Tarone, 2001; DaSilva Iddings and McCafferty, 2007; Davies, 2003). Possibly because of this, the data tends to be presented in separate episodes which are not related in terms of the language items used by speakers. However, there are glimpses of the incremental nature of language play in some investigations. For example, in Pomerantz and Bell (2007), one of the students tries out new and playful meanings for the Spanish word '*pues*' as evidenced in various pieces of the data. In Cekaite and Aronsson's paper (2005), it is interesting to note how learners pick up and develop each other's funny contributions in a Swedish immersion class for young immigrant and refugee children. More recently, Victoria (2011) has noted how particular words and phrases become significant for a group of immigrants on an Employment Preparation Programme in Canada, being

used to trigger amusement and pleasure by evoking their shared experiences. However, even in this case, the development of such phrases as in-group identity markers are not traced in detail. Thus, their growing social significance is not plotted nor are any changes in the phrases themselves as they are reused in play episodes.

In summary, the extent to which playful episodes and the language within them become incorporated into a group's cultural identity remains an under-researched area. Although, as mentioned above, some researchers have acknowledged the importance of a shared repertoire of humorous reference points, none has systematically traced the significance and development of particular references and language items over time. Tannen (1989: 45) mentions the ways in which certain expressions emerge in a group and assume particular significance for it, becoming part of a private language that '..gives a recognisable character to communication among long-term associates.' However, as she mentions herself, most emergent expressions usually do not outlive their first context of use. In this regard, my own study provides the opportunity to investigate the extent to which newly-acquainted NNSs use shared reference points and their associated language which then become part of a group repertoire. The relatively enclosed investigative context (see Chapter 3) provides an ideal opportunity to trace the origins of in-group language and the extent to which it contributes to a group's identity and provides reference points for further play opportunities.

2.5.3.3 Play as a collaborative activity

Language play is not only a means of establishing common ground, but its collaborative nature is itself conducive to the building of social relations. It

has long been recognised that a joke or humorous remark opens up a 'play frame' which gives others the licence to follow it up with word play or thematically linked stories or jokes of their own. This is why much of the data collected on such linguistic behaviour shows that it clusters, occurring in play episodes (Carter, 2004: 100-1; Coates, 2007: 38-43; Holmes, 2007: 529-30). Even when playful language is focussed on one speaker, such as in the telling of a humorous story, the participation and response of the audience are vital in ensuring its success (Toolan, 2006: 65).

The collaborative nature of language play presents particular challenges to the second language learner. Firstly, he or she has to be able to both produce and recognise the conversational cues that signal play frames. In addition, once instigated, such a frame is particularly demanding for the NNS who attempts to build upon it because of the need to stay within the form or theme constraints introduced by the previous contribution. Furthermore, an utterance that attempts humour, even if it does not demand a contribution in kind, does require a reaction, if only of laughter. It could be argued that this is true of any conversational turn. However, the stakes are so much higher for both speaker and listener in humorous exchanges. As has already been alluded to, much humour depends on the listener to fill in the gaps of what remains unsaid. For example, if there is any fun to be had from innuendo it is that the listener identifies the lewd dimension of meaning while the speaker can act the innocent. Therefore, it is vitally important in the research not to neglect the addressee and the importance of his or her reaction to play in the meaning-making process. However, this does not necessarily imply that the audience needs to show a complete understanding of what is being uttered.

Research by Bell (2007b: 377) indicates that NNSs can appreciate the contextualisation cues and sense of bonhomie in play episodes without necessarily fully comprehending what is being said.

2.5.4 Subverting social norms through language play

According to Brown and Levinson's Politeness Theory (1987: 102), humour can be a means of claiming common ground, a useful tool in ensuring the smooth flow of our everyday interactions. Brown and Levinson build upon Goffman's (1959) notion of face, a preferred self-image which speakers present to the world and which, ordinarily, they and their interlocutors seek to protect. Brown and Levinson view humour as a means of protecting the speaker's and hearer's 'positive face' - this requires that the individual's 'wants be desirable to at least some others' (1987: 62). It also protects an interlocutor's negative face - the need that 'his actions be unimpeded by others' (1987: 62) by diluting the threat inherent in such acts as directives and criticisms. However, Brown and Levinson's mention of humour (a concept which they do not define) does not take into consideration the fact that it can be an astringent as well as a balm.

That HLP can be the natural means of expressing the darker side of our human impulses can be seen by looking again at the nature of language. It has already been noted (see Section 2.4) that Bakhtin (1981: 270-2) regards language as the site of an ideological struggle between centripetal forces that exert a standardising, normative pressure on the language, and those known as the centrifugal that push against such pressure. Language play seems to be a natural outlet for the centrifugal for an important reason: it

steps outside the norm (Section 2.2). As such, it has a quality which allows it to be both real and not real, making it paradoxical in nature.[8] This is one reason why it is sometimes problematic to identify and define. Teasing an interlocutor, for example, can simultaneously demonstrate both antagonism and affection. Such language use is deniable ('I was only joking'). In other words, it has a characteristic of humour which Attardo (1994) calls 'decommitment', making an utterance easily retractable. This allows speakers to operate at the edge of acceptable norms in order to assert or subvert those norms. There is plenty of evidence to show how native speakers attempt to undermine or question the prevailing ethos through play (e.g. Carter, 2004; Holmes, 2007). It is often the arena, therefore, where the 'centrifugal' forces of the language are realised in various ways, from the distinctive and long-lived lexicon of a subculture, such as the Polari-speaking gay community in the early to mid-twentieth century in the UK (Baker, 2006), to the ephemeral use of stylised 'posh' or Cockney accents by teenagers in secondary school (Rampton, 2006b)

For the language learner who is struggling towards a native-like competence, is there any room for play that may attempt to subvert the very standard that such a process imposes? Interestingly, this question is one which goes against the grain of much SLA literature which, either implicitly or explicitly, advocates a non-combative, stress-free atmosphere as optimal for learning, a view which seems to have little room for the subversive and sometimes abrasive nature of play. Krashen (1982), for instance, argues for an anxiety-

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[8] Brian Sutton-Smith, a leading play theorist, believes that play's paradoxical nature, which encompasses opposite attributes, reflects a key element that is vital to our survival – flexibility (Sutton-Smith, B. 1997. *The Ambiguity of Play.* Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press).

free learning environment, while even Tarone (2000), an advocate of play as facilitative of SLA, couches her support in terms of the way in which it lowers affective barriers. Yet, although play can be a means of relieving stress (as indeed evidenced later in my own data), this does not take account of the fact that it has more than one face and is not totally innocent and threat-free.

Language play may well be one means by which adult language learners assert a sense of control in a cultural and linguistic environment where they must often feel its lack. A learner's use of humour to help shape the context in which language is learnt, used, and recast is part of what Kramsch (2006) would call a speaker's 'symbolic competence', which includes their ability to shape the conditions of their own social survival. Pomerantz and Bell (2007) seem to find evidence of just such activity in the Spanish conversation classes that they investigate. However, the research participants share a common L1 and much of the undermining of the prevailing discourse is carried out with the aid of that language. Learners from a variety of cultural and linguistic backgrounds, such as those in my research setting, are denied that potential avenue of subversive discourse. One of the aspects which my research attempts to explore is the degree to which learners use the TL to go against the prevailing drive towards 'correctness' that a language classroom promotes and, indeed, whether they undermine other aspects of the dominant ethos.

2.5.5 Telling stories and language play

Humans have a propensity not only for playing with language but also for telling stories. Whether conscious of it or not, our everyday interactions are

characterised by narrative (Toolan, 2006). The human mind seems to have a proclivity for splitting the amorphous flow of experience into rationally connected episodic events (e.g. Bruner, 1991; McAdams, 1993). This process seems to help us both make sense of and remember our interactions with the world around us. It is one of the principal means by which people project their social identities. One only has to think of a country's national stories and myths to realise how important they are in forging a national identity. At an individual level, stories, because they allow the speaker their own internal and external evaluation of events (Toolan, 2006: 60-2), are an extremely powerful tool in influencing how others regard both the narrator and their subject matter. This story-telling inclination is frequently accompanied by humorous play, and this is evident among both children (Maybin, 2006) and adult native speakers (Norrick, 2006; Tannen, 1989; Toolan, 2006).

The distinctive social advantages of story-telling are not, however, without their dangers. Firstly, it is a form of communication which claims speaking time and, partly as a result of this, invites evaluative comment from others (Norrick, 1993). It requires skilful manipulation of the language itself where, typically, features such as intensifiers, hyperbole and certain discourse markers are salient (Chiaro, 1992). It is often accompanied by the exploitation of prosodic and paralinguistic elements in cueing the story and maintaining the audience's interest and attention. Furthermore, the ability to speak through different voices (Bakhtin, 1984a) is an important element in determining the success or otherwise of a narration. Indeed, Yule (1995:

196) regards the ability to produce and recognise voicing is an aspect of language learner competence that needs to be addressed in the classroom:

> The ability to recognise the creation of [...] personae, via paralinguistic signals and different quotative frames, would appear to be a more useful and potentially more absorbing exercise for language learners than mechanically converting contextless direct speech forms to indirect.

Beyond the language itself, stories are often the carriers of our socio-historical knowledge. Indeed, Bhaya Nair (2003: Ch. 5) would maintain that we need 'impliculture' – cultural knowledge - as well as 'implicature'(Grice, 1975) – the ability to infer beneath the surface meanings of utterances. It is likely that, in the context of a language course among strangers, the impulse to tell stories in order to establish an identity and history must be strong. However, given the challenges mentioned above, if NNSs attempt such an endeavour, they need to compensate for their incomplete grasp of the language and the prevailing culture in which they find themselves. The stories that second language learners tell are an under-investigated area of interest. Ros i Solé (2007), for example, looks at the role of anecdotes in projecting identity among Spanish learners, but even these are primarily told in the first language. Stories may be particularly important because, as Tarone (2000) hypothesises, a learner's sociolinguistic competence, as mentioned above, may well improve through experimenting with different voices. In terms of bringing a group of strangers together, stories are a means by which an individual's history becomes a shared history. Thus, a reference point for one becomes a reference point for all who hear it. For

these reasons, storytelling's role in the building of an in-group culture is relevant to my second initial research question about play's social functions. Furthermore, its productivity as a site for play is relevant to the first research question about the forms play takes.

2.5.6 Language play as a projection of identity

As mentioned above, narrative plays an important part in the process of projecting an image to the world, especially, but not exclusively, if the narrative is about the self. Indeed, all the social functions discussed so far - showing prowess, finding common ground, signalling intimacy and subverting social norms - are pertinent in the building and maintenance of identity. As Goffman (1959) highlighted over half a century ago, so much of our interactional energy is taken up with constructing and preserving our social selves. Of course, this sense of self is very important at all times but, as Block (2007: 21) recognises, when people cross geographical and sociocultural borders '..individuals often find that any feelings they have of a stable self are upset and that they enter a period of struggle to reach a balance'. Pellegrino's (2005: 9) remarks, although relating specifically to the experiences of university students on exchange programmes, can equally be applied to all those who find themselves in a different country, using another's language:

> Stripped of the comfortable mastery of their first language and culture
> and societal adroitness, learners in an immersion environment, such
> as study abroad, often report feeling as if those around them may

perceive them to be unintelligent, lacking personality or humor, or as having the intellectual development of a small child.

From my teaching experience at BizLang, some course participants, especially at the lower end of the proficiency spectrum, feel a loss of status: from being important people in their organisation, they are, in their own eyes at least, reduced to the status of helpless children who are sometimes unable to communicate basic needs and thoughts.

It is noteworthy, in terms of this research paper's concerns, that Pellegrino mentions the importance of humour in retaining a sense of self. For some people at least, being able to demonstrate humour in another language may be crucial in validating their identity in that language.

Given the feeling of vulnerability that some people experience when operating in another tongue and another country, it is surprising that researchers in the fields of linguistics and SLA have, until recently, lagged behind their counterparts in other social sciences in explicitly exploring the issue of speaker identity (Block, 2007: 2). It was not until the late 1990s that there was a belated awakening of interest in the notion of identity among second language learners. This is perhaps exemplified by the arrival in 2002 of a journal specifically dedicated to issues around language and identity – *The Journal of Language, Identity and Education*. The foci of its articles reflect where research interests in this field lie at present. It is illuminating to look at these in relation to the research concerns of this thesis.

It is perhaps to be expected that contributions to the journal often investigate bilinguals (Kanno, 2003; Li, 2007) or immigrants (DaSilva Iddings and Katz, 2007; Liang, 2006). For bilinguals, their attitude to and usage of their two languages seems, on the face of it, crucial to their sense of self, especially as, in most cases, their cognitive development has coincided with the acquisition of their language codes. In the case of immigrants, their relationship with the language(s) of their new community seems vital to how successfully they adapt their identities to new surroundings. In Gardner and Lambert's (1972) influential account of the importance of motivation in second language acquisition, immigrants would seem to have a primarily integrative motivation for acquiring the TL. At first sight, there appears to be far less at stake for what Gardner and Lambert call instrumental learners of a TL, that is those whose reasons for improving their English are largely practical in nature. This is the category into which most of the research participants for the present study fall. They need their English in order to carry out their work more efficiently, and even then, only when dealing with the international or cross-border dimensions of the job.[9] The TL appears to have far less of a bearing on the speaker's identity as its context of use is narrower than that of many immigrants, and its acquisition, unlike that of most bilinguals, comes at a stage when the speaker has already forged a sense of self. However, one need only consider the still growing importance of English in our global transactions, politically and commercially (Crystal, 2003; Jenkins, 2007; Seargeant, 2012; Seidlhofer, 2011), to see that work

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[9] There are, of course, some people who come on courses at BizLang, the setting for this research, because they are about to move to another country. However, these form a minority of the company's client base and none of my research participants fall into this category.

encounters in English form an ever-increasing part of NNSs' identities. Despite a discernible shift in the tectonic plates of global economic power in recent years towards such countries as China, and despite uncertainty at the time of writing about the effects of worldwide recession on this power dynamic, it seems that the place of English as the world's lingua franca will remain unchallenged for some time to come. However, what seems to have changed is speakers' relationship to it: nowadays, some argue that English is not so much colonizing the world as being colonised and shaped by it (Jenkins, 2007) .

English is the default language for so many important decision-making occasions at governmental, board or inter- departmental levels. These occasions are usually pan-cultural in nature:

> Members of international political and business elites spend an increasing proportion of their time interacting with one another at gatherings whose physical location in Rome, Seattle, or Tokyo is largely irrelevant to the way transactions are conducted. (Block and Cameron, 2002: 1)

Not only do such encounters happen in hotel foyers, board rooms and the offices of multinational corporations, but increasingly in video conferences and the virtual space of electronic communication. This pan-cultural world of multinational and multicultural encounters needs further investigation. My research setting - a language school for people who are players in such encounters - is a first step in that direction.

It is interesting to note, with regard to the concept of identity, that, in SLA research, it is rarely explicitly married with the notion of humour or language play (Belz 2002 is an exception in this regard). However, it is also noteworthy that, despite this, humour's importance incidentally comes to the fore in a number of papers that explore the ways in which individuals try to project and maintain identities in another language and country. For example, Schmidt's (1983) classic study of how Wes, a Japanese man living in Hawaii, successfully conducts himself in everyday encounters, despite a limited command of English, highlights how his sense of humour helps make up for shortcomings at the grammatical level (Schmidt, 1983: 160). Similarly, Karol, another migrant living in America with limited linguistic skills, nurtures friendships through his telling of witty stories (Teutsch-Dwyer, 2002: 190).

The present investigation provides an opportunity for looking into how NNSs use humorous play as part of their armoury in their negotiation of identity during the give and take of their classroom interactions, whether they are taking part in form-focused grammatical practice or simulating a job-related meeting.

2.6 The advantages of play for the second language learner

As mentioned previously (Section 1.3), the relationship between HLP and language acquisition is not a focus of this research. However, given that the raison d'être of the language classroom is the learning of a TL, my findings may offer indications of a relationship between play and acquisition,

something which is returned to in my concluding chapter. In this regard, a brief exploration at this point of the potential benefits of play in the learning of a language are explored.

It seems commonsensical to regard HLP as advantageous in learning a language. After all, such play requires a demonstrable ability to recognise and exploit the forms and meanings that a particular language offers. So, learning to play in a language requires the mastery of such forms and meanings. This is a reason why play is recognised in the SLA literature as proof of proficiency (Section 2.8.3). As previously discussed in Section 2.5.4, Tarone (2000) sees it as facilitative in lowering affective barriers to learning and allowing the opportunity to experiment with different TL voices.

Cook (2000: 141-4) goes further, positing that play is a means of developing and expanding our cognitive abilities, whether we are second language learners or not. He finds an analogy between language play and random changes that occur to genes: mutations allow us the potential to conceptualise the world in novel ways. Language play, where form, meaning and function are often in dynamic communion, is one way in which such mutations can occur. Humour often seems to arise from a sense of the incongruous and this may trigger new ways of thinking. In the field of SLA, it is interesting to reflect on whether a NNS's comparatively fresh perspective on the language code can be a trigger to play and a source of innovative thought. In this regard, it is noteworthy that children play with the properties of language as they acquire it (see Section 2.7 below).

This is an as yet underdeveloped area of research, yet Holmes's (2007) study of workplace interactions suggests that humorous exchanges can prime participants for creative thinking. As she points out, the communicative features of humorous and creative episodes in the meetings she analysed shared a number of features: high-energy, high-pitch and high-volume interaction with frequent overlap, echoing and challenging.

Certain types of play foreground language items and Sullivan (2000) hypothesises that this raises learners' awareness of links between form and meaning. Evidence from the field of SLA (Tomlin and Villa, 1994) points to the importance of noticing in the learning process. It could be posited that the heightened affective sense that humorous interactions can trigger may, in turn, influence the depth at which particular language items are processed. Furthermore, given the fact that much language play is cumulative and incremental (Carter, 2004), it may be that the repetition of particular items or phrases help in their assimilation (Tarone, 2002). Evidence from Bell's (2005) study suggests that at least one of her participants remembered the various meanings of a particular vocabulary item through the play that it had originally generated.

It could be argued that, paradoxically, despite all the obstacles that a second language learner faces in operating successfully in the TL, the area of identity (discussed above) could be one where a perceived difficulty could also be regarded as a strength. Appel (2007) alludes to the 'in-between' identities that learners often feel that they have when operating in another language. Hall (1995) touches upon a similar fragmentation of self,

maintaining that becoming competent in a second language involves 'ventriloquating' i.e. developing a range of voices. As previously discussed, play, and especially humorous story-telling, is a natural arena for developing just such a skill. Might this 'otherness' also be a licence to experiment? Rather like the masked reveller at Bakhtin's carnival, a second language may allow a speaker to take risks that their first language cannot afford them. It is to this potential affinity between the learner of a language and a player with the language to which we now turn.

2.7 The potential for play inherent in the language learner's role

It might seem, at first glance, that the proficiency level of the beginner-to-intermediate language learner precludes the possibility of indulging in play. After all, as already noted, he or she may well lack the linguistic skills or socio-cultural knowledge by which so much humour is generated in conversation. These disadvantages cannot be discounted. Indeed, seeing how learners deal with these difficulties forms part of the motivation for this research. In addition, learners face another potential difficulty when attempting to play, a difficulty they can do nothing about - how they are perceived by dint of the fact that they are not native speakers of a language. Harder (1980: 268) memorably coins the concept of the second language learner's 'reduced personality' where '..a foreigner is not permitted to go beyond a certain limited repertoire'. As a result, any attempt at wit may be discounted. Prodromou (2007: 21), following up Widdowson's (1998)

observations about the perceived 'authenticity' of utterances in relation to their speakers, puts it this way:

> What is considered creative in the mouth of the L1-user is often seen as deviation in the mouth of even the most advanced successful bilingual user of the language.

This suggests that, however dexterous the second language speaker in the TL, he or she will never attain the status of native privilege which allows for language play.

However, it is worth pondering an alternative viewpoint to the notion of the language learner being banished to the sidelines where they can only be witnesses to rather than participants in play . It could be argued that there are interesting parallels between the language learner, especially at the lower level of proficiency, and the wit, comic or humorist, suggesting that language play may be a more natural avenue of expression for the learner than previously acknowledged. These are parallels which, to date, have remained unremarked upon. Firstly, the language learner, like the humorist, takes a risk when he or she speaks: the chances of making a fool of oneself are high. Yet, using another language, like using humour, may also be a form of liberation from one's 'normal' self, an opportunity to take risks which a speaker might not otherwise contemplate (see Section 2.6). In this regard, it is worth remembering that an intensive language course such as that on which my research participants enrolled is a place where the short-term nature of the experience may bestow a sense of liberation. After all, it is probable that the participants will never encounter each other again.

Furthermore, learning another language may offer a fresh perspective on its properties, rather like children acquiring their first language for whom their native tongue has not yet lost its novelty: witness the ways in which children play with sounds and meanings in such routines as 'knock knock' jokes, nursery rhymes and playground chants (see e.g. Cook, 2000: 13-31). This is not to deny the clear differences between the acquisition of a first language among children who are in the process of cognitive development and that of a second language among socialised and mature adults.

The above points do not underestimate the difficulties that a learner faces in attempting not only to speak a TL but also play and have fun with it. However, they do suggest that such play may be less 'off-limits' to the learner, even one at the lower end of the proficiency scale, than might at first appear to be the case.

2.8 Play as a research topic in the language classroom

The nature of play as discussed so far in this chapter provides some clues as to why it has been under-researched in the language classroom setting. It has already been noted that play can have a subversive nature (see Section 2.5.4) and that ambiguity lies at its heart (Section 2.2). Many people remember from their schooldays that if they heard laughter issuing forth from a classroom, it could indicate one of two things: the students were having a good time or the teacher was losing control (of course, the two were not necessarily mutually exclusive!). Given that researchers in the field of SLA have, for the most part, been interested in the classroom as an arena for language acquisition, they may well dismiss laughter and humorous play as

irrelevant or even inimical to their research focus. The stepping-outside-the-norm nature of play may be regarded as a disruption, an aside from the prevailing business of learning the TL.

To further understand why humorous play has not received the attention it deserves specifically in the field of language learning and teaching, it is fruitful to examine the different approaches to language pedagogy that have been adopted over the last one hundred years or so.

2.8.1 The structural approach

Although approaches to the teaching of languages have been many and varied, they can often be classified as falling into two main camps: the first of these is one that highlights the importance of language form. In this tradition, from the paper-based study of Classical Greek and Latin to that of modern languages, an emphasis is placed on grammatical well-formedness that sees language learning primarily in terms of mastering the structural systems operating at the levels of phonology, morphology and syntax. Indeed, in the not-so-distant past, the acquisition of another language was not in itself seen as the primary objective of such study. Rather, what was valued was its role as a means of developing a student's mental acuity and flexibility. Although, eventually, the learning of a modern foreign language came to be seen as a desired practical outcome of study in itself, an emphasis on structure remained strong in educational circles, and continues to do so to this day. Theoretical underpinnings for such an approach could be found in the work of Saussure (1959), whose work at the beginning of the twentieth century focussed primarily on the structures of the language system rather than how

people used it in their everyday lives. Even those figures who were as concerned with the practicalities of teaching language as philosophical reflections on its nature, such as the British linguist Harold Palmer (1921), emphasised the importance of grammatical patterns and structures in the acquisition process. In this respect, Palmer's approach has much in common with the audio-lingual method that followed it (Lado and Fries, 1943). The habit-formation techniques that these approaches advocated, although strongly criticised in the latter half of the twentieth century by Chomsky (1965), had one thing in common with his work - the structure of language lay at the heart of their concerns.

One need only look at most second language textbooks and courses in circulation in the UK and elsewhere today to find evidence that structural approaches are still very influential: most language books on the market are designed around a progression of grammatical structures for the learner to acquire. A purely structural approach tends to divorce language from its social milieu, focussing on the way it is put together rather than as a means of communicating meaning. As such, it is hardly surprising that language play with its multi-layered social functions does not feature as an area of interest in this tradition.

However, nowadays, most approaches to teaching and learning are not purely structural. A cursory glance at the same language books which use grammatical structure as their design framework, also confirms that they seek to ensure that learners practise the language for the various scenarios that they might meet outside the classroom, whether ordering a meal or chatting with friends. It is to this social context that we now turn.

2.8.2 Contextual approaches

Despite the strength and ubiquity of the structural approach, there have long been alternative pedagogical traditions which have attempted to root the teaching of languages in the 'real' world. These have focussed on language as a communicative tool rather than simply a complex of structures to understand and master. British linguists such as Halliday (e.g. 1973) and Widdowson (e.g.1992), while seeing grammar as central to an understanding of language, have insisted on studying it in its context of use. Meanwhile, in the United States, sociolinguists such as Hymes (e.g. 1971) and Gumperz (1982) have emphasised the overriding significance of communication in both the study and teaching of language. Such ideas have influenced the development of pedagogical frameworks, such as the task-based syllabus (Long and Crookes, 1992). Yet, as Cook (1997) has pointed out, despite attempting to expose learners to the TL in a social context, these approaches have tended, like the structural ones, to ignore the playful side of our communicative behaviour. Perhaps because its advocates emphasise the practical, their attitude to communication in the TL has been somewhat serious-minded; learning a language is seen as a sober business which requires work and application. Yet, the previous discussion points to the vital social functions of play as a means of finding and establishing common ground and as a projection of identity. As Cook (2000: 150) says:

> Knowing a language, and being able to function in communities which speak that language, entails being able to understand and produce play with it, making this ability a necessary part of advanced proficiency.

I aim to show in my data analysis that language play has an important socialising role in the talk of learners whatever their proficiency level.

Contextual, function-based approaches to language learning have often focussed on the transactional rather than the interpersonal dimension of communication: language use is the means to an end, a tool that is put to work in the execution of a task. From such a viewpoint, HLP could be regarded with suspicion and seen as 'off task' and even disruptive, given its potentially subversive nature.

The net result of the focus on the transactional is the promotion of a rather 'safe' and restricted notion of pedagogical practice and the types of communication that need to be practised and mastered by the second language learner:

> A good deal of contemporary language teaching, then, deliberately turns its attention away from language play, and focuses more or less exclusively upon simulation of discourse of the 'bulge' - in which students go about their daily business, motivated by external pressures, doing the things they will have to do in the language, and interacting with people they have to negotiate their needs with along the way. This is of course what many of them are learning language for. (Cook, 2000: 158)

Cook's description of the types of learners and communicative needs that contemporary classroom practices restrictively cater for seems, on the face of it, to apply rather neatly to my own research participants. As has already been noted, they seem to operate in the 'bulge' - the non-intimate world

where speakers are on an equal footing and meanings have to be carefully negotiated. Their motivations for improving their English come from the external pressures of their jobs and the need to 'go about their daily business' in the language. On the face of it, these characteristics militate against the use of play which actually make its occurrence that much more significant.

Some might argue that my description of the worlds of language theory and pedagogical practice as sober and humourless is unfair. After all, open a typical course book for the teaching and learning of a language and you are likely to find games and 'fun' activities among the explanations of particular structures and lexical groupings. However, such content should not be confused with the type of play which is the focus of this study. English language teaching publications, which are sold throughout the world, tend to avoid any hint of culturally-sensitive controversy or subversion (see e.g. Meddings, 2006). Rinvolucri (1999: 14) talks of a bland EFL subculture and '..the soft, fudgey, sub-journalistic, woman magaziney world of EFLese course materials'.[10] In such a world, there seems to be no room for the types of play which have ambiguity and subversion at their heart.

2.8.3 The narrowness of SLA research in the language classroom

In SLA research, learning has been seen as primarily a cognitive process and its social dimension somewhat overlooked, an oversight which Young

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[10] EFL is a common acronym for English as a Foreign Language. It is commonly used of publications which are designed for use in English language classrooms. It should not be confused with ELF - English as a Lingua Franca.

notes in the forward to Seedhouse's (2004) book on the interactional nature of the classroom. Beyond the ways in which SLA has been conceptualised over the years, another factor which has worked against a consideration of any playful element in classroom interaction is the narrow objective of much of the research in the field. To state the obvious, a second language classroom exists for one main purpose – to improve its members' performance in a particular TL. That being the case, it is hardly surprising that researchers have tended to concentrate on the degree to which that objective is met. The easiest means of measuring progress is to investigate learners' acquisition of lexis or mastery of grammatical structure. This preoccupation with the end-product has meant that researchers have sometimes overlooked the social dimension of what takes place in the classroom beyond the immediate objective of acquiring the question form or filling in the information gap. As Rampton (2007: 588) observes, '[r]elatively little attention is given to the classroom as a cultural context'. This inevitably means that HLP, an important tool of social interaction, has also, until recently, been largely overlooked. In a criticism of SLA research that echoes Cook's observations about the restricting and restricted notion of what constitutes good language pedagogy, Block (2003: 73-4) observes:

> Many SLA researchers (...) have managed to get themselves in a quandary: they want a conceptualisation of what people do with language that is grounded in the real world, but they do not seem willing to take on the fact that in the real world, there is play as well as work and that when there is work, there is the co-occurrence of other phenomena, such as phatic communion.

Even when play has been investigated, it has been defined in rather narrow terms, and it is to this that we now turn.

2.8.4 The narrow conceptualisation of HLP in the second language classroom

In the language classroom, the TL is, at one and the same time, the focus and medium of learning as well as being a potential resource for play. In the last decade, the place of humorous play in the language acquisition process, whether in the classroom or outside it, has begun to be recognised (e.g. Bell, 2005; Belz, 2002; Cekaite and Aronsson, 2005; Cook, 2000). Some now regard play as an excellent means by which learners can marry form and function through the natural child-like impulse to play with sounds, to revel in nonsense words and to indulge in make-believe. However, although the research community has started to discover the potential to be found in investigating humorous play among learners, it has done so rather narrowly in terms of its manifestations and its contexts of use. For one thing, research to date has tended to continue the SLA field's traditional focus on acquisition and evidence thereof. Thus, humorous language play has been analysed in terms of the extent to which it provides evidence of competence in the TL (e.g. Belz, 2002; Cekaite and Aronsson, 2005).This focus has, perhaps unsurprisingly, led researchers into analysing those elements of communication that are measurable in terms of acquisition i.e. the formal features of the language (see my previous comment on this). In the area of language play this means conceptualising the phenomenon as the native-like exploitation of the forms, meanings and sounds of words for humorous

effect. This narrow understanding of what constitutes language play, especially if measured by native-speaker standards, is one that seems to present particular problems for the learner. Indeed, seeing play primarily as evidence of proficiency highlights the product rather than the social process that brings it into being.

My own experience of the classroom suggests to me that this notion of play as a barometer of language competence does not tell the whole story. Although it could reasonably be hypothesised that there is a greater chance of encountering punning or other forms of wordplay among speakers with a high level of proficiency, this does not mean that the generation of humour in and through the language increases in relation to learners' mastery of it. Its manifestations may change as learners go up the proficiency scale, but what is missing from the literature is an exploration of the means speakers at the lower end of the proficiency scale use to find their way around their linguistic limitations in order to play. Indeed, although manifestations of play may take rather different forms among less competent speakers than their more proficient fellow learners or, indeed, native speakers, the nature of such play may not be so different in either its origins or its functions. It was this interest in how learners overcome their own linguistic limitations in order to play which led me to focus my research on learners at the lower end of the competence spectrum. Indeed, I wanted to find out if play could be a means of overcoming some of those very limitations.

2.9 Conceptualising HLP for the purposes of this research

The fact that most research in the field of humour and play has focussed on native speaker interactions means that at its forefront is 'wordplay', a manipulation of language that relies on knowledge of its semantic and phonological properties - a knowledge that is generally outside the linguistic competences of my research participants. Even in terms of identifying humorous language play in formal terms, our understanding of it needs to be extended. For example, the notion of tropes could usefully encompass the metonymic use of language which triggers laughter and pleasure through its evocation of shared experiences. Furthermore, as the knowledge and competences in the TL of my research participants are relatively unstable, the research needs to take an open-minded view of the formal elements that constitute play, identifying it also in terms of its social impact at any given moment. After all, as Cook (2000: 101) comments '[p]eople are playing when they say and believe that they are playing.'

The discussion in this chapter reveals that an understanding of language play is not possible without taking account of its situated context of use. In the field of SLA, the social dimension of communication has tended to be ignored in favour of the cognitive (Block, 2003). Language play, an area that has only recently caught the attention of researchers in the field, is no exception in this regard. How play is used as a tool in the establishment and development of social relations is under-researched. This balance needs to be redressed, especially when one considers the importance that humour

has as a marker of group identity within many social, familial and professional circles in which people move.

As has been noted in this chapter, 'language play', 'humour', 'wit' and other associated concepts have not been consistently defined in the literature. This thesis works towards a definition of its own through the investigative process. Provisionally, the term 'humorous language play' can be understood in an everyday sense of play through language which, at least in part, sets out to amuse and which is taken in the same vein by its addressees. It emerges in the course of interaction and includes the clever wordplay that one might associate with wit, such as punning. However, given that HLP is a situated, incremental, collaborative and ambiguous phenomenon which has an important role in the social dimension of communication, the research goes beyond such phenomena to encompass other types of utterances which generate amusement and laughter. The different realisations that playful language behaviour take and the social functions that they fulfil form an integral part of this investigation.

2.10 Conclusion

Using HLP as a social tool carries many risks. When a speaker demands the floor by launching into a story, attempts to undermine prevailing social norms or simply tries to make his or her interlocutors laugh, there is always the chance that the endeavour will come to grief. Yet many speakers (though not all) will persevere with the attempt precisely because of the potential social benefits that can accrue. For the NNS, of course, such behaviour is even

more fraught with danger. Across the world, at any one moment, people are speaking to negotiate contracts, to discuss organisational problems and to exchange know-how. They are doing so in a language in which they do not necessarily feel comfortable and in a space, virtual or physical, that, on the face of it, is not embedded in a particular socio-cultural soil. Yet any exchange inevitably generates and negotiates cultural values. The present investigation provides an opportunity to shed light on the role of HLP in exchanges between people who inhabit the world of international communication where English as a Lingua Franca is the common currency of such exchanges. It looks at HLP not merely as a measurement of linguistic competence but as a means of overcoming shortfalls in such competence. Furthermore, it explores the role that play has in helping to forge individual and group identities where its members create their own particular culture.

The discussion of HLP in this chapter, especially in relation to the language classroom, has brought to light various aspects which are relevant to the current study. Firstly, the figurative and fluid nature of language makes it a natural outlet for play. Secondly, the concept of the frame is central to play as play-instigators need to signal that a play frame is in operation which, in turn, needs to be understood by their interlocutors. The language classroom is potentially a frame-rich environment where a number of frames could be 'in play' at any given moment, including the 'play-as-rehearsal' frame which teachers often set up to practise aspects of the TL. The relationship of the play frame to other operative frames is an important investigative avenue. Thirdly, the chapter has highlighted the important social functions that play fulfils. Yet, the social and cultural dimension of the language classroom and

play's role within it has been largely overlooked by SLA researchers. Furthermore, in terms of language play's social significance, part of its power, as the previous discussion makes clear, lies in its ambiguous nature. It carries the potential to subvert, a feature which is of particular import in a context where, superficially at least, there is a clear hierarchical structure where the teacher embodies authority.

The next chapter looks at the research setting, detailing how BizLang's pedagogical approach shapes not only the interactions within its classrooms but also the physical layout and equipment of those classrooms. In the course of this explanation, the significance of these features in relation to the research focus of HLP are commented on. In addition the methodology is discussed together with its strengths and limitations, along with any measures taken in order to minimise or counter the latter.

3 Setting and Methodology

3.1 Introduction

We have seen in the last chapter how language play among second language learners is a neglected area of research. Firstly, the social role of play in forging relationships and building a sense of community amongst such learners has received scant attention. How it manifests itself among speakers with low proficiency in the language is also in need of investigation.

This chapter contextualises the research setting. Firstly, it gives an outline of the BizLang institution and its pedagogical approach and then links this information to my particular investigative aims, identifying the particular advantages that the setting affords these aims. These advantages are summarised in table form before the chapter moves on to the research approach taken. This approach draws, in part, on the traditions of ethnography and Conversation Analysis in that it recognises the fluid nature of context and the way in which it shapes and is shaped by talk. The analytical frameworks used here, as with any other, carry inherent risks and limitations as well as strengths, and these will be identified and acknowledged in the course of the chapter.

3.2 The Research Setting

3.2.1 The BizLang organisation

BizLang is a staff-owned private language school founded in 1965.[11] From its beginnings, it has specialised in English language training for business people. It was set up in west London and has maintained a presence there ever since. The research for this study was undertaken in the London premises. In the 1970s, it opened a training centre in Milan and, in the following decade, further centres in Bath and Tokyo. The Bath offices subsequently closed while the Milan and Tokyo centres are now financially independent although they still carry the BizLang name. The London-based organisation employs seventeen teachers - or 'trainers' in BizLang parlance - and eight administrative staff. It also draws on a pool of about thirty freelance associate trainers when necessary, nearly all of whom have worked as BizLang employees at some stage in their careers. The teaching staff has a wide range of ages and experience. Turnover tends to be slow. For instance, at last count, seven of the seventeen employed trainers and twelve of the associates originally joined BizLang prior to 1990.

The core activity of the company is English-for-Business training. However, since the 1980s, more general communication skills courses have steadily grown and now make up about 40% of the organisation's revenue and are set to grow still further. This side of the organisation's activities encompasses 'Skills for Business' including presentations, writing and negotiations, 'Cross-cultural training' and 'Team working'. Nowadays, many of BizLang's clients

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[11] It used to have the word 'School' after its name but dropped it in its effort to brand itself as a training organisation rather than an academic institution.

are native speakers of English who attend courses, for instance, to learn how to adapt their language to international contexts. Trainers are expected to be able to teach in these two main business areas (English-for-Business and communication skills) which means that the pedagogical approaches in one of the two areas influence and inform those in the other (see Section 3.2.5 below). At any one time, half the training is being delivered in the London offices and the rest in the premises of client companies around the world.

BizLang's in-house jargon reflects how it sees itself. Teachers are referred to as trainers for the same reasons that the classroom is the 'training room' and BizLang is no longer a 'school'. It regards and sells itself as more of a service provider and consultancy firm than an educational institution. Its recruitment and training of staff is also indicative of this outlook. It does not demand formal teaching qualifications from the TEFL world or elsewhere as a prerequisite for joining, insisting rather on experience of and a feel for the business world. It runs its own five-week induction training programme for new trainers and develops all its own training materials.

From the research point of view, BizLang, as a private language organisation, represents an opportunity to begin to rectify an imbalance in the SLA literature. Such organisations have tended to be overlooked and so the types of places where many learners worldwide study and acquire a second language are under-investigated. The humour and play literature among NNSs is no exception in this regard. Researchers in this area have either explored the phenomenon beyond the classroom (e.g. Bell, 2005) or in kindergarten (e.g. DaSilva Iddings and McCafferty, 2007), school (e.g.

Bongartz and Schneider, 2003; Cekaite and Aronsson, 2005) or university (e.g. Pomerantz and Bell, 2007; Sullivan, 2000). This means that the focus has tended to be on children, teenagers and young adults rather than the over-25s that make up the majority of BizLang's intake.[12] The average age of the 14 participating learners in this study, for example, is 36.

3.2.2 The English-for-Business open group course

The focus of this current research is the 'English-for-Business' (EfB) open course. 60% of BizLang's business is generated by the EfB arm, and half of this comes from its open courses.[13] The advantages of focussing on this particular type of course are set out below.

Unlike the in-house language and skills courses negotiated with individual companies and generally delivered on their premises, the EfB course is run in the BizLang training centre, is charged at a set price and is 'open' to participants from all sectors and nationalities.

Before arriving at BizLang, the participants who have booked onto a course are telephone tested. This allows them to be assessed for their language proficiency and grouped accordingly. Six members to each group is the maximum permitted. In practice, the group size tends to average out at about four. Although choosing to put together people of roughly equal proficiency in the language remains the most important criterion for constituting the course groups, there are other significant considerations. Personality (as far as it can be ascertained over the phone) and nationality mix are also regarded as

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[12] No systematic investigation has been attempted into the average age of BizLang's intake, but experience tells me that it would lie somewhere in the 30s. There is a company policy not to take under-21s except in exceptional circumstances.

[13] The other half of EfB revenues come from one-to-one tuition.

salient to the eventual success of a group. When practical, people of the same nationality are put into different groups, as are colleagues from the same company who may have booked together. The fact that the great majority of people in the course groups are strangers to each other and that they are not of the same nationality dovetails nicely with my research interests. It means that group members have to establish their relationships from scratch exclusively in English and that they cannot rely on obvious cultural common ground as a means for doing that. This is a fruitful backdrop for studying how play in a language other than the speakers' own is used to build relationships and forge group identity (see Research Question 2: What social functions does language play fulfil?).

The duration of EfB open courses is also favourable from the research perspective. To a large extent, their length is dictated by the time which participants can dedicate to training away from their jobs – usually not very long at all. As a result, a typical group course is for five days. They can be as short as three days and the maximum length is two weeks (ten training days). In practical research terms, this allows the possibility of investigating a group for the duration of its existence. Furthermore, the members of a group on an EfB course have long contact hours relative to their total stay. They are in class from 9 a.m. until 5.30 p.m. and are rarely out of each other's company. Of course, they interact in various contexts beyond the classroom - over lunch, in the lounge during coffee break, in the pub with their fellow learners, at the hotel or host family breakfast table etc. However, given the long training hours, the classroom is where the group members spend the major slice of their time together. Thus, the research setting is a relatively

enclosed one where the interactions between a group's members can be captured from the group's birth to its demise. As a result, its shared history can be recorded, and the extent to which that history is used to create reference points for play and the building of a common culture can be investigated (see Research Question 1: How does language play manifest itself? and Research Question 2: What social functions does language play fulfil?).

3.2.3 The BizLang classroom setting

As with nearly all establishments delivering language courses, BizLang's EfB courses take place in training rooms designed for the purposes of teaching and learning. It is perhaps surprising that the classroom, one of the principal, and, for some, the only, locale for the acquisition of a second language, has, until recently, been largely neglected as a research setting by those in the SLA field. This was noted by Candlin over twenty years ago in his preface to van Lier's (1988: ix) exploration of classroom research, and more recently in Young's forward to Seedhouse's (2004) Conversational Analyst's perspective on the same subject. Furthermore, the social and cultural dimensions of the classroom have remained largely unexplored. Rampton's words (2007: 588), primarily used to describe the shortcomings of research into child-adult interactions in the classroom, could as easily apply to the adult classroom:

> Relatively little attention is given to the classroom as a cultural context with its own sites of struggle and its own institutional imperatives and

affordances for particular kinds of learning, and the multilayered and contested nature of aims within the classroom is often neglected.

The reason for the neglect of the social dimension to the second language classroom setting may lie in part with the ideas in some circles about what constitutes 'real' interaction in a TL. Advocates of the task-based approach to language teaching (e.g.Long and Crookes, 1992; Samuda and Bygate, 2008; Skehan, 1998) tend to see language as salient only in so far as it relates to and prepares the learner for the world beyond the classroom itself. However, as Cook (2000: 170-3) points out, what constitutes 'real' language and interaction goes far beyond the narrow conceptualisation that such an outlook allows. After all, what happens in the classroom has real social consequences. It is a place where friendships are made, alliances formed and identities negotiated.

The enclosed nature of the 'EfB' BizLang classroom has already been described. It is also a particularly intimate one where there are, at most, six learners and one trainer. Unless participants are moved to another group at the beginning of the course, they remain together throughout . Also, if their course lasts for one week or less, they are usually allocated only one trainer for the duration of their stay. Furthermore, the physical environment, unlike the settings of most other classroom research, does not allow for 'unofficial spaces' (Maybin, 2006: 13): very little can be said that is not overheard by the trainer, for example. This means that any language play takes place in a sanctioned arena. This makes it distinct from some of the other research into play in the language classroom which often occurs away from the gaze of authority (Broner and Tarone, 2001; Cekaite and Aronsson, 2005; DaSilva

Iddings and McCafferty, 2007; Pomerantz and Bell, 2007). In such a setting, power dynamics, something alluded to in the Rampton quotation above, are particularly pertinent. Of course, Rampton's interest lies primarily in ideology and power in the classroom setting (Rampton, 2006a; 2006b). While it is true that the interactional dynamics of an all-adult classroom such as that found in BizLang are typically rather different to those found among a class full of inner-city teenagers of the kind studied by Rampton, the issue of who has authority and how that is exercised is a real one in the all-adult context too, as any teacher of adults will verify. Although it might be expected that there are more overt and frequent challenges to authority in a school classroom full of teenagers than a 'training room' peopled by motivated adults whose learning is often inextricably connected with their professional advancement, this does not mean that challenges do not occur in the latter context. With this in mind, how the subversive dimension of language play finds voice is of interest in the current research. The power dimension in the context of my study is complicated by the fact that the learners, or at least their employers, are also paying customers. The intricate dynamics of these interactions and the role that subversive play has within them becomes particularly significant when they are acted out in front of the teacher as an officially recognised representative of the larger institution. These issues of authority and its subversion are pertinent to Research Question 3: Who instigates humorous language play, how is it sanctioned and what are its identifiable targets?

On the face of it, a disadvantage of such an intensive, 'hot-housing' environment from my research viewpoint is that it does not seem to be naturally conducive to play, something which would be expected to occur in

more informal, relaxed settings (Carter, 2004: 165). It is, after all, the place where the 'work' of improving the learners' English takes place. The world of work is conventionally contrasted with that of play, yet Holmes' investigations (2000; 2007) among native speakers seem to suggest that this may not necessarily be the case. Her research indicates that humorous play can relieve tension and energise discussion, suggesting that the two are perhaps not as mutually exclusive as some might think and, indeed, as Cook posits (2000: 150), may overlap. So, the occurrence of play in the type of environment that BizLang provides is informative in terms of the work/play dimension (Research Question 2: What social functions does humorous language play fulfil?).

Finally in this section, because my research interest lies, in part, in the role of HLP in developing a sense of communal identity, the cultural status of a typical group of learners on a BizLang EfB course needs to be considered. Eckert and McConnell-Ginet's definition of a Community of Practice, itself influenced by Lave and Wenger's (1991) conceptualisation, seems closely to describe what such a group is for:

> A community of practice is an aggregate of people who come together around mutual engagement in an endeavour. Ways of doing things, ways of talking, beliefs, values, power relations - in short - practices - emerge in the course of this mutual endeavour. (Eckert and McConnell-Ginet, 1992: 464)

This is a definition which foregrounds the shared aim of the group. Without having in common a perceived need to improve their English, the members

of the BizLang group would not come together in the first place. Secondly, the emphasis on the emergent nature of the norms which help define a community of practice is particularly apt given that a BizLang group has to start from 'scratch' in forging a cohesive working relationship and culture. True, there is already an established institutional culture that frames the development of the group, but its particular practices are, to a large extent, established by its members. I would include a group's trainer as well as its learners in the community of practice. After all, the former shares the latter's main aim, although, of course, the role designated to her or him in the achievement of that aim is rather different. The trainer is also usually a constant for the group's duration.

As well as seeing the group as a Community of Practice, it is also useful in terms of my research context and methodology to regard it as what Holliday (1999) would call a 'small culture'. In contrast to the 'large' cultures from which the learners come and by which they are defined through their nationalities, '[t]he dynamic aspect of small culture is central to its nature, having the capacity to exist, form and change as required' (Holliday, 1999: 248) . People may, by dint of their place of birth and other factors, belong to particular 'large' cultures. On the other hand, they are part of numerous small cultures - work, friendship group etc - which they can move between and shape. The small culture cuts across the large cultures of nationality and is emergent and negotiable in nature. This conceptualisation of culture makes the small culture's members creators of their own socio-cultural community. As such, culture can be regarded as a verb rather than a noun (Street, 1993), an idea which dovetails with my research aim of investigating the

degree to which HLP contributes to the emerging culture of the group (Research Question 2).

3.2.4 The general profile of the research participants

From the outset, BizLang sought to establish its own niche in the market by offering English language courses exclusively for business people. This is useful for the current investigative purposes because, as yet, the research community looking into language play phenomena has tended to focus on the immigrant. For such people, the motivation for learning the language is often integrative (Gardner and Lambert, 1972) as can be seen in the literature on play (e.g. Bell, 2005; Bongartz and Schneider, 2003; Cekaite and Aronsson, 2005; DaSilva Iddings and McCafferty, 2007; Pomerantz and Bell, 2007). To date, research has tended to ignore those learners with what Gardner and Lambert would call an instrumental motivation, such as business people, who need English for their international interactions and transactions. This is a puzzling omission given the fact that function-based approaches to language learning tend to view communication in transactional terms (see Section 2.8.2). It is also a significant omission considering that, in the case of English, the language is used so often and by so many in international meetings, conferences and telecommunications in the fields of commerce, politics, science and academia. Indeed, business people, politicians, scientists and academics frequently speak English together without a native speaker participating. It is claimed that only one in four users of English can now be classified as a native speaker (Crystal, 2003). Some assert (e.g. Jenkins, 2007: 4) that if we accept that language is shaped by its contexts of use (Bakhtin, 1981), then it follows that the

development of English is, in part, in the hands of its NNSs. The SLA community, therefore, needs to investigate those contexts, virtual and physical, where international communication through English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) takes place. In this regard, BizLang attracts clients from all over the world. Many of them come on courses because they work for multinationals whose company language is English. Others need to talk to suppliers, clients and subcontractors from across the world. As well as speaking the language on their business travels, more and more of them use it through the media of teleconferences, video-conferences and, of course, email. While my study focuses on the research participants using English in a context other than their professional one, it nonetheless provides some insight into interactions between speakers who inhabit that globalised milieu where ELF is the medium of communication.

Because of the nature of the courses on offer (see below), they are not deemed suitable for beginners in English. Those at an advanced level of proficiency tend to opt for BizLang's communication skills courses (which also attract native speakers). As a result, the vast majority of those who enrol on the open EfB courses fall into a category range from high to low intermediate (B+ to D- in BizLang terms). Even for those at the top end of this spectrum, the type of wordplay that indicates a native-like control of the language (see e.g. Bell, 2005) would prove challenging. For those at the bottom end, it is well-nigh impossible. It is these less proficient course participants who are the focus for this research as they can throw light on how learners play in and through the language without necessarily being able to exploit the structures and potential meanings that are open to the

advanced learner or the native speaker (see Research Question 1: How does humorous language play manifest itself among my research participants?). The ability ranges of the research participants, if measured in terms of the widely recognised standard of the European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR), would fall somewhere between the A2 Basic User who can understand and communicate information on familiar matters and the B1 Independent User who is able to express opinions and ideas on topics with which he or she feels at home.[14]

3.2.5 Situating BizLang's courses in terms of its pedagogical approach

It is important, given that this research is concerned with the ways in which learners play with language, to look at the resources made available to them in their classroom environment which might be used for this purpose. I am not primarily referring to the physical objects and equipment that can be found there (these are mentioned later in this chapter), but to the communicative opportunities that the classroom setting provides. These opportunities, to some extent, are determined by course content and the types of interactions and activities that are either permitted or encouraged within the four walls of the training room. They are inevitably and inextricably linked to the pedagogical approach that is taken on any given course. For this reason, the generalisable elements of this approach and their relevance to my research are discussed.

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[14] See p.24 of the Council of Europe's guidelines
http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/linguistic/source/framework_en.pdf (accessed 03.11.13)

Partly as a result of the fact that BizLang offers both language and communication skills courses, it sees the two as interlinked, and this is reflected in its teaching methodology and course content.[15] In this sense, BizLang's approach corresponds to a heterogeneous competence model where, according to Ellis (1985: 77) '..the user's knowledge of language rules is interlocked with his knowledge of when, where, and with whom to use them.' Indeed, the BizLang End of Course Report includes a grade for 'Communicative Competence' the definition of which seems to suggest that it corresponds closely to Hymes's (1971) concept of the same name.

The brevity of BizLang's courses has already been mentioned, and the fact that they aim to make a significant difference to their participants' language acquisition in a matter of days, a process that ordinarily can be measured in months and years, means that the institution's course content and pedagogical approach are largely driven by the pragmatic constraints of time. This, to some degree, makes it difficult to categorise BizLang's approach in theoretical terms. Indeed, the organisation seems to take pride in this fact:

> *We do not believe in rigid programmes, still less in trying to apply prescribed language or communication techniques.* [16]
>
> (BizLang's website, accessed 03.03.13)

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[15] The communication skills training on offer at BizLang has already been described and is of the type that Deborah Cameron discusses in Cameron, D. (2002). Globalization and the teaching of 'communication skills'. In Block, D. & Cameron, D. (Eds.), *Globalization and Language Teaching* pp. 67-82). London: Routledge. She sees such 'skills' teaching as part of a process of disseminating global norms which are actually based on an Anglo-Saxon model of good communication.

[16] From an academic viewpoint, such statements can be queried (what, for example, constitutes a 'language technique'?). However, the target audience is not an academic one and these declarations are noteworthy for the image which the organisation tries to project to the world.

Despite eschewing rigid programmes, BizLang courses reflect a pedagogical approach with its own viewpoint on language acquisition, however implicit this viewpoint may be. On the rare occasions the organisation has couched its pedagogy in theoretical terms (e.g. during its annual retraining programmes), it has sometimes made reference to David Kolb's Learning Cycle (1984). Kolb is an American educational psychologist whose ideas, it is interesting to note, seem to hold more sway in business circles than in the TEFL world (see, for example

www.businessballs.com/kolblearningstyles.htm, accessed 03.03.12), reflecting to some degree BizLang's own hybrid culture that lies somewhere between business training and language teaching.

Kolb's cycle does indeed capture some aspects of a BizLang course training programme:
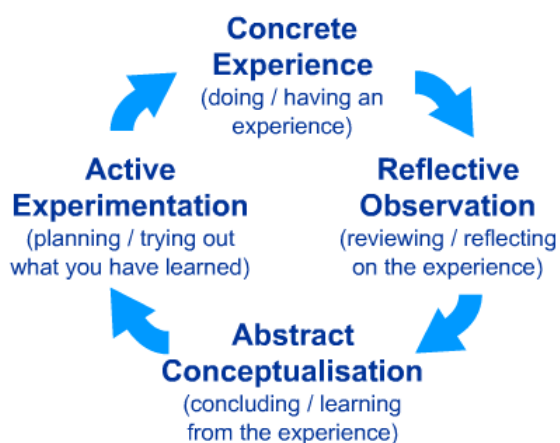
Figure 1 Kolb's Learning Cycle (taken from http://www.ldu.leeds.ac.uk/ldu/sddu_multimedia/kolb/static_version.php, accessed 04.08.13[17])

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[17] This diagram can be found in the Staff and Departmental Development Unit section of Leeds University's website. In fact, most of the websites where Kolb is referred to are connected in some way with training and development of staff.

Kolb believes that concrete experience is vital in the learning process. It is not surprising, therefore, that his own training programmes, e.g. Kolb, Rubin & Osland (1991), have role-play at their centre. In BizLang too, because the aim is to provide clients with the means to be more effective in their jobs within days, practising the types of situations that clients meet in English through role-play has always formed a central part of its courses, both in EfB and communications skills.[18] As its website makes clear, it sees this as the key factor that differentiates it from its competitors:

> _What makes BizLang different:_ _We adapt our courses to the needs of the people in front of us, rehearsing what they have to do in real life. We are experts in learning about people's working lives and transforming what we learn into training activities. We create scenarios based on real business issues and problems._
>
> (BizLang website, accessed 11.08.13)

Beyond the inevitable marketing language here, the notion of rehearsal is a significant one which will be returned to shortly.

Kolb's influence on the shape and content of BizLang's courses should not be exaggerated. For instance, he has a classification of learner types which can be plotted along two axes representing doers and watchers, and thinkers and feelers (Kolb et al., 1991: 58-64). These are at the heart of his learning

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[18] The terms 'role-play', 'rehearsal', 'enactment' and 'simulation' are all used more or less interchangeably within the company, perhaps reflecting a theoretical uncertainty about the nature of the activity.

model (Kolb, 1984; Kolb and Fry, 1975) yet do not seem to influence BizLang's approach either explicitly or implicitly.

As role-play is central to the approach, the teacher's first job is to ascertain the types of situations that the participants encounter in English. Thus a good slice of the first morning of the course is spent finding out the nature of their jobs and the dynamics and challenges of the particular situations they negotiate in the language. A large part of the success of the training programme relies on the ability of the trainer and learners to recreate such scenarios during the course of their stay. Unlike one-to-one courses, group courses, where the members may well come from a wide spectrum of fields and jobs, require role-plays to be created with which everyone can engage. These are often drawn from case studies and other course materials which lend themselves to telephone and meeting enactments.[19] Over the duration of a course, the group can expect to experience a number of different scenarios with a wide range of complexity and communicative functions e.g. exchanging information, renegotiating a contract, handling the fallout from a PR disaster and so on.

Role-play could be said to correspond to the 'concrete experience' stage of Kolb's learning cycle. In practice, the 'reflective observation' and 'abstract conceptualisation' stages tend to be conflated in the 'feedback' session following a role-play,[20] where the teacher and learners reflect on the

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[19] The case studies are fictionalised versions of business cases that have either been in the news or been supplied to the organisation by participants. Names and data are often changed for reasons of commercial sensitivity.

[20] Given the intensity of the course programme, learners rarely have time for the reflective phase of Kolb's cycle. In fact, BizLang sees a large part of the reflection period happening *after* the learner leaves the course.

performance of the latter in terms of their communicative effectiveness and the former provides language to enhance that effectiveness. This feedback often involves the playing back of a recording of the role-play (see below). Inevitably, it brings to light language issues (e.g. grammatical problems), more general communicative skills (e.g. the sequencing of information-giving) and performance factors in the large grey area between the two (e.g. the packaging of messages in a way which is appropriate to the situation). Subsequently, the learning outcomes from these role-plays may well be tested out in further role-plays with a similar or more challenging dynamic. This stage could be categorised as a conflation of the 'active experimentation' and 'concrete experience' stages of the Kolb cycle.

The predominance of role-play in the typical classroom schedule at BizLang is significant in terms of my research focus. In Vygotskyian terms (Vygotsky, 1978; 1986) it can be seen as a means to learn through play-as-rehearsal. It has already been noted (Section 2.5) that play-as-rehearsal and play-as-fun should be differentiated (Lantolf, 1997: 4-5). However, this does not mean that they do not come together at all. The fact that play-as-rehearsal is a prominent frame in many language classrooms and particularly the BizLang one makes the relationship between HLP and the frames of reference operative at any given moment a potentially fruitful area for research. Frameworks of interpretation (Goffman, 1974) are particularly rich at such moments where, in answer to the question 'what's going on here?', the participants could answer that they were participating in an English lesson or negotiating a contract. The extent to which they exploit the 'play' between

such frameworks is one of the investigative avenues explored in this thesis. Furthermore, feedback sessions allow the learners to revisit and relive role-plays which affords the opportunity to play upon previous play.

In some ways, the importance of role-play in the BizLang course suggests something akin to the content of a task-based syllabus (Long and Crookes, 1992; Skehan, 1998). However, in other ways, BizLang's course content has more in common with that of a structural syllabus. A typical teaching programme includes grammar 'slots' where the focus is put upon particular aspects of grammatical structure. Language drilling is also regarded as an important part of BizLang EfB courses.[21] Being able to 'cue' and drill particular language structures is valued as an essential skill among the teaching staff. The language that is drilled often arises from role-plays. The trainers are therefore expected to think on their feet when setting up and practising particular drills. This language is reinforced in the language laboratory which includes a large drilling element. This rather sets BizLang apart from other organisations in the sector where the language laboratory is either defunct or is designed primarily for student-directed self-study using pre-recorded materials. BizLang's approach in this regard puts one in mind of the audio-lingual method (Richards and Rodgers, 2001) which was heavily influenced by behaviourism and also grew, in part, out of Charles Fries' pattern drilling methods (Lado and Fries, 1943). What is interesting pedagogically is that, in contrast to the role-play exercise, pattern and substitution drilling tends to de-contextualise and objectivise the language. In

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[21] A British Council in 2012 noted the prominence of language drilling as a particular characteristic of BizLang's approach and further noted the organisation's use of a language laboratory for drilling purposes.

this sense, BizLang's methods would be regarded with suspicion by advocates of task-based learning who may view such practices as 'synthetic' (Long and Robinson, 1998; Wilkins, 1976).

This drilling practice links to my research interest in two ways. Firstly, language play, like drilling, often seems to have an objectivising and distancing effect with regard to the language that it uses. Despite the fact that targeted language is 'cued' in drills, it is largely de-contextualised by the very process of drilling it. It could be argued that this takes semantic meaning out of language and reduces it to its sounds and structures. This decoupling of semantic meaning and form echoes some of the ways in which children play with language as they acquire it (e.g. Cook, 2000: 14-17; Ely and McCabe, 1994; Inkelas, 2006; Kuczaj, 1983). It also might encourage learners who, in some ways share a child's fresh perspective on the TL (see the discussion of the parallels between the comic and the language learner in Section 2.6), to play with its sounds and forms. The second reason why drilling links to the focus of this study is that it involves repetition. As research among both children (see the previous references) and adults (e.g. Carter, 2004; Coates, 2007; Crystal, 1998; Tannen, 2007) shows, repetition is often a prominent feature of play.

The nature of interaction in the BizLang class can, like most language classes, be very different depending on the activity which is taking place at any one moment. The structure of talk in what Seedhouse (2004) would call 'fluency contexts' is very different from those in 'form-and-accuracy contexts'. Role-play along with things like general discussion would fall into the former category. Grammar, drilling, listening exercises and, to a degree, feedback

from role-play would constitute the latter. In terms of my research aims (see Research Question 4: With which types of classroom activities does play occur?), the prominence of play in particular phases of the class is of interest. Does it occur more often in less controlled phases of interaction? Does it occur in those moments where, ostensibly at least, the trainer has a tight rein on the management of talk?

A further area of interest with regard to HLP and the BizLang training room is a feature which it shares with most language classrooms: it is replete with language which is regarded as erroneous and is subject to repair. Repair carries a risk to face (Goffman, 1959) both for the interlocutor whose utterance is being repaired and for the person repairing it (usually the teacher). Research into play among NNSs in language classrooms suggests that error and repair can be sources for play (e.g. Cekaite and Aronsson, 2005) and this is another potentially rich seam for my investigation.

In sum, it is difficult to categorise BizLang in terms of one recognised pedagogical approach. Like most language teaching institutions, it draws, with varying degrees of conscious intent, on different frameworks and methodologies. However, there are elements of its English for Business course that, at least in combination, other practitioners in the TEFL world would find unusual: the prominence it gives to role-play, its eschewal of mainstream TEFL publications in favour of in-house classroom materials, its insistence on drilling, its long contact hours and, finally, its own pedagogical terminology that expresses a particular 'training room' environment. It is an environment which, as alluded to in my commentary, opens up various potentially interesting areas for investigation with regard to HLP.

3.2.6 The research setting: BizLang's equipment and training rooms

Unsurprisingly, the classroom equipment at BizLang reflects both the expectations of its particular market and the types of activities that take place in the training rooms. As role-play forms such an important part of the courses, each room is fitted with recording equipment. In each there is a digital video camera as well as the means to make audio recordings. There is also a telephone which can be used to record simulated inter-room calls. All recordings transfer directly onto a computer in every room. There are obvious logistical advantages for the researcher in having the classrooms 'wired up' in this way. Firstly, it means that the necessary equipment for capturing exchanges is already present in the research setting and does not represent an unnatural intrusion or distraction. Secondly, the learners soon become acclimatised to being recorded as part of their course, thus reducing the effects of 'the observer's paradox' (Labov, 1972a: 209).

3.2.7 The advantages of the research setting

The previous discussion in this chapter has explained the nature of the BizLang institution, its pedagogical approach and the clients it attracts on its EfB courses. In the course of this explanation, I have highlighted how the features of this setting are potentially beneficial to my research aims. The table below provides a summary of this discussion.

Figure 2 Advantages of My Research Setting

Research Setting	Research Advantages
Private language organisation	Neglected but important sector in SLA research. When the previous focus has been on educational institutions, it has tended to be schools or universities
The language classroom	Neglected as a socio-cultural entity in SLA research
A repair-rich environment	The role of HLP in repair and other treatments of error can be explored
The EfB course Six or fewer participants	Intimate, enclosed with no 'unofficial spaces' - the forms and opportunities for subversive play can be investigated
Short duration but long contact hours	Logistically convenient in terms of collecting data. Can trace development of play and its social and cultural impact within the group
Groups are multi-national and multi-cultural	Participants cannot rely on their L1s or common cultural reference points

	in order to play so must find other ways to do so
The course participants	
Strangers to each other	They need to establish relationships from scratch, so the role of HLP in building relations and developing an in-group culture can be traced
Low level of proficiency in English	Can investigate how their HLP manifests itself without recourse to wordplay which demands proficiency
Older learners	Under represented in terms of SLA research. The extent to which they employ play for subversive purposes is of interest
Instrumental learners	An important group in relation to the use of ELF in global communications
BizLang's pedagogical approach	
The centrality of role-play	How play-as-rehearsal and play-as-fun relate can be explored
The prominence given to drilling on	The extent to which this objectivises

the EfB course	the language and turns it into a potential plaything for learners can be investigated
The contrasting phases of interaction that the BizLang class provides	The types of activities which attract play and the effect it has on their structure of talk can be looked at
The classroom equipment	This facilitates the collection of recorded audio and video data. In addition, BizLang course participants soon acclimatise to being observed and recorded, thus minimising 'the observer's paradox'.

3.3 Methodology

3.3.1 My approach and its rationale

HLP, with its associated social functions of identity and relationship negotiation, is embedded in the push and pull of everyday interaction. The focus of this thesis lies in the manifestations and effects of such play in the classroom. It attempts to capture the actual experiences of learners and teachers (Rampton, 2006b: 3) as they negotiate the social and intellectual challenges of the second language learning environment. In the light of these considerations, one of the research's main concerns is to ensure a design that does not compromise or unduly interfere with the usual daily

occurrences to be found in that setting. It therefore eschews the option of setting up particular situations (e.g. Davies, 2003) or activities (e.g. Belz, 2002) as part of its research design.

In its attempt to capture the social universe created through moment-to-moment interactions and its exploration of the small scale in a search for generalisable truths, the research design draws on the tradition of ethnography, itself a rather broad term encompassing a wide range of methodological features (Hammersley, 1994: 1). However, many of the elements that Hammersley identifies as ethnographic in nature (1994: 1-2) can be found in the approach undertaken in this research:

- it concerns itself with the analysis of empirical data; this data is from the 'real world' context of a language classroom;

- the data is primarily gathered from observation and recording of research participants in the natural course of their learning programme;

- the focus is relatively small scale, involving a small number of classroom groups;

- the analysis of data involves the interpretation of the meanings and functions of a particular aspect of human behaviour i.e. language play, and is qualitative rather than quantitative in nature.

This approach, influenced by the ideas of Grounded Theory (Glaser and Strauss, 1967), is, among other things, characterised by a constant movement back and forth between the formulating of ideas and the collecting and analysing of data. Thus the whole research process is not, as the written

layout of this, or any other, research thesis might indicate, neatly staged and sequential in nature, but involves the continuous modification and alteration of each and every phase of the process throughout the investigation.

However, it should be pointed out that ethnographic approaches often involve the interviewing of participants in order to obtain their perspectives on events (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007: 110-14). For various compelling reasons, interviews with the learners are not carried out in this research, although other means were used to help triangulate my findings (see Section 3.3.5).

As well as the ethnographic tradition, I also draw, to a degree, upon Conversation Analysis. This approach grew out of Ethnomethodology (Garfinkel, 1967) which concerned itself with the organising principles by which people construct their social worlds. Conversational Analysis (CA) (e.g. Sacks et al., 1974) focuses on the structure of talk and how participants manage their interactions. One of its principles is that interaction is context-shaped and context-renewing (Seedhouse, 2004). In other words, talk is part of context and cannot be separated from it. In practical terms, CA looks at such aspects as turn-taking and topic management. This is of particular interest to my investigation given that within the language classroom, as mentioned previously, different activities are characterised by very different structures of talk. As HLP is usually something which, by its nature, steps outside the norm and is, thus, potentially disruptive of the usual flow of interaction (see Section 2.2), CA is a useful means for throwing light on HLP's effect on the structure of talk and how it impacts on social relations.

3.3.2 My position as a researcher

There is a potential risk that needs to be acknowledged about the context for this research. The BizLang training room is an environment of which I have been a part for about two decades. The wider institutional culture that surrounds it and influences so much of what happens within it is one with which I have been imbued for most of my teaching career. Especially given that ethnography grew from the impulse to understand and inform our compatriots about other, exotic societies (Hammersley, 1994), how can I achieve the requisite researcher's distance that will allow me to look at it afresh? As van Lier (1988: 5) points out, in the usual whirl of the classroom routine '..as learners, but especially as teachers, we are too involved in the process to do much memorisable noticing apart from the usual anecdotes.'

To answer this question of distance, it first has to be acknowledged that there is always a tension in all such investigations between the need, on the one hand, to be part of the research context in order to understand its social mores and blend in with its culture and, on the other, to retain a certain distance so that a degree of objectivity is possible. Furthermore, as Rampton (2007: 591-2) points out, there are distinct advantages to knowing the context well: it reduces the danger of stereotyping that an outsider's perspective might encourage; it means that time is saved in exploring the rudiments of the social milieu under scrutiny. In addition, researching is itself a distancing process. For example, the acts of watching and listening to recordings and transcribing conversation (see below) provide a different perspective on what is happening at any given moment. They are what van Lier (1988: 37) describes as 'estrangement devices.' Further measures for

ensuring that the research analysis and findings pertain to a truth about the phenomena being investigated are set out in the course of this discussion.

The developmental history of this particular research needs to be mentioned here as my role actually changed in the course of it. With my pilot study (see below), I simply sat in on and observed a group undertaking a simulated negotiation for about an hour. With the next observation session which I undertook, I again assumed the role of observer for one morning (about four hours) of another group's course which encompassed a number of learning activities. In neither my pilot project nor the second observation did I know the participants prior to sitting in on them. With the third observation which I undertook (again, a morning's observation of a group), I decided that it would be better to have an active role within the class. The BizLang training context is a particularly intimate one where there are never more than seven people in the classroom at any one time (Section 3.2.3). Despite the fact that learners on a BizLang course are used to being observed (Section 3.2.6), I felt that the natural flow of events would be least disrupted and the effects of the observer's paradox minimised if I had a designated role within the teaching and learning activities taking place and I was already known to the participants. So, I sat in on a group I had previously taught. Furthermore, I took on the role of 'stooge'. This is a term used by both trainers and course participants to refer to another member of staff who can take part in a role-play meeting or telephone call to provide the group with the challenge of interacting with someone with native-speaker proficiency. The stooge often helps the trainer in subsequently providing supplementary feedback to the group on their performances during role-play. Finally, in the case study which

lies at the heart of my data analysis, I was simultaneously the teacher and researcher for the three days of the group's existence.

So, in the competing needs to be part of the community which I was researching and, at the same time, to retain a distance from it, I seemingly surrendered, by stages, the need for distance in favour of integration. For example, taking an active part in the teaching meant that I was, for the most part, unable to take notes to provide supplementary insights into the recorded data. However, I would argue that the most important distancing process in the investigation lay in the analysis of the data which I had collected. Furthermore, being an integral part of the social interactions I witnessed gave me a privileged insight into their significance and brought back to me salient aspects of the interactions when I replayed them soon after.[22]

3.3.3 De-limiting the context

In acknowledging the importance of context in shaping the actions and utterances of human beings, the researcher is left with a problem: that of attempting to de-limit the seemingly infinite number of contextual factors that could be taken into account, even in the restricted environment of the classroom. In aiming to do this, a useful starting point is to acknowledge the centrality of talk to my research concerns. Indeed, talk is seen here as context-shaping, transforming the setting and the social relations within it (Bauman and Briggs, 1990: 68). From such a viewpoint, context becomes a fluid concept, something which it is within the powers of the human agents

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[22] I usually played back the recordings the day after making them and, in the case study, I recorded the material in the first half of the week and played it back in the second half, taking notes during playback while the interactions were still fresh in my memory.

present to shape and change. Furthermore, the verbal and non-verbal actions which take place are highly complex and interrelated. Attempting to separate them out as component parts may of itself distort them. However, some form of selection must take place to make the data manageable. In doing so, a simple fact should firstly be acknowledged which sometimes goes unmentioned in social research: investigators are themselves experienced social actors. As such, their noticing of certain phenomena in the stream of experience is itself significant. In investigating something like HLP in everyday interactions, the analyst necessarily has to be selective in deciding what is noteworthy. Even when asking participants for their own perspectives on recorded interactions, it is the analyst who, for practical purposes, usually pre-selects those exchanges which are of significance. This is especially true in the field of HLP where instances of such play may not occur for long stretches of natural interaction. As Holmes (2000: 163) points out in explaining the research methodology she employs in her own research:

> The analyst's identification of instances of humour is a crucial component in the analytical process [...] Instances of humour in this analysis are utterances which are identified by the analyst, on the basis of paralinguistic, prosodic and discoursal clues.

Of course, language is both the medium and subject matter of instruction in the classroom and the main means for accomplishing play, even for those learners who have little proficiency in the TL. One means of identifying relevant data in this investigation is to look for the various surface features of language which seem to occur during language play episodes. Goffman

(1974: 42) observes that there is a great deal of repetitiveness in a play frame; Coates (2007: 43) identifies syntactic repetition while Carter (2004: 89-112) notes the use of neologisms and tropes more commonly associated with literary texts. Research in the field of SLA echoes some of the findings from investigations into NS interactions. Broner and Tarone (2001: 371) note unusual lexical choices such as neologisms while other researchers (Bell, 2005; Belz and Reinhardt, 2004) demonstrate how proficient L2 speakers are able to playfully exploit the forms of the language.

However, looking for such surface features would necessarily preclude those learners (probably the majority) who lack the expertise for a native-like exploitation of forms, yet are nevertheless able to play in the TL. Furthermore, a more fundamental issue arises when researching social interactions. As Jones (2007: 341) puts it:

> Words do not produce or interpret themselves; people, engaged over some matter, are responsible for that, and, under certain circumstances, answerable too.

In other words, looking at the surface forms of language is not enough. Play can only be so classified if the participants in it regard it as such. The features of utterances do not alone constitute evidence of anything. It could be argued that this is especially true when investigating HLP. Not only does the deniability of much playful language use allow something to be said but not said (North, 2007: 553), but 'humour often lies in the gap between what is said and what is meant' (Coates, 2007: 32). People derive pleasure from

understanding each other without having to articulate everything being communicated.

This leaves a problem. It means that an 'etic' classification of linguistic features i.e. one based on criteria formulated outside the group, is, on its own, inadequate. However, an 'emic' perspective (Cook, 2000: 67) - one formulated by the participants themselves - on which episodes constitute play was, in my research context, practically impossible, given the time constraints which course participants are under and other obstacles (see Section 3.3.5 for a discussion of why learners were not interviewed). However, one means of identifying whether the participants regarded particular exchanges as playful was by pinpointing moments of laughter. Indeed, unsurprisingly, this is a method used by a number of researchers in this area to find significant episodes of play, both among NSs (e.g. Carter, 2006) and NNSs (Bell, 2005: 198; Cekaite and Aronsson, 2005: 174). Although laughter is a useful pointer to play, it is, of course, by no means foolproof as a detection device as it may, for example, merely signal support or something less benign such as embarrassment or even anger.

Fortunately, it has already been noted (Section 2.4) that play, being a stepping away from the norm, is usually carefully signalled by its instigator through contextualisation cues (Goffman, 1974: 45). Marked or contrasting prosody can be good indicators of such episodes (Bell, 2005: 199; Broner and Tarone, 2001: 363; Pomerantz and Bell, 2007: 563) as can smiling (Bell, 2007a: 39). An expansive and exaggerated body language may also indicate that a play frame is operative (DaSilva Iddings and McCafferty, 2007: 42). Indeed, intuition suggests that the latter would be a very useful resource for

learners needing means other than language to signal play. A further indication of play is that it can affect the structure of talk, disrupting the normative features of a particular type of classroom activity. For instance, the learner may 'topicalise' (van Lier, 1988: 152) - assume control of the topic of communication - at a moment where, ordinarily, he or she would not have the right to do so. Another aspect which facilitates the identification of play is the fact that it has a tendency to occur in clusters (Carter, 1999: 199-200; Holmes, 2007: 530; Norrick, 1993: 42). This seems to arise from an impulse to join in the 'fun' and as a signal of camaraderie. Furthermore, Goffman (1974: 43) posits that, in humans as in animals, the openings and closings of play frames are usually cued clearly in order to avoid misunderstandings. The research cited above indicates the importance of contextualisation cues in signalling when people are entering and then participating in a play frame. Indeed, what research there has been into play in a second language indicates that participants can identify and appreciate such cues, even when the accompanying humour is either not, or only partially, understood (Bell, 2007b: 377).

In sum, although the researcher has to be wary of risks in identifying play - contextualisation cues do not necessarily carry the same meanings across cultures (Gumperz, 1982) and body language especially is open to a great degree of interpretation (Adolphs and Carter, 2007: 136) - there are strong indicators which can help him or her in the task. Play episodes are usually cued by the play instigator. Their initiation and development can be recognised also through the reactions of the others present and evidence of changes in the structure of talk. In addition, play tends to cluster. It is,

perhaps, less easy to identify the ending of a play episode, precisely because of the clustering that can take place. However, signals, verbal or otherwise, that indicate a return to the primary activity can usually be discerned. Also the structure of talk may well return to the typical patterns of interaction that were operative before play disrupted them. In other words, 'normal service' can be seen to be resumed.

Another criterion for selecting particular episodes for analysis needs to be mentioned. At the outset of this thesis, I explained how my interest in investigating HLP among my language learners was triggered in part by noticing their laughter inducing in-group references. The event or exchange from which particular references grow need not necessarily be particularly playful in its origin. Therefore, in tracing the development of incremental play, some exchanges only gain significance with hindsight. Therefore, the selection process is, in part, a retrospective one. In this regard, it should be mentioned that, in the investigative process, certain patterns begin to emerge such that an exchange can become more significant in the light of previous exchanges noted in other groups and at other times.

Group laughter and clustered stretches of joint banter and fun with the language indicate a successful play frame. However, the current research also finds interest in those moments where an attempt at humour fails. In exploring how learners are able to have fun with language despite a lack of common socio-cultural reference points and an incomplete control of the language, it is instructive to investigate failures as well as successes (Bell, 2007b). Surface features to pinpoint such failures are not always easy to find. However, discordances, asymmetries and arrhythmic exchanges often

signal communicative breakdowns of this sort. It has to be acknowledged, however, that by their nature, some failures in humorous play may well go unnoticed.

Given the difficulties set out above in identifying pertinent segments of data, measures are needed to validate the process of pinpointing, classifying and analysing relevant material for this research. These will be set out later in this chapter. Firstly, the means of collecting data will be explained.

3.3.4 The practicalities of data collection

It is unsurprising that most researchers in this field use electronic means of recording their interactions (e.g. Bell, 2005; Bongartz and Schneider, 2003; Broner and Tarone, 2001; Cekaite and Aronsson, 2005; Sullivan, 2000). In the current research, given the potential importance of gestures and smiles (see above), video is used to capture relevant interactions (see the end of the next section for details). The one exception to this is my pilot study which is audio recorded but, nonetheless, contains material pertinent to the research. Indeed, there was one particularly important body gesture in that recorded meeting (see EPISODE 8 in Section 4.7) which brought home the importance of using video and convinced me to switch from audio-only to video recording.

 As already discussed (Section 3.2.6), the BizLang classroom provides a logistically and technologically convenient environment for obtaining recordings of the interactions within it. Video and audio equipment is already installed in the training rooms. In addition, the most significant interactions are easy to capture as the teacher and students sit at one table.

Despite the advantageous environment for collecting data, this does not, of itself, eradicate the ever-present problem of the observer's paradox – the fact that a researcher, by their very presence influences the behaviour of others. However, even in this regard, the BizLang classroom offers advantages. Firstly, recording learners does not impinge significantly on the classroom routine; secondly, the context is one in which they expect to be scrutinised and recorded and indeed they soon get used to it, regardless of whether they are being researched or not. Typically, the BizLang group is observed by people in addition to their trainer and other group members. On the very first day of the course, a member of the teaching team will come and sit in on each class on the course to ascertain whether the group configuration is optimal. The learners are also frequently exposed to 'a stooge' (Section 3.3.2) The group's trainer will also take notes when, for example, watching a simulated meeting, the notes forming the basis for the subsequent feedback session. Furthermore, the group is recorded on a daily basis when taking part in role-plays such as meetings or telephone calls.

Not only do the learners become used to being observed and assessed in the normal course of events, but the context also allows the investigator a certain flexibility of role that blurs the already unclear divide between participant and non-participant researcher (Atkinson and Hammersley, 1998). As previously mentioned, to some of the research participants, I am solely a researcher. To others, I am their previous or present 'trainer'. To others still, I am also their 'stooge'. This allows a particular perspective on any role-play and, again, provides a legitimate motive, in addition to research, for my presence there. All the above allow the classroom to be

investigated in its most natural state, although, of course, the very act of investigating a particular context does, in however small a way, change that context.

3.3.5 Means of verifying significant play episodes

Understanding human behaviour always involves interpretation and is thus necessarily subjective. One means of counteracting the inherent dangers of over-interpreting the collected data is through investigator triangulation (Janesick, 1998: 46). With this in mind, I recruited one of my BizLang colleagues, Harriet, at the outset of the research.[23] At the beginning of the project, given the time-consuming nature of looking at raw material, the company allocated her two days a year to the project, although its overriding commercial needs inevitably meant that this was never more than a nominal time allocation. She was informed about the general nature of the investigation and looked at the research data, playing a valuable part in providing inter-rater reliability in the identification of significant episodes of play and bringing her own interpretations to those events. With regard to the recordings of Group A and Group C (see next section), both of whom she also trained, only episodes which both she and I regarded as potentially significant form part of the analysis.[24] Her involvement in the project was complicated by the fact that she left the organisation before I did my final recordings of the pair of learners. In this case, as with the recording of Group B, I sent her pre-selected data which she agreed to look at and pass comment on in her limited free time. Over the period of the research, my

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[23] All names have been anonymised, including those of BizLang employees - see Section 3.3.9
[24] There is an exception to this - EPISODE 20 (see Section 5.3.6) contains an allusion which Harriet was unaware of but which I decided was worthy of inclusion.

communication with Harriet took the form of ad hoc face-to-face meetings, email correspondence and two days when we were allocated time together which was dedicated solely to the project.

In addition to this, on two occasions, BizLang arranged for a number of my other teaching and non-teaching colleagues to spend a morning looking at pre-selected extracts of the collected data in order to provide their perspectives on the exchanges they saw and heard. Time constraints meant that recorded extracts had to be pre-selected for these sessions rather than presenting the group with 'raw' data. The first of these took place on the 26th September 2008 after my initial recordings had been made. On that occasion, six of my colleagues viewed my data. The second took place on the 5th January 2012 and twelve of my colleagues took part. The subsequent group discussions were recorded. A full transcription of the 2008 discussion can be found in Appendix 2, and of the 2012 discussion in Appendix 3. Elements from these have been incorporated into my research findings. Given that there is no absolute truth in any investigative pursuit, especially one involving the inter-subjective world of human relations and interactions, incorporating different perspectives into the findings helps towards what van Lier (1988: 46) calls 'truth-as-agreement'.

Informal interviews with the teachers of the target groups assisted in providing insights into aspects of group dynamics and its emergent culture. These occurred during breaks immediately after the recordings. When, on

subsequently viewing the data, I had further questions, I asked the teachers when the opportunity arose.

In terms of the comments I received from my BizLang colleagues, it is worth mentioning that, for the most part, they were only aware of my research topic in the broadest of terms, that is, they knew I was investigating humorous play in the classroom. On the other hand, Harriet was given a greater insight into my developing ideas and was, for example, aware of the importance of the concept of framing to my research. So, in one sense, she could provide a fuller perspective on particular exchanges. On the other hand, there was an advantage in hearing comments from other colleagues whose insights were not coloured by my developing research ideas.

Despite the importance of the learner participants' perspectives, after some thought, it was decided not to interview them about the data. The reasons for this are primarily practical. Firstly, asking learners to view and comment on recordings of themselves while on course would be a time-consuming business. Given the tight training schedule, making the space for such interviews is well-nigh impossible. Secondly, even if it were possible, asking learners to provide metalinguistic and psychological insights in English about the interactions would be beyond the capabilities of those at the lower range of language competency. The option of bringing in interpreters would also have been very difficult in terms of logistics and budget, bearing in mind that the target groups were made up of people with different first languages. In addition, it could be argued that no-one is necessarily a privileged commentator on their own behaviour, and that speaker intention, even with the help of interviews, is ultimately elusive. In the end, the validity of the

interpretations found herein reside with the readers of this thesis, who must decide if they ring true and resonate with their own experiences (Tannen, 2005: 49-50)

The very act of transcribing the data, although itself an inherently selective process, allows for outside verification and adds to the validity of the data, and thus of the research as a whole (Rampton, 2006b: 395). It was decided to transcribe those episodes which I and, where possible, my colleague identified as significant in terms of HLP.

3.3.6 Transcription conventions

In establishing the transcription conventions (see Appendix 1), my objective was to make the transcripts reader-friendly, including only those features which were salient in capturing the playful dynamic in the interactions. I do not for instance, attempt to encapsulate the participants' wide range of pronunciations of English words, especially as these had no bearing on the play which took place. In view of the fact that laughter is an important feature in my selected episodes, after some thought, I decided to follow Du Bois et al (1993) in using '@' to represent it. The advantages of using this symbol is that, unlike conventions such as '((laughter))', it allows a representation of the 'syllables' and duration of laughter, showing, for example, where it overlaps with talk. Furthermore, 'a laughing voice', often a cue for play, can easily be represented by '<@ text>'. Although I have tried to be as accurate and impartial as possible in transcribing episodes, I would agree with Cook (1995: 46) that the process is inevitably subjective, especially with regard to paralinguistic features of interaction:

We cannot avoid this by retreating into some psuedo-scientific neo-behaviourist pretence that the transcriber should represent only an objectively verifiable physical phenomenon.

A total of 67 audio and video recorded episodes of interaction feature in the data. Of these, two are unfortunately no longer accessible as the CD-ROM on which they were recorded became corrupted (EPISODES 18 and 21). The other selected clips can be found on the accompanying CD-ROM. For ease of reference, the numbering of episodes on the disc corresponds to the numbers used in the analysis itself. Furthermore, subtitles have been added as the learners' utterances are not always easy to understand.

3.3.7 Relevant information on the specific research participants

As previously mentioned, the main focus of this research is on those learners at the lower end of the proficiency spectrum in order to investigate how they play in the language despite lacking mastery of it. Furthermore, a good nationality mix is important so as to ensure that shared cultural norms among a particular class of learners are minimal. These were the main criteria in deciding which open course English for Business learners to observe. The other reasons why I recorded those participants that I did were dictated by issues beyond the study's concerns and were primarily to do with logistical factors such as my own and other people's availability. The time gap between my recordings of the first three groups and the fourth was primarily due to the fact that I had to suspend my research due to illness.

The details of the research participants, whose names have all been changed for the purposes of this thesis, are set out below in the chronological order in which they were recorded:

- Group A consisted of four learners, audio recorded at the beginning of the research in February 2008. They were classified as D/E in BizLang terms, putting them towards the bottom end of the low-intermediate scale. They were recorded on the final afternoon of their five-day course by Harriet. The group, the details of whose jobs and companies I have removed for reasons set out in the 'Ethical considerations' section, consisted of:
  - Dieter, a German
  - Koji, a Japanese
  - Antoine, a Frenchman
  - Mario, an Italian
- Group B was made up of five learners, video recorded in September 2008. They too were classified as D/E and were recorded on the morning of their ninth day of a ten-day course. They were taught by Ray, an experienced BizLang colleague. The group consisted of:
  - Thomas, a German technical manager in a chemical company
  - Viktor, a Ukrainian regional manager for an agro-sciences company
  - Takeshi, a Japanese import manager for a pharmaceutical company
  - Michele, an Italian trainee lawyer
  - Andrei, a Russian biologist in an agro-sciences company.

- Group C had three members, video recorded in November 2009 on the final morning of a one-week course. They were deemed to be D level which makes them a shade more proficient than the previous two groups. They had been taught for the first three days by me and then by Harriet. The members were:
  - Joseph, a French/Senegalese test engineer for an engineering company
  - Sandro, an Italian manager for a family firm with various commercial interests
  - Bilel, a Tunisian project manager for an engineering company
- Group D consisted of two learners, video recorded in April 2012 on the second and third days of their three-day 'group' course. I taught the pair at the same time as recording them. They were deemed to be at C/D level. They were:
  - Juan, a Spanish Business Intelligence Unit manager for an IT and consultancy firm
  - Marek, a Czech CEO for an international construction company

My recordings of the last of these groups (Juan and Marek) form the basis of the case study which features in Chapters 6 to 8. Apart from the fact that they satisfied the criteria I set out at the beginning of this section, this pair was chosen for primarily logistical reasons. As I explain in Section 3.3.2, I decided in the course of the research that my most effective role as researcher was to take on an increasingly active role within the context I was investigating. Once I had determined to record a group over a full two days of

training, I looked for the opportunity to select a group that I was scheduled to teach. Juan and Marek happened to provide just such an opportunity.

None of the participants had met before their arrival at BizLang, despite the fact that Viktor and Andrei worked for the same company, as did Joseph and Bilel. This is not unusual given that many course participants work for big multi-national companies. It is noteworthy here that all the learners (although not all the teachers) are male. This did not form part of the original research design but was the result of happenchance. As alluded to later in this chapter and discussed at more length in its conclusion, this is obviously a factor in deciding upon the generalisability of my findings.

The recordings of the first three groups amount to about eight hours of classroom time. These were used primarily to identify discernible patterns of play behaviour. The recordings of the pair of learners amount to about sixteen hours of classroom time, encompassing all the training that took place on the second and third days of their course. This data was used not only to find commonalities with that of previous recordings, but also to trace the incremental nature of any playful episodes and the role such play had in developing the participants' shared reference points, and their relationship with their trainer and each other (see Chapter 7). The pair of learners form the main focus of the thesis. The total recorded data in the research amounted to about twenty-four hours of interactions.

I also talked to the trainers of Groups A, B and C - Harriet and Ray who provided me with pertinent information about the groups. In addition, as mentioned previously, Harriet assisted me with some of my analysis.

As mentioned in Section 3.3.5, I showed pre-selected snippets of my data to BizLang colleagues on two different occasions in order to garner their reactions. I followed the same procedure in both cases: clips were played to sub-groups who then reported back in a plenary discussion. These plenary discussions were recorded and pertinent elements of them appear in my data analysis where appropriate. Transcripts of the full discussions appear in Appendices 1 and 2.

The first plenary discussion took place on the 26th September 2008 and involved Ruby, Rosie, Josh, Robert, Toby and Harriet. They looked at and talked about clips from the recordings of Groups A and B. The second discussion took place on the 5th January 2012 and involved twelve colleagues. Only five of these contributed to the main discussion, primarily because the sub-groups chose a spokesperson for the plenary session. The contributors were Kate, Geraint, Camilla, Mick and Mark. They discussed clips from Groups A, B and C.

3.3.8 The generalisability of the research findings

The ethnographic dimension to my approach, by its nature, acknowledges the uniqueness of the context of its investigation. Even the seemingly restricted setting of the language classroom differs widely from institution to institution, country to country, teacher to teacher and even week to week. Classrooms differ greatly in terms of their physical layout, their size, the equipment they have, the conduct they sanction, what is taught and how it is taught. Indeed, every context is unique and every utterance contingent on its

context. Actions (verbal and otherwise) in every classroom are infused with cultural meaning.

So, how, if at all, can the findings from the unique context of this research have any worth beyond the four walls of the investigation itself?

In order to answer this question, it has to be acknowledged that any attempt to generalise from the particular must be circumspect in nature. However, the fact that contexts are unique does not mean that we are unable to learn from them. After all, this is the very process we undertake in learning to adapt to our world as we grow up. It is also the process we necessarily go through in adulthood whenever we move to a new environment, be that another job or another country. In fact, this particular research seems to have an advantage in this regard. Despite the fact that the wider institutional culture of BizLang is undoubtedly well established, that of the particular group in the particular class is not, and needs to be worked at and developed by the participants within it. This is the responsibility of the learners as well as their teacher and such a context allows the researcher an insight into that process. This laying down of cultural roots, especially given the multi-national and multi-lingual makeup of the groups, should give an insight into the potential role of language play in the processes of establishing common cultural reference points. Furthermore, I would agree with Eckert's observation about the light that particular individuals can throw on the communities of which they are a part:

> Linguists get nervous about studying individuals, but I would say that the individual is key to much that we need to learn, but only inasmuch

as individual practice is seen in its role in community of practice (Eckert, 2005)

Even so, sensitivity needs to be shown to the particularities of the investigative context which militate against drawing conclusions about the universal applicability of my findings. For instance, all the learner participants are male. Two of the groups, however, had a female teacher, so not all the interactions are male-to-male exchanges. Nevertheless, there is certainly a gender imbalance which is significant given that there are some generalisable characteristics of communicative style which tend to differentiate the talk of women and men (e.g. Coates, 1986; Fasold, 1990: 89-118; Holmes, 2001: 150-174; Tannen, 1991) and some of these differences can also apply to HLP (e.g. Coates, 2007). However, recording and analysing a mixed group of learners or an all-female one would have necessarily added another dimension to the research which I believe already has a significant number of factors to address. Nevertheless, the question of gender and play is one which can constitute a useful avenue for follow-up research to this study.

The question of generalisability is explored further when discussing the significance of my findings in Chapter 9.

3.3.9 Ethical considerations

Care has been taken to ensure that ethical principles are upheld. Research participants received information about the investigation at least a day before the recordings and they were told both orally and in writing that they were free to decline to take part. None did. With the exception of the pilot study for

which verbal assent was obtained from all those who took part, all research participants signed a consent form indicating their willingness to take part in the research. See Appendix 4 for the course participants' form and Appendix 5 for the form signed by BizLang's staff. No recordings were obtained without their knowledge. All participants have been anonymised by referring to them with names other than their own. Given that only oral permission was obtained for the pilot study, all personal information such as jobs and companies which might conceivably identify the participants in that group has been removed.

Any of the research participants who wish to know about the purpose and details of the research afterwards will be debriefed accordingly. This research design has been approved by the Open University Human Participants and Materials Ethics Committee (ref: HPMEC/2008/#463 - see Appendix 6). Minor alterations recommended by the committee were implemented and approval confirmed by email on the 24th July 2008.

3.4 Conclusion

The focus of this investigation is the world of social interaction. Its perspective is one where 'reality' is not 'out there' but something which is experienced and created by social actors. The social reality of a given moment encompasses as many perspectives, motivations and pre-conceptions as there are participants in it. Thus, the actions of others (verbal or otherwise) are open to a multitude of interpretations. As Hammersley and Atkinson (2007: 236) put it:

The very assumption that there is some single, available world in which we all live is rejected in favour of the idea that there are multiple realities.

However, this does not mean that any one interpretation of events is as valid as any other. A researcher's explanation must be credible. In order to be so, it needs to be able to identify patterns and regularities in human actions and, through a process of inter-subjective validation, come to a truth about it. This inter-subjective validation is provided by a colleague who assisted me in analysing the data and other colleagues who provided their own insights into pre-selected episodes from the data.

As set out above, the raw data was looked at to identify play through features such as laughter and contextualisation cues. Once identified, significant exchanges were transcribed and then analysed by looking at features such as repetition and disruptions in the structure of talk. Given the incremental nature of play (Section 2.5.3.2) and the focus on the development of an in-group culture, evocations of previous play were also identified.

Although there is an inherent recognition in this research design of the uniqueness of every particular context investigated, the aforementioned patterns and regularities that are discernible across different classroom groups and different moments can give an insight into generalisable processes which demonstrate how an in-group culture is established. It can also show the role of HLP in such processes.

Chapters 4,5,6,7 and 8 constitute the data analysis element of this thesis. Discernible patterns of HLP together with its component characteristics and

its functions are identified. Chapters 4 and 5 are dedicated to analysing data from the first three recorded groups. Chapter 4 looks at a resource whose exploitation emerges as a prominent feature of play: the frame. Chapter 5 explores another which has close links with the notion of frame - recontextualisation. The three chapters that follow on from these look at the manifestations and development of HLP amongst a pair of learners and their trainer over a couple of days in the classroom, tracing the role of HLP in an emergent in-group culture as well as looking at its relationship with the various learning activities which take place during the period of the recording.

4 Playing with the classroom's available frames

4.1 Introduction

The concept of the frame (Bateson, 1972; Goffman, 1974) is central to an understanding of play. It has previously been noted (Section 3.3.3) that play frames are signalled by animals and humans when wanting to play, allowing them and others to do so within the frame that the instigator creates. Another type of frame is the role-play which often overlaps with play-as-fun: it is no accident that the compound noun 'role-play' has the word 'play' as one of its constituent parts. When young mammals frolic together, we can see that their activities incorporate both make-believe and fun as they create simple scenarios in which they take on the roles of hunter, prey or rival. The training element to such activities is clear as the participants hone their skills for the challenges of their adult lives (Cook, 2000: 106-7).[25] Make-believe and fun are also evident in much of the play activity of children as they act out hypothetical scenarios which, it could be argued, help to socialise them and prepare them for the challenges of later life.

One of the prominent features of my data is that the research participants actively bring together role-play and play-as-fun in the classroom. Indeed, such a setting presents particular opportunities to do this as teachers often set up play-as-rehearsal scenarios to allow learners to practise particular communicative functions in the TL. The analysis explores the frame-rich

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[25] Cook makes a distinction between play for 'training' which functions to promote particular skills, and play for 'education' which fulfils a more general preparation for the world by increasing the player's general flexibility.

environment that the language classroom offers through these play-as-rehearsal scenarios. It shows how, despite the risks and pitfalls that role-plays represent for the learners, they actively use them as a means of having fun in the TL, blending the frames available to them for their own social ends. In the course of the analysis, themes which run through the thesis begin to emerge, including the importance of comparisons and contrasts in generating humour.

This chapter begins with an exploration of the concept of frame in theoretical and general terms. It then analyses how the research participants exploit the frames available to them in the classroom. The data analysis itself is structured into sub-sections looking at the various social functions that are fulfilled by the learners' playful exploitation of frames.

4.2 Goffman's frame

As mentioned in Section 2.2, Goffman (1974: 8) sees the frame as a means by which we interpret what is happening around us. This is particularly important in the language classroom environment where what is going on could be either 'simulated' or 'real', although the division between the two is not always as neat as it first appears. Goffman's concept of the frame comes from Gregory Bateson's (1972) study of the play behaviour of animals which shows that play is patterned on 'serious' activities such as hunting. In order to play, animals need to signal that they are not, in fact, engaging in the activities that their play mimics, otherwise the consequences could be serious for them or their fellow participants. The frame then is interactional and 'local' in nature. It is operative when the participants 'agree' that it is so: if

one participant does not 'play the game', there is no play. The data gathered in this research shows that, like other animals, human beings play even during the serious business of language learning. Before investigating how they do this, it is worth exploring the nature of the language classroom and the potential for play that such an environment affords.

4.2.1 Frames in the adult language learning classroom

It is hardly surprising that many experts in the field of SLA see the role-play as an important teaching tool, from Vygotsky's disciples such as Lantolf (e.g. 1997; 2000) to the advocates of task-based learning (e.g. Long and Crookes, 1992; Skehan, 1998). As already noted (Chapter 3), the staff of BizLang, whose training rooms form the setting for the present research, regard role-play as central to the organisation's pedagogical approach: 'the best way to learn is to do' is as near as it comes to a mantra. The context for the present study therefore provides the learners with many play-as-rehearsal scenarios.

In Goffman's terms, a role-play set up in the language classroom, whether a full-blooded negotiation or a fleetingly created hypothetical situation, is a 'keyed' activity (Goffman, 1974: 40-82), that is, the actions that typically refer to one activity are actually referring to another. As young mammals' play is already meaningful in terms of a primary framework such as fighting (Section 2.2), so the language learning opportunity is also recognisable as something else (the negotiation of a contract, for instance). Goffman categorises such role-plays as 'a kind of utilitarian make-believe' (1974: 59). In such a situation, the context is multi-layered. It contains a 'lamination of frames'

(Goffman, 1974: 82) where the outer frame is the English lesson and the inner layer is the simulated exchange or exchanges (Appel, 2007: 282). Of course, depending on which of these frames the participants understand themselves to be in at any one moment, the roles that they take up with each other will vary. For instance, the teacher – learner relationship will operate at the outer layer (what Goffman calls the 'rim') of the classroom context while, for example, that of customer – supplier will pertain in the inner layer of the simulation. It could be argued that there is a framework even beyond that of the teacher-learner in the BizLang language class: that of the client as embodied by the learner, and the provider as represented by the teacher (or 'trainer').[26] It is clear that the dynamic between participants is different in each frame. Goffman uses the term 'footing' to help explain this, something he describes as:

> the alignment we take up to ourselves and others present as
> expressed in the way we manage the production and reception of an
> utterance. A change in our footing is another way of talking about a
> change in our frame of events' (Goffman, 1981: 128)

The notion of footing then carries within it the potential for the speaker to shift and blend frames for their own social and communicative ends.

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[26] I say 'embodied by the learner' as usually the learner's company rather than the individual learner pays for the course. Occasionally, there are individuals who pay for their own course although none of the participants in the research cohort fall into this category.

4.2.2 The challenges that classroom frameworks present to learners

In the classroom, it is teachers who have the responsibility for setting up play-as-rehearsal frames. However, attempting to create a play-as-fun frame is another matter as it represents an unofficial stepping out of the norm. When animals play, they usually signal the play frame by various means; for example, a dog will wag its tail, a cat will withdraw its claws. In contrast, humans often use conversational cues such as exaggerated prosody, formulaic expressions and lexical and syntactic choices associated with such frames (Gumperz, 1982: 131). Such signals are not easy for language learners to master, especially those with a low proficiency level, and any attempt to shift to a play-as-fun frame is, therefore, open to misunderstanding, not only because of potentially faulty signalling, but also because of potentially faulty reception of such signals. Of course, the difficulties lie, in part, with potential cultural differences in how such signals are given and interpreted.

With regard to the play-as-rehearsal frame, although it might be said that part of its usefulness lies in the fact that it does not carry long-term consequences (the frolicking puppy will not be eaten, the contract will not be lost), it does have its own particular pitfalls for the language learner. As Appel (2007) points out, participating in a role-play puts the act of speaking on display, not only to the teacher but also to fellow learners. This means that it carries the potential for 'real' social consequences in terms of the relationships within the room: a humiliation in role may still be a humiliation. Furthermore, it could

be felt all the more acutely for those who, in their business lives, feel in control, but suddenly find themselves, in their own eyes at least, in the role of less-than-competent pupil. Thus, the danger of the 'reduced personality' (see the discussion in Section 2.7) is an ever-present one.

Yet despite the potential minefield of the role-play, especially in terms of exploiting it for fun, the data to follow illustrates how learners often decide to navigate its dangers in order to generate humour and to meet their own social objectives.

4.3 Background to the data

The following data is drawn from approximately seven hours of recording carried out among three groups of low-intermediate learners in 2008 and 2009 (see Section 3.3.7). The first, with Group A, was a pilot-study which was audio-recorded while the other two groups (B and C) were video-recorded. Where appropriate, I have incorporated the comments of my research collaborators and colleagues who have viewed some of the collected data in the analysis (Section 3.3.5).

4.4 Blending frames for comic effect

Language's ambiguous nature make it a natural conduit for play. According to Raskin (1985: 21), this is why, although children laugh and smile from early in life ' ... verbal humour is inaccessible to them till they begin to discern ambiguity in language', something that typically happens from about the age of six. As with the child learning its first language, semantic ambiguity is not as readily accessible to the language learner at an early stage of acquisition

as it is to someone with a more extensive command of the TL. However, the learner in the classroom has another resource at their disposal - the classroom's lamination of frames. So, much as the humorist in Raskin's framework can evoke two or more meanings in a particular word or phrase, so the language learner can evoke the 'real' and 'simulated' frames that role-play scenarios allow them for comic effect. Hoyle (1993) shows how children as young as eight can blend frames to generate humour. Her research participants are two boys who comment on 'real-world' happenings through the fantasy sportscaster personae that they adopt when playing computer games. Blending frames allows them to comment on the 'real' world while in role, something which is also a feature of my data.

The first episode to show evidence of participants playing with frames is taken from the pilot study in February 2008 which consisted of the audio-recording of Group A comprising Koji, Dieter, Mario and Antoine, along with their trainer, Harriet (Section 3.3.7). They were recorded on the last day of their course together, during their final activity, which was a half-hour simulated negotiation.

By the end of a lively meeting where a contract is renegotiated, a compromise is reached between the suppliers (Antoine and Mario) and their customers (Koji and Dieter) and a price of £180 per unit is agreed. Dieter sums up:

EPISODE 1[27]: DO YOU WANT A GLASS OF CHAMPAGNE?

Dieter: one (.) eight zero (2) yes that's what we want (.) it's [OK*

Mario: [(xxx)*=

Dieter: = we have to find a compromise (.) that's fine ((*claps hands*))(.) do you want a glass
          of champagne? =

All: = @@@@@

What Dieter says seems fairly unremarkable but his offer of a glass of champagne is met with a seemingly inordinate amount of laughter. In fact, the humour of the moment lies in his evocation of two frames simultaneously. Firstly, his utterance is perfectly apt for the simulation where people's schema for the successful completion of a negotiation may well include a drink to seal the deal.[28] At the same time, the offer is also relevant to the 'real-world' context of the language classroom. The course is drawing to a close and the participants know that there is a glass of champagne awaiting them in the BizLang lounge before they leave London.

So, much as the evocation of two or more semantic meanings in a word or phrase triggers humour in Raskin's (1985) framework, Dieter provokes laughter through his ability to use one phrase to refer to two frameworks simultaneously. Why we find such episodes amusing is in part due to the movement between or the unexpected combination of interpretative frameworks, as Brkinjac (2009: 20) notes. The sense of incongruity that this

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[27] The numbering of episodes is determined by the sequence in which they appear in the thesis. They do not relate to the chronological order of recorded events

[28] This example illustrates that schema include optional elements. The cultural nature of such elements is clear if one thinks about the differences in our expectations of the completion of a negotiation in, say, Russia compared to Saudi Arabia.

induces is a characteristic of humour which will be revisited later in this chapter.

So, despite his limitations in terms of his knowledge of the TL, something which is clearly evident in the negotiation, Dieter is still able to play through the language by drawing on the resources available to him; in this case, the frames of reference that are active at any given moment. The example is noteworthy for two other reasons. Firstly, Dieter's utterance comes at the end of the simulated negotiation. Indeed, it not only signals the end of the role-play, but also, more or less, the end of the learners' course. Holmes (2000), in her investigation into workplace humour, finds that play episodes seem to cluster at the beginnings and endings of meetings. The extent to which play among my research participants signals the end of an activity or the transition to another activity is one which is returned to in Chapter 8 where participants are studied over the duration of two continuous days of 'training', thus, allowing patterns of play behaviour to be identified in relation to the activities in which they occur. In this regard, it is worth bearing in mind that how learners react is influenced by factors such as time of day or stage of the course. A BizLang colleague, Mick, put it this way after listening to these exchanges during a plenary discussion among BizLang colleagues on the 5th January 2012 (see Section 3.3.5 and Appendix 3):

> "I do think their whole attitude to what they do on the last day is very different. I think most of them are thinking about other things - am I going to get to the airport on time, what's on my desk next week?"

Secondly, it is interesting that, in the simulation, Dieter's footing (Goffman, 1981: 128) gives him an alignment to his interlocutors whereby he has the right, as host, to offer champagne. Yet, in the classroom framework, he is a guest and is not invested with such power. Whether the utterance is an attempt, consciously or not, to claim power in a situation where, as learner, he ostensibly has little, is impossible to ascertain from Dieter's words alone. However, the degree to which play is used as a means to lay claim to power is an area which is returned to throughout the course of the analysis in this thesis.

A second notable episode where the blending of frames occurs is taken from a class of learners in their second week of their two-week course. Group B is made up of Michele (Italian), Andrei (Russian), Thomas (German), Takeshi (Japanese) and Viktor (Ukrainian). The group were recorded in September 2008. By the time of the recording, they had already established their own in-group culture. Nonetheless, the interactions provide an insight into how that culture has been established. On the morning of the recording, the group prepares for and takes part in a simulated meeting. As part of the background to the meeting, the teacher, Ray, plays a recording of a dialogue. He takes the opportunity to use the recording to ask the students to repeat particular phrases in order to practise intonation and pronunciation. Coincidentally, as with EPISODE 1, champagne is mentioned:

EPISODE 2: MORE CHAMPAGNE?

Ray: Stephen? =

Viktor   = Stephen your glass is (.) is empty (.)

Ray: yes (1)

TAPE: y*our glass is empty (1) more champagne?(.)*

Viktor: more champagne? (1)

TAPE: *oh yes. thank [you**

VIktor: [oh* yes thank [you*

Mich: [here* you are =

Thom: = plea[se*

Andrei: [@*@

Viktor: ((*holds out paper cup*))

Ray: <@ this is a- this is a (xxxxx[x*)>

Viktor: [typ*ical (.) typical =

Ray: = typical [typical evening*

Mich: [here you are* (1) here [you are*

Ray: [sorry?* (1)

Andrei: every [day*

Ray: [every* day yeah (.)

Viktor: no every day no

Figure 3 'More champagne?'

In this episode, the outer frame is the listening exercise where the students are repeating the recorded dialogue. The inner frame is the party that is happening in the recording itself. In Goffman's (1981) terms, in repeating the dialogue, the students are being asked to fulfil the role of 'animator'– taking the words of another and bringing them to life. Goffman's ideas about the different potential alignments that speakers take up to the words they utter are relevant to this example and elsewhere in the data. He regarded the animator as ' ...the talking machine, a body engaged in acoustic activity' (1981: 144). Thus, someone reading from the bible at a church service, for example, takes on the role of animator. Similarly, learners are often asked to fulfil this constrained role in the language classroom in activities like drilling or the acting out of modelled dialogues (Rampton, 2006b: 180-2). However, Viktor breaks through this frame into the fictional world of the party, making himself appear to be what Goffman would call both the 'principal' and the 'author' of the words he repeats as 'animator'. For Goffman, the principal is 'someone who is committed to what the words say' while the author is '..someone who has selected the sentiments that are being expressed and the words in which they are encoded' (1981: 144). Through breaking into the party frame, Viktor manages to create a further frame that evokes evenings when the group has been out together. Both Ray and Andrei take this up and the footing of the group changes to one of fellow revellers. Within the exchange can be seen an important element of group bonding. During the morning, the group makes various references to things that they have done together of which drinking was an integral part. Here, Andrei wants to

perpetuate the notion that this is something that the group does every day although, interestingly, Viktor resists the temptation to do so.

In terms of the organisational structure of the exchanges in this episode, it is noteworthy that the play that Viktor instigates disrupts the turn-taking pattern (Sacks et al., 1974) of the BizLang listening exercise. In this phase of the activity, the learners are being asked to repeat from a recorded dialogue. The turns are rigidly structured: typically, a section of the recording is played and a student chosen by the trainer is asked to repeat the word or words which they hear. So, using Sinclair and Coulthard's (1975) model of the IRF pattern of exchanges, the Initiation is triggered through the taped dialogue by the trainer, the learner responds and, occasionally, the trainer provides feedback as follow-up. This pattern is operative when Viktor decides to disrupt it. The laughter following his initial gesture allows him to topicalise (van Lier, 1988: 152) through his utterance 'typical'. In other words, the disruption lets him introduce the group's drinking as a topic of the exchanges. This one-word allusion to drinking together is immediately taken up by Ray and Andrei, as noted above. So, the play, however briefly restructures the classroom talk.

It is noteworthy, given the potential communicative hazards mentioned earlier in signalling changing frames, that the contextualisation cue that Viktor employs is physical as well as linguistic. His lifting of the paper cup is clear and unambiguous. Furthermore, the fact that he uses such a modest receptacle to represent a champagne glass adds to the comedy of the moment.

This contrast between the simulated frame and the props employed in the 'literal' frame to represent them is seen most clearly at the end of a role-play involving a group on the last day of their one-week course. Group C is made up of Bilel (Tunisian), Joseph (French, of Senegalese descent) and Sandro (Italian). They were recorded in November 2009. At the time of the recording, they were being taught by Harriet, although their trainer for the first three days was David (the main researcher).[29]

They are enacting a simulation where, in the role of consultants, they have put forward a proposal to their client (as played by David as 'stooge'). At the end of the meeting, Bilel offers the client a parting present:

EPISODE 3: HERE'S OUR BIG GIFT

David: thank you very [much*

Sandro: [thank* [you*

Joseph: [thank* you (.)

Bilel: ((*proffers cheap biro*)) here's er our big er gift from our [company*

All: [@@*@@@@

David: ((*holding biro, speaking over laughter*)) very impressive (2) very impressive

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[29] In this thesis, I use the third person pronoun to refer to myself when I feature in the data. Otherwise, I use the first person.

Figure 4 'Here's our big gift from our company'

The double consciousness of being in role, and yet being aware that it is a role, is brought to the fore in drawing attention to the gap between features of the physical environment and what they stand for in the simulated frame. The degree to which disbelief has been suspended during the role-play is deliberately highlighted by Bilel choosing to make a humble biro represent something akin to a gold-plated Mont Blanc. This incongruity generates laughter. Maybe this is because, as William Hazlitt (from a lecture in 1818, cited in Morreall, 1987: 56) puts it when reflecting on the nature of comedy, Humans are '..the only animal that is struck with the difference between what things are and what they ought to be.' On viewing this episode, a BizLang trainer, Geraint, commented:

> "They find sort of universally funny, things like contrasts. So, over the top introduction of a really crap present is just funny." (Appendix 3)

Contrast is an important element of the play to be found throughout the data. The incongruity of blending frames is also clearly seen in an exchange

between members of Group B as they prepare for the simulated meeting mentioned earlier. This meeting revolves around the problem of dividing the estate of a hotel owner who has recently passed away. Thomas is trying to explain the situation to Takeshi by using a hypothetical scenario of his own:

EPISODE 4: VIKTOR DIED	
Thom:	((*pointing to Viktor*)) Viktor (2) Viktor had a house (1) [he has*=
Mich:	[Viktor died*
Thom:	=[two children*
Andrei:	[@@* =
Viktor:	= (x) (1) not yet =
Thom:	= he have two children (2) Viktor died (2)
((Viktor puts his head on his hands as if asleep))	
Thom:	and then the two children [share their* house fifty fifty (x)(.)
Mich:	[I and Andrei*
Tak:	normally it's a (.) fifty fifty is un-normal (2) almost =
Ray:	= it's not normal =
Tak:	= It's not normal (1) almost first children get (.)
Andrei:	last children =
Ray:	= oldest [oldest*
Tak:	[last* children no =
Ray:	= oldest =
Tak:	= oldest children =
Andrei:	= (xxx) (1)
Thom:	It's not fair (.)
Tak:	no no no no =
Ray:	= life's not fair (.)
Andrei:	the (first) it's er it's (2) happy to be (xxxx) =
Ray:	= <@ yes > (2)
Mich:	but if Viktor died (1)
Ray:	OK (1)
Viktor:	no (.)
Mich:	and er (2)

Viktor:	sorry (1) one moment (2) ((*gets up and moves towards the flipchart*)) pre-died (2) pre-died =
Mich:	= <@ after died>

Figure 5 'Viktor died'

'

Thomas creates a hypothetical scenario to explain a point, much as a teacher might. It is interesting to note here that he picks up Michele's initial comment and Viktor himself builds on it by enacting his own death. Again, the contextualisation cues are exaggerated and physical in nature. Thomas's initial attempt to explain the situation through the use of an example has been collaboratively built upon to create a moment where the gesticulating, breathing, speaking Viktor is, at the same time, reduced to a corpse. It is noteworthy too how Michele takes pleasure in the hypothetical frame, pretending that he and Andrei are Viktor's sons who are about to inherit.

Viktor picks up the idea moments later when he decides to go to the flipchart to explain further and gives himself a few more moments of life in order to do so. One can imagine that if Viktor were a native speaker of English, he would get up and say something like 'Before I pop my clogs, let me just explain...' This blending of the real and imagined frames such that the dead can talk provides a sense of shifting ground, a place where things are not quite as they seem. In such a world, paper cups can be filled with vintage champagne, biros can be priceless gifts and one can be both language learner and party-goer at the same time. Such a world has the flavour of Bakhtin's notion of carnival where '..the laws, prohibitions, and restrictions that determine the structure and order of the ordinary, that is noncarnival, life are suspended' (Bakhtin, 1984b: 122-3, first published in 1965). It is a world which allows the possibility of subverting the established order, at least on a temporary basis. It is to the manifestations of this subversion, made possible by the blending of different frames, to which we now turn.

4.5 Subverting the established order

Gordon (2002), in her study of the interactions between a mother and her daughter of two years and eleven months, notes how play frames allow the two to reverse roles, so that the daughter takes on the nurturing role and the mother plays the child. This reversal of the footing that the two take up to each other actually allows the mother, the figure of authority, to achieve particular strategic goals, such as getting her daughter to pick out a book for naptime. This particular example of role reversal between two individuals echoes wider societal instances of role reversal from history. For instance, in the ancient Roman festival of Saturnalia, masters would serve their servants

at table,[30] something which finds an echo in the medieval Feast of Fools where power was invested for a few hours in those who did not ordinarily have it.[31] In the latter event, a member of the peasantry would typically assume the role of someone in the ecclesiastical hierarchy and openly preach subversion. However, although such festivities may seem to the modern eye to be tinged with the whiff of revolution, it is worth bearing in mind that they were sanctioned by the power structures of their times. So, it could be argued that, rather like the mother in her role reversal with her daughter in Gordon's research, such outlets were, in their way, an instrument of institutional control.

Subversive role reversal is prominent in the present data, although here the role reversal is instigated, not by an authority figure as represented by the teacher, but by the students themselves. The frames available to the learners mean that they can, within their role-play, turn the normal world upside down. This can be seen in the roles that learners assign for themselves in simulations, allowing them to take up different footings with each other from those they usually have. The pleasure members of Group C derive from reversing roles can be seen when Joseph hands over to Sandro who is playing the team's company director:

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[30] See http://penelope.uchicago.edu/~grout/encyclopaedia_romana/calendar/saturnalia.html (accessed 08.08.13)
[31] For more details of the Feast of Fools and its offshoots, see the Catholic Encyclopaedia http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/06132a.htm (accessed 08.08.13)

EPISODE 5: OUR SOCIETY DIRECTOR

Joseph: the-our dir- our society director gonna summarise on our proposal and er @@@ =

Bilel: = our company GM =

Joseph: = @[@*

Sandro: [I'm going to* show you the-the last (1) area

The laughter springs from the fact that Sandro is the youngest in the group and yet, in this imagined world, he is the most senior of the team and has been elected as such by them. The others enjoy this inversion of the social norms, although Sandro's lack of reaction leaves open to question whether he does.

This episode finds a striking parallel in the exchanges of Group B when its members are deciding on which roles to assume in their simulated meeting. Nobody seems to be willing to chair the meeting:

EPISODE 6: YOU DIRECTOR

Viktor: Michele (.)

Mich: yeah (.)

Vitkor: please (.)

Mich: please (2)

Viktor: you (3) director (.)

Mich: I director =

Andrei: = chairman =

Mich: = no =

Andrei: = big boss (.)

Viktor: Michele (.) you Michele (.)

Mich: [I*

Andrei: [not* Michele (.) Mr Big Bo[ss*

Mich: [I'm* young (.) I young (2) I'm more very young (1)

Andrei: you only image (.) imagine (.) yeah (1) big boss (2) foot on table (.) cigar (.)

```
Mich:    tod[ay you* can (1) you can be big boss
Viktor:      [no (xx*)
```

Like his fellow Italian, Sandro from Group C, Michele is the youngest in his group by far (he is 20 while the others are in their 30s and 40s). Here, although the learners are not yet in the simulated role that they are about to take part in, Andrei evokes the hypothetical frame where Michele would assume the position of boss and conjures up the trappings of power to humorous effect. There is hyperbolic language here in Andrei's use of the term 'Mr Big Boss', a form of address with a cartoon-like quality which he wouldn't ordinarily use outside a play frame. As Carter (2004: 136) observes, hyperbole signals a recognition that something is contrary to the perceived facts.

The question of taking on and switching roles is one which will be returned to in the next chapter where it is revealed how the learners assume the mantle of the authority figure within the classroom by purloining the words of their teacher.

The training room allows students the opportunity to play with their assigned roles within the frame of the simulation and within the outer frame of the language lesson itself. This play has a subversive element to it, albeit one which does not seriously seem to threaten the status quo.

4.6 Asserting the established order

BizLang is an organisation where there are few explicitly elaborated rules. However, two are mentioned to course participants at the outset of their stay. These are, firstly, to speak only English when communicating together during the course, even if participants share a common first language, and, secondly, to arrive on time for the training day and after coffee and lunch breaks.

At the beginning of the recording of Group A, Dieter and Koji as customers welcome Mario and Antoine to their office for a renegotiation of their contract. The start of the meeting is held up by Antoine going off to get himself a coffee. Upon his return, Dieter kicks off the meeting by greeting his 'guests':

```
EPISODE 7: YOU ARE A LITTLE BIT LATE
Dieter:  um er we hope you have a nice trip to (2) er (1) to our company [and* =
Ant:                                                                     [oh yes*
Dieter:  = you have no problem  you are a little bit late but er (1) it's not [a problem*
Ant:     ((gesturing towards Mario))                                          [his fault* his fault
         his fault =
All:     = @@@@@[@*
Dieter:              [we* welcome you
```

In this excerpt, Dieter manages to admonish Antoine for delaying the start of the simulation by bringing this fact into the role-play itself. This forces Antoine to deflect the criticism towards his colleague, Mario. As in the previous examples in this chapter, Dieter fuses the two worlds of the real and the make-believe. Although he uses this to uphold classroom procedures and, thus, the status quo, he also asserts his own authority over one of his

fellow group members. After the role-play, Harriet, the group's trainer, mentioned to me that this episode is indicative of a rather fractious relationship that had built up between Dieter and Antoine over the course of their stay and which readily comes to the surface in this simulation. The exchanges illustrate, as noted previously (Section 2.2), that the play bite is not real but it is also NOT not real. From my experience of teaching at BizLang, any tensions that there are between group members are manifest most readily in role-plays. The simulation allows Dieter to both joke with and reprimand Antoine at the same time.

The previous examples of the subversion and assertion of the established order that pertains in the outer frame of the language lesson through the inner frame of the role-play demonstrate that the research participants see role-play as a useful resource in the exercise of power. It can be hypothesised that this is because it allows speakers to push at boundaries in ways which would not otherwise be permissible. The fact that learners are ostensibly operating within a simulation gives them a fall-back defence if their interlocutors take offence. 'I was only in role', much like 'I was only joking', is a position which is difficult to counter.

4.7 Releasing tension when the frame dissolves

Bateson (1972: 182) observes that play is intrinsically labile or unstable: the play bite can become real; the football match can degenerate into violence. This applies as much to play-as-rehearsal as it does to play-as-fun. It was seen in the previously cited exchange how simulated situations often bring out any underlying tensions that can be found within a group. At such

moments, the lamination of frames present in the classroom are de-layered or, as Goffman (1974: 359-60) would put it, 'downkeyed' such that the participants' awareness that their role-play is embedded within a classroom frame disappears and the simulation becomes unkeyed. In other words, in their own minds, the simulation becomes real. An example of this can be seen in the negotiation between the members of Group A, where, as in the previous example, the tension between Dieter and Antoine surfaces. In the following exchanges, the customers, Dieter and Koji, have just indicated that they would be prepared to pay their suppliers, Antoine and Mario, 165 per unit:

EPISODE 8: HANDS UP!

Dieter: ((*pointing his finger like a gun*)) we are serious (2) we are serious (.) and when you
       say one times again we are not serious (1) you can go (2)

Ant: go where? =

Dieter: ((*still pointing*)) = it's [right?*

Ant: [@*@@@ =

Dieter: =hands up =

All: = @@@@

Here, Dieter's pointing finger is not accompanied by a smiling face that might indicate play. He is truly angry at Antoine's attitude and, at that moment, does not seem to be aware that he is in a language role-play but sees himself in a negotiation where his integrity has been impugned. There seems to be a real danger that the situation will become irretrievable when he points his finger at Antoine and tells him that he can go. As a BizLang colleague, Toby, subsequently observed (Appendix 2), "They were getting quite swept

away in the whole thing".[32] Although Antoine attempts to defuse the moment with his riposte 'go where?', it is, in fact, Dieter himself who manages to retrieve the situation by cleverly evoking another frame which recasts his utterances as mere play. He uses his already pointing finger to conjure up a world universally associated with it, that of the cowboy western or the gangster movie. When children play at cowboys or gangsters, they often use the pointing finger to represent a gun. By changing the threatening gesture into one belonging to children's play, Dieter demonstrates that he is aware that he is in a simulated frame and, in that moment, the tension is released.[33]

4.8 Conclusion

This chapter demonstrates how the research participants exploit and have fun with the play-as-rehearsal frame which is common in the language class, and especially so in the BizLang training room. Speakers are able to provoke laughter by using words and phrases that simultaneously refer to both the simulated frame and the language lesson frame in which it is embedded. This blending of frames can be used for various purposes. It can show up the contrast between the two worlds it evokes, such that a biro can represent a treasured gift. It can also allow learners to assert power in ways that would not be possible in the lesson frame alone. They can subvert or assert the established order. The play between frames also allows them to break free of

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[32] In nearly all cases, course participants maintain their self-control. However, an episode comes to mind from my own experience where one learner in a particularly lively role-play, threw a pen at another who was supposedly on the same 'team' and then walked out of the classroom. He apologised profusely for his behaviour afterwards.

[33] It was this moment in the pilot study recording that made me realise the potential importance of body language and gesture in the research. All my subsequent recordings were video recorded rather than being audio only.

the restricted role of learner which sometimes only lets them 'animate' particular words and phrases. A BizLang colleague, Geraint, put it thus:

'It's the irony of being forced into this ridiculous role-play which they'll play the game and take seriously for a long time but they have to be in control of when they remove themselves from it and if they can do that with a laugh, all the better." (Appendix 3)

Another colleague, Josh, equates the undermining of the role-play with the undermining of authority:

"Sometimes it seemed to be breaking the rules and breaking conventions and breaking the role-play." (Appendix 2)

Through playing with frames, the learner can claim a voice which is his own. On the other hand, as Gordon (2008: 324) points out, this is a liminal world where '..footings of the participants may be uncertain, a world where frames can dissolve and pretence can evaporate'. In other words, although there is a fluidity and give between frames which the learners can employ for their own playful ends, that very porosity also carries dangers which are potentially face threatening.[34]

The exchanges in this chapter reveal how learners play by blending the frames that are available to them. The data demonstrates that doing this can have useful social impacts: it allows the speaker to become 'author' and 'principal' as well as 'animator' of the words he utters; it lets him choose the topic of interaction where otherwise he could not; it permits him to subvert or,

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[34] It is noteworthy that the word 'play' can also be used to mean 'give' in this sense.

indeed, assert the established order and, finally, it allows him to rescue potentially embarrassing situations.

All the examples cited involve the use of language. However, the degree to which play is dependent on language varies in each episode. When Bilel offers a biro to David in EPISODE 3, the humorous incongruity of the moment is primarily generated by the physical prop, although the accompanying words - 'here's our big gift from our company' - are vital in triggering humour. At the other end of the scale, when Dieter shouts 'hands up!' (EPISODE 8), the humour of the moment relies heavily on his interlocutors' understanding of the associations which the words carry with them. In the next chapter, language moves centre stage as the extent to which the participants play by using words and phrases which carry particular associations and connotations is investigated. These associations evoke different frames which the speakers compare and contrast for comic effect.

5 Evoking frames through associated language

5.1 Introduction

In the last chapter, it was noted how the research participants use the particular environment of the language classroom in order to blend the frames of reference available to them for comic effect. Exploiting the 'play' between frames gives the learners the licence to subvert the usual power dynamic and to break free, however temporarily, of the roles assigned to them by the classroom context. In this process, language is used as a means of positioning the participants in a particular framework. For instance, Bilel's 'here's our gift from our company' (EPISODE 3) clearly places the words within the simulated role-play while the gift itself - a humble biro - remains stubbornly outside it in the outer frame of the classroom interaction itself. The humour is derived from this juxtaposition. Nevertheless, the relationship between the words and the frame is very different from that in Dieter's 'hands up!' (EPISODE 8). In the latter case, the evocation of the play frame is largely dependent on the phrase which is inextricably linked to the schema of a western or gangster movie and, in turn, to that of children's play. The language does not so much refer to a current frame of interpretation, such as those of the lesson and the simulation, but actually summons one into existence because the words themselves encode their own particular framework. I now turn to the ways participants use words to activate previously encountered frames with which they are associated, thus allowing those frames to become available for play.

This chapter examines further the theoretical underpinning to the relationship between language and frame. In so doing, it draws upon the ideas of two influential thinkers from the twentieth century, Saussure and Bakhtin. Saussure describes how there is no inherent relationship between language and the concepts it refers to. As a result, word meanings are, by their nature, unstable. Bakhtin sets out to explain how these meanings are shaped by their context of use and are forever provisional, carrying forward previous speakers' intentions as well as those of the current speaker. The meanings that language accumulates through use have socio-cultural implications, giving language a crucial role in the forging of identity. The chapter goes on to examine the evidence in the data that the movement of a word or phrase with all its associations into a novel context allows that word or phrase to be 'rekeyed', thus changing the meaning of an interaction. Furthermore, recontextualised words in the data are often associated with a previous speaker who, in Bakhtinian terms, is 'voiced' for the current speaker's own communicative ends. Recontextualised language metonymically refers to and stands for other frames, thus highlighting humorous contrasts and gaps between elements of the evoked frames and that of the moment. Associations are often particular to the group and, as such, carry a specific social resonance. Throughout the chapter, the important social functions that the individual episodes fulfil is commented on.

5.2 Theoretical perspectives on language, context, play and learning

5.2.1 The relationship between language and its context of use

At the beginning of the last century, Ferdinand de Saussure (1959), often regarded as a founding figure in modern linguistics, posited a theory of language built around the idea that the linguistic sign is arbitrary. The connection between the combination of phonemes or letters that make up, for example, the word 'table' and our notion of the object itself is purely dictated by convention rather than any inherent link between them (we could as easily find another word which would function as well, if everyone in our particular speech community agreed to use it). According to Saussure, this arbitrary nature, coupled with the fact that languages do not name existing categories in the 'real world' but articulate their own, dictates that linguistic signs only have meaning in relation to other linguistic signs in the language system. Thus, however often someone might point to blue objects in the physical world to illustrate the meaning of the word 'blue', we do not truly know what the word 'blue' means until we know that it does *not* mean 'brown', 'green' and so on.

This non-essentialist conceptualisation of language makes meaning inherently fluid and unstable. In order to explore this, and how meanings are transformed with use, the interaction between language and its context of use needs to be interrogated.

In the early twentieth century, the Russian literary scholar Mikhail Bakhtin (1981), although drawing upon Saussure's non-essentialist notion of

language, rejected the idea that the language system is a reified synchronic code which speakers simply draw upon to communicate (Voloshinov, 1986, first published in 1929).[35] Bakhtin rooted the study of language firmly in its socio-historical soil. He maintained that, as a word or phrase has no essence beyond that with which users endow it, its meaning is profoundly influenced by the contexts in which it is encountered by individual speakers. Of course, no two contexts are exactly identical (Pennycook, 2007) and, consequently, a particular word within the sign system of a language carries the flavours of previous uses. Because of this, language is heteroglossic (multi-voiced) by its very nature. Furthermore, Bakhtin maintains that every instance of a word's re-use changes it. As the literary theorist, Terry Eagleton (1983: 129) puts it:

> It is difficult to know what a 'sign' originally means, what its 'original' context was: we simply encounter it in many different situations, and although it must maintain a certain consistency across those situations in order to be an identifiable sign at all, because its context is always different it is never absolutely the same, never quite identical with itself.

The fluidity at the heart of language suggests that its meanings are always provisional. Maybin (1994: 139-40) illustrates this tellingly with an example from her data of an exchange between a boy and girl on the cusp of puberty where they make tentative arrangements to meet at her house.

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[35] Voloshinov was a colleague of Bakhtin's. The authorship of works attributed to him is a matter of some dispute and it is said by some that they were actually written by Bakhtin himself - Clark, K. & Holquist, M. (1984). *Mikhail Bakhtin.* Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press.

Julie and David are sitting together eating their sandwiches at lunchtime

Julie: Do you know where I live? Right if you go along Redlea the only blue door, that's
          where I live. The only blue door in Redlea.

David   Only?

Julie: Right. If you can't get through, go to my next door neighbour's, that side… go
          through her place, jump over the fence and go down my path.

David: Which number do you bang on?

Julie: One three four. And if you can't get through, go to… go round to number one
          three two,   go through the fence, over the wood…./

David: /you got a bike?

Julie: Puncture… got lost. I got skates. I can hold onto the back of your bike   and go
          oooooh! (pause) Do you really go out with thingy – Ma-

David: Who?

Julie: Mellie.

David: No.

Julie: What, did she chuck you? Why? (pause) Do you think Warren will mind if I move
          onto your table?

David: No. It's my table, I was the first one on it, so I own it.

Julie: You don't, the school does. What's the hottest part of the sun? What's the hottest
          part of the sun? (pause) Page 3!

On the one hand, their talk can be seen as coming from the childhood
discourse of games. On the other, it can be interpreted as the beginnings of
a relationship between girlfriend and boyfriend where the girl's use of terms
such as 'go out with' and 'hottest' could carry a heightened significance. How
the two participants view their conversation will, to a large extent, be
determined by exchanges to come, a point which illustrates another
Bakhtinian concept, that of language's dialogical nature (Bakhtin, 1981: 276-
7): all utterances respond to previous utterances and anticipate their own

response. Furthermore, the exchange between the boy and girl in Maybin's study shows that meaning is, to a great degree, forged by people's frameworks of interpretation which help us determine what is happening at a given moment (see Chapter 4). Of course, these frames do not guarantee that interlocutors will come to a shared understanding of a particular interaction: one could easily imagine the boy and girl leaving their encounter with very different impressions of what had just taken place.

Despite Bakhtin providing a persuasive argument for showing that meaning is not fixed and is shaped by its contexts of use, it would be a mistake to see it as completely fluid. After all, even the Eagleton quotation above admits to a 'certain consistency' across situations for any sense to be made of a word or utterance. Widdowson (2004), despite seeing the analysis of language as meaningless without a consideration of its particular context of use, provides a useful brake on the tempting notion that language meaning is simply what the speaker wants it to be. He views semantically encoded meaning '..as constituting a range of delimiting coordinates' (Widdowson, 2004: 70). Nevertheless, it should be noted with regard to NNSs who have a lack of competence in the TL, knowledge of the conventionally understood meanings of words is generally less secure than that of their NS counterparts.

If language meaning is not fixed and is shaped by its context of use, then the implication is that it is not just provisional but contestable and, thus, intrinsically ideological. Bakhtin (1981) sees language as both the subject of and the means by which there is a constant struggle between centripetal (or standardising) forces and centrifugal (or diversifying) forces within society. In

practical terms, this struggle can be seen in the way, for example, in which different social groups might lay claim to particular words or ways of speaking as a means of rebelling against pervading societal norms as represented by 'standard' language . This centrifugal impetus is evident in a wide spectrum of language varieties, among disparate groups of speakers, from the Polari of the predominantly working class, homosexual community in the UK during the first half of the twentieth century (Baker, 2006) to the special way of 'talking' encoded in the developing culture of the internet chatroom (North, 2007). This is of particular interest to the present research is that the centrifugal force's linguistic manifestations are often characterised by instances of HLP. Although play is usually associated with the undermining of prevailing power structures, it can also be employed to protect and enhance them (Holmes, 2000).

5.2.2 The relationship between language, the speaker and the social group

The distinctiveness of particular types of talk among different social groupings demonstrates that speakers are not merely subject to language 'rules' but have a degree of agency that allows them to use it as a resource in their own image-making. Word meanings are not just given but can be manipulated to the user's own ends. However, it has already been noted that it would be a mistake to view individual speakers as having complete freedom to generate what meanings they will with the language. Indeed, Bakhtin himself views language use as very much a socio-historical process which is constrained by what has gone before:

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> Language is not a neutral medium that passes freely and easily into
> the private property of the speaker's intentions; it is populated,
> overpopulated – with the intentions of others. (Bakhtin, 1981: 274)

Because Bakhtin views language within a broad societal context, it is no surprise, as noted above, that he is interested in the ways in which the different groupings within society find expression through habitual patterns of usage which, in turn, establish their own linguistic norms. This is pertinent to the language learners featured in the present study who have to endeavour to establish their own collective cultural identity within the short time span that their course allows them.

5.2.3 Recontextualisation in a Bakhtinian conceptualisation of language

The previous discussion brings to the fore the intimate relationship between language, its speakers and its contexts of use. All language that carries meaning could be said to be contextualised. As Linell (1998: 117) points out, even the act of seemingly decontextualising a phrase - removing it from its context - is itself context-bound. So, for instance, although some might argue that 'the cat sat on the mat' can be understood outside any particular context, he counters that such an understanding is itself part of a context, for example, that of a theoretical linguistic discussion.

The notion of 'context' needs to be clarified as it is not easy to define in the fluid and amorphous stream of experience. The concept of frame (Section 4.2) is useful here as it delimits the context. The frame is a psychological

construct, something determined in people's heads rather than in their physical surroundings. It tells the interactants what's happening at any given moment. It is 'local' and essentially interactive in nature, allowing frames to change even when the physical environment does not do so. My focus is on how language is used to manipulate interlocutors' frames of interpretation where the movement of a word or phrase from one frame *with which it is associated* to another transforms it into something else. I refer to this movement as 'recontextualisation', something which Linell (1998: 154) describes as:

> ..the dynamic transfer-and-transformation of something from one discourse/text-in-context (...) to another. Recontextualisation involves the extrication of some part or aspect from a text or discourse, or from a genre of texts or discourses, and the fitting of this part or aspect into another context.

In the broadest sense, all language is recontextualised and recontextualisable, even, it could be argued, neologisms.[36] Indeed, a language learner cannot be said to have mastered a feature of a language, be it a word, phrase or grammatical construction, until he or she is able to take it from the context in which it is first encountered and then to use it in another. Given that all the language we hear around us is recontextualised, it is not necessarily the case that this transforms a frame. In order to determine what sort of recontextualisations lead to reframing, a notion from linguistic

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[36] Neologisms can be said to carry the taste of other words. Just look, for example, at Lewis Carroll's famous *Jabberwocky* poem. The supposedly nonsense words that make up much of the poem conjure up images precisely because they evoke similar sounding words with their associated denotational and connotational meanings. Several, such as *chortle*, are now in common use.

anthropology, that of 'entextualisation' is useful. Bauman and Briggs (1990: 73) define the concept as:

> ..the process of rendering discourse extractable, of making a stretch
> of linguistic production into a unit - a text - that can be lifted out of its
> interactional setting.

This makes the elements of the text bounded, so that, for example, words within the extracted text become a unified whole. I also take the text to be bounded in another way in that it is, in the mind of the speaker who entextualises it, linked to its original interactional setting. The act of entextualisation, as Bauman and Briggs's definition implies, actually unbinds it from that setting. To be entextualised, the text '..can be detached from one discursive context and fit [*sic*] and grafted into others' (Eisenlohr, 2010: 321). As Eisenlohr's words make clear, entextualisation can be regarded as part of a process which encompasses 'decontextualisation' (taking a text out of a particular context) and 'recontextualisation' (putting it into a new one). Indeed, from the observer's point of view, recontextualisation is the only evidence that a text has been entextualised and decontextualised. An example of this process in action can be seen in Trester's (2012) research into a troupe of improvisers whose exchanges she analyses. She notes how their backstage and frontstage performances largely depend on entextualisation, decontextualisation and recontextualisation:

> ..performers pay attention for opportunities to hang on to texts, and by
> noticing them, render them extractable (entextualising them), moving
> them from the original interactional context in which they were used

(decontextualising them), and looking for an opportunity to use them

again (to recontextualise them). (Trester, 2012: 238)

The notion of recontextualisation is inextricably linked to that of

intertextuality, a term coined by Kristeva (1980) and based on Bakhtin's

ideas about the inherently heteroglossic and dialogical nature of language.

Intertextuality is to do with the way in which texts incorporate previous texts

and reshape them by so doing. Intertextuality, therefore, is realised through

recontextualisation. To take Trester's example of the improvising performers,

their skill (and presumably their audience's appreciation) lies in the ability to

weave intertextual references from their prior talk into their current

utterances. For these improvisations to carry any weight, the

recontextualisations must carry associative links with what they have already

said. They cannot simply contain words which the audience has heard

somewhere before!

Trester notes that intertextuality invariably signals a shift in frame, that is, a

change in participants' understanding of what is going on at any given

moment. Indeed, 'intertextuality can at times be the only signal that a frame

shift has been enacted (that a game has begun)' (Trester, 2012: 240).

Furthermore, as the bracketed words at the end of the previous quotation

indicate, reframing can be playful and previous talk can be rekeyed as

something humorous.

At this point, it is helpful to clarify the definitions of concepts which are

closely interconnected and are pertinent to the analysis to come:

- Recontextualisation - the movement of language from one frame with which it is closely associated to another.

- Entextualisation - the process by which a text is 'chunked' and rendered extractable from its original context and co-text.

- Decontextualisation - the process by which a text is decoupled from its original context.

- Intertextuality - the result of recontextualisation where a chunk of language is entextualised, decontextualised and recontextualised into another setting.

- Reframing - a change in what the discussion is about (Tannen, 2006: 601). In my data, this change can be triggered by the recontextualisation of a word or phrase.

- Rekeying - an activity becomes something patterned on that activity, for example, an argument is rekeyed as a humorous exchange (Section 2.5.3.2). The rekeying is often signalled by a change in the tone of voice, indicating '..a change of emotional stance' (Tannen, 2006: 601). Rekeying inevitably results in reframing.

In a Bakhtinian account, as discussed above, the movement of a word or phrase from one frame to another affects the meanings of those words or phrases which are transposed.[37] The result is that interactions are 'reframed' as something else. As Linell (1998: 154-5) says, '..recontextualisation usually

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[37] It should be remembered that particular grammatical classes of words are more open to transformation than others. Firstly, it is clear that lexical words have more mutable meanings than functional words. Secondly, within the lexis, Carter's distinction between 'core' and 'non-core' vocabulary Carter, R. (2004). *Language and Creativity: The art of common talk.* London: Routledge. seems pertinent: the 'core' words of the lexis tend to be those we learn first and carry basic meanings by which other words are defined. As such, they tend not to be context specific in nature; 'non-core' words, on the other hand, tend to carry strong associations and connotations and are more open to change when moved from one context to another.

amounts to reframing'. One can imagine, for example, Maybin's girl and boy (1994: 139-40) evoking elements of their exchange to lay claim to a particular meaning to that exchange and, so, a particular status for their relationship. Tannen (2006) shows how the meanings of family arguments can subsequently be rekeyed and reframed as something humorous. Words and phrases of previous exchanges are repeated - recontextualised - and their significance is consciously altered, something which is discussed below.

The reason for focussing on the very movement of language from a context with which it is identified to one where we do not usually expect to find it is that it has the potential to be regarded as humorous and playful. We now turn to why this might be so.

5.2.4 Recontextualisation and humour

As already noted (Section 2.3.1), Raskin (1985) is interested in how language's homonymous nature allows us to combine meanings from different contexts in incongruous and laughter-generating ways. It could be argued that this wordplay, which typically manifests itself in such behaviour as punning, is a form of recontextualisation: it involves taking language out of one interpretative framework and putting it in another, such that its ambiguities are highlighted.

We hear recontextualising play in everyday interaction and see it in magazine and TV advertising. An example is a cartoon which features a barman, leaning over his bar and saying to a private detective and his female client, 'The guy you're looking for waltzed out of here an hour ago'. The

humour arises from the fact that the woman is dressed in a tutu and ballet shoes. Our schema for a detective story includes the fact that the word 'waltzed' is typically used metaphorically by its characters. However, our expectations of this are thwarted by the picture which allows the meaning to be realised literally. An exchange associated with tracing a crook or a cheating husband is transformed by the recontextualisation into one about finding a dancing partner. However, such wordplay is beyond the competence of many NNSs at the lower end of the proficiency scale. However, play involving recontextualising and reframing without necessarily exploiting ambiguous meanings in words can commonly be found in NS communication. It has already been noted, in the BBC Radio 4 game show how someone's name not only refers to a particular person but also metonymically stands for a shared experience (Section 2.3.3). Another instructive example comes from the discussions between BizLang colleagues in January 2012 of the video clips which form much of the data which is analysed in this thesis (see Appendix 3). At the end of the discussion, Mick mentions that he had taught one of the groups which he and his colleagues had been watching:

Mick: I was with these temporarily

Geraint: But before that, without?

Mick: (xxx) without.

Others: (laugh)

Only by being present at the whole of the discussion can Geraint's utterance make any sense. In fact, the word 'without' refers to a recorded exchange between a couple of learners (EPISODE 24) which features in Section 5.3.8 below. Geraint's wit does not lie in playing with the language itself but with his ability to recontextualise it and, in so doing, make it absurd. Also, Mick's response, although partly indecipherable, seems to play on this and triggers laughter. A phrase which, however transiently, has become associated with a recent shared experience is recontextualised to comic effect.

Recontextualising language often produces a sense of incongruity. The notion that incongruity lies at the heart of humour has a strong tradition among humour theorists (see Morreall 1987 for an overview of the field). The above exchange is significant for another reason: the very fact that it is only understandable to those who have been present throughout the discussion produces a sort of fleeting in-group reference point to which people who were not there are not privy. This indicates a possible reason why humour is such a common feature in the language repertoire of different social groupings – their shared experiences allow the incremental build up of meanings whenever language associated with those experiences is uttered. Of course, particular meanings based on shared experience may fade and die while others persist and then become part of the group's identity. It could be hypothesised that my research participants' relative lack of exposure to the TL makes words and phrases more susceptible to taking on particular shared meanings which are likely to persist.

Bakhtin's assertion that language is essentially ideological means that it is impossible for us to utter or write anything without communicating a particular stance. Maybin (2006: 4) puts it thus:

> we can never talk about anything without making some kind of judgement reflecting an assumed evaluative framework and signalling our own position in relation to it.

This evaluative positioning is very evident when we reproduce the words of others for our own communicative ends. Unsurprisingly, given that he sees the meanings of language as infused with the voices and intentions of previous speakers, Bakhtin is interested in the ways in which speakers consciously manipulate the words of others. He sees an utterance in which, for example, a narrator quotes a previous speaker as a form of 'double-voicing', as it carries the intentions of both speakers. When the meaning of the former contrasts with that of the latter, he categorises this as 'vari-directional double-voicing' (Bakhtin, 1984a: 193). This is often ironic and humorous in intent (e.g. DaSilva Iddings and McCafferty, 2007; Rampton, 2006a). The words of the original speaker are rekeyed. In the classroom setting, many people have memories of pupils from their schooldays who mimicked the words and mannerisms of their teachers. It seems highly unlikely in my research setting that learners would dare such a face-threatening act. However, the degree, if at all, to which they voice others as part of their playful repertoire is an area of interest in this study.

The recontextualisation of language, then, can reframe the meaning of an interaction, often turning it into something humorous. The humour is

triggered by the juxtaposition of interpretative frameworks and by the uttering of others' words where they are overlaid with the speaker's own intentions. However, this explanation of the enjoyment to be had in the conscious act of recontextualising language can only partly explain its appeal. In a book about the art of improvisation, Johnson (1979: 116) touches upon its ultimately elusive attraction:

> Very often an audience will applaud when earlier material is brought back into the story. They couldn't tell you why they applaud, but the reincorporation gives them pleasure.

5.2.5 Recontextualisation, language learning and language play

If speakers never use a word or phrase beyond the context in which they first meet it, then there is, of course, no proof that they have understood it, let alone incorporated it into their active language repertoire. Unsurprisingly, when we acquire a language, including our first, the process of reusing the language we hear is by no means smooth or unproblematic. We have to learn the extent and limit of the meanings of specific words and phrases. We need only reflect upon the amusement and affection unintentionally generated by first language learners when they inadvertently generalise the meaning of a word beyond its universally accepted semantic limits to appreciate that learners often overextend meanings. An example would be a young child going through a period of calling all animals 'cat' until eventually learning that cats are just one type of animal (Gelman et al., 1998; Kay and

Anglin, 1982).[38] Beyond semantic meaning, speakers also need to learn about the appropriateness of language in particular situations. The child who asks about Granny's varicose veins in front of a roomful of strangers shows that learners do not always get this right.

This aspect of learning puts the non-native speaker in a position akin to although not identical with that of the child acquiring its first language. Adult learners may well have a breadth and depth of life experience that can help them in many ways when learning another language. However, they have not encountered particular uses of the TL in various contexts, and are not able to draw upon the accumulated flavours of meaning that such experience allows. Meaning, therefore, already less fixed in a Bakhtinian framework than we might usually regard it, is even more unstable in the minds and mouths of NNSs. This could be regarded as a disadvantage for someone wishing to play with the connotations and associations that lie behind language but who is unable to do so through lack of exposure to such meanings.

A further disadvantage for the non-native speaker can be seen in the evocation of others' voices. A narrator, for example, in quoting the words of another, may reproduce a particular accent, inflection or way of speaking which can heighten the ironic or humorous effect of vari-directional double-voicing. It is notoriously difficult for non-native speakers, even those who are advanced learners, to identify, let alone mimic a particular accent or way of speaking. This suggests that they would avoid any form of double-voicing. However, the data in the current study indicates that this is not the case.

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[38] Of course, it is also true that learners underextend meanings, only using the word 'cat', for example, in relation to black felines. However, in normal circumstances, underextension, by its nature, is less easy to identify in learner talk than overextension.

Although the language learner is burdened by a number of disadvantages when recontextualising language, it could be argued that some of these drawbacks actually have the potential to enhance the opportunities for HLP. As alluded to previously (Section 2.6), the very fact that non-native speakers are less familiar with a language than adult native speakers might allow them a fresher perspective on it, giving them the chance to play with its sounds and shapes in similar ways to children experimenting with their first language. Secondly, the stable sense of self which is threatened by the challenges of being in a different environment and using a language which is not one's own might also be a form of liberation, allowing the speaker to experiment with unfamiliar personas which let him/her don the carnival mask of the language player. Thirdly, the speaker's status as a non-native might actually work to their advantage in terms of how their utterances are received, at least in a supportive environment. There seems to be evidence that speakers in intercultural exchanges take a lenient attitude to each other's attempts at humour (Bell, 2007a). Furthermore, the very effort and mental dexterity needed for a learner of the language to successfully transpose a word or phrase from one context to another could be appreciated for those factors alone, transforming what would otherwise be a mundane comment into an example of wit:

> While in NS discourse, the satisfactoriness of talk typically lies in its nonroutine nature, its particular wittiness and harmoniousness, which makes it the achievement of *somes* rather than *anys*, in NNS discourse, even the routine may be problematic, with the result that its

> successful bringing-off can appear a noteworthy accomplishment that
> provides grounds for mutual satisfaction. (Aston, 1993: 239)

Finally, the very limitation on the linguistic resources accessible to NNSs means that locally emergent expressions (Tannen, 1989: 45) which, among native speakers would not usually outlive the conversation in which they first appeared, are more likely to become part of the group's active repertoire of humorous reference points. In other words, the comparative narrowness of associations that a word or phrase may have for the learner is likely to make its recontextualisation that much more significant, evoking a previous context of use. In such circumstances, it is a metonym for the whole shared experience, a figurative expression of common ground.

Having considered the way in which language carries with it flavours of its previous contextualised uses and how the recontextualisation of language to new contexts can trigger humour, we now look at the ways in which my research participants recontextualise previously encountered language for their own communicative and comedic ends.

5.3 Evidence of recontextualisation for playful purposes

5.3.1 Taking ownership of learnt language through recontextualisation

Learning the lexis of a TL is a challenge. Indeed, it is a life-long task even for a native speaker. This is something most learners are aware of and, in my experience as a BizLang trainer, the majority of course participants would

cite the need to extend their knowledge and use of vocabulary as an objective when enrolling on a course.

So, being able to incorporate new words and phrases into one's active repertoire is a significant moment for the language learner. During the morning when Group B were recorded, the meaning of the word 'impressive' becomes a subject for debate among the participants. Only one of their number, Takeshi, feels confident of its meaning when it first comes up for discussion. He gives the example of the painting of Monet's *Water Lilies* which he had seen in Paris as something which he found 'impressive'. The group's teacher, Ray, then asks the rest of the group for examples of things that they had found impressive during their stay in London. At first, they complain about the rain which is 'bad impressive', but then Viktor mentions something which has left a more favourable impression on him:

EPISODE 9: YESTERDAY PUBS

Viktor: but pubs (2)

Andrei: @@[@*

Viktor: [yest*erday pubs (4) very good (1)

Andrei: yes (1)

Viktor: good [impressive*

Andrei: [good* [impressive*

Ray: [was very* [impressive*

Viktor: [was* very impressive (.)

Ray: good was very impressive (.) yesterday's pub was [very impressive*

Viktor: [was very* impressive (1)

Thom: ((*gives thumbs up*)) <@ I agree with you >

Ray attempts to get the learners to de-couple the word 'impressive' from Takeshi's anecdote and use it to refer to another context. As mentioned previously, without such de-coupling and re-use, no learning can be evidenced. Viktor's mention of pubs is significant. An inkling of the group's professed relationship with alcohol has already been seen in EPISODE 2 (Section 4.4). On that occasion, Viktor's miming of raising a glass of champagne prompts a discussion amongst its members of the group's drinking habits. It is clear that the collective enterprise of going to the pub forms an important part of its members' sense of shared identity. This doesn't necessarily extend to all its members. Ray told me that Takeshi did not always join the others in the evening. Neither, from the evidence of the data, does he play as much as they do. Interestingly, when Viktor mentions yesterday's pub (or it may indeed be 'pubs' - whether the group made a night of it is unclear), Andrei immediately backs him up. This is significant, not only because he and Thomas reinforce the group's collective identity, but also because Viktor employs the newly learnt piece of lexis in order to do so, albeit with a non-standard intensifier 'good'. This provides clear evidence of a learner taking possession of an element of the TL and using it for his own ends.

Although the exchanges in EPISODE 9 produce a smiling recognition in the participants, they do not produce guffaws of laughter. Maybe this is because the word 'impressive' has little associative purchase for the learners. However, this episode does have a retrospective significance. The word 'impressive' features later the same morning after a coffee break when the group is undertaking another classroom activity. As the learners are

preparing for a simulated meeting, they are given a picture of a dilapidated

hotel (this building is at the centre of the discussion they are about to have).

A couple of the students pass comment on this picture as they look at it:

EPISODE 10: NOT IMPRESSIVE

Thom: typical old English build[ing*

Ray: [@*@ (2)

Viktor: [not* =

Thom: [(so)* (yes) (.) very old (1)

Viktor: = impressive (1)

Ray: <@ not impressive> (.)

Viktor: yes (2)

Ray: ((*slaps hand on desk in appreciation*))

Viktor: not impressive (.)

Ray: bravo bravo (.) I like it (.) very good

Viktor negates the adjective which he had learnt earlier and this elicits a

laugh and a compliment from Ray. There seems to be an appreciation of the

effort and mental dexterity needed for a learner of the language to

successfully transpose a word from one context to another. The fact that the

participants are in a phase of the day which is clearly different from that in

which 'impressive' was first encountered makes this a particularly noteworthy

use of the word. This celebration of what appears to be something fairly

mundane from an onlooker's perspective highlights how the very act of

recontextualisation can be seen as wit, especially at the lower proficiency

levels. Few would argue that one of the ways in which a teacher can

encourage learning is by acknowledging evidence of it. However, the

laughter that accompanies Ray's positive words signals an appreciation that

can, to some degree, explain other moments where recontextualisation gives rise to laughter from teacher and students alike. Nevertheless, explaining accompanying laughter as solely an appreciation of a speaker's ability to use new language appropriately seems inadequate. After all, the students do not laugh every time that one of their number successfully uses a learnt word or phrase and it is perhaps significant that the laughter in EPISODE 10 mainly comes from the teacher. Other exchanges provide further evidence of how the learners derive amusement from each other's recycling of learnt language. For instance, being able to use learnt language as a means of evoking shared experience is a clear indicator that the words have been stamped with the speaker's own intentions.

5.3.2 Summoning shared experiences through associated language

As mentioned on various occasions, the participants on a BizLang course cannot assume that they share cultural reference points. As a result, amongst the few allusions which they can safely expect to be successful are those to experiences they have had together. In the previous chapter, the playful blending of frames has already been remarked upon. In the exchanges highlighted below, the learners evoke previous experiences by using language associated with them. One such occasion occurs in Group A's lively negotiation. In order to make sense of the exchange below, it needs to be understood that, prior to the role-play, the group had practised comparative forms and these had been reinforced in the language laboratory using the examples of different makes of car. Antoine cleverly draws on this

shared experience at a moment in the negotiation where the suppliers' team

(of which he is one) have made a price offer which the customers have

rejected as too high. Nevertheless, Antoine remains undeterred:

EPISODE 11: YOU WANT COMPARE A VOLVO WITH A FERRARI?

Ant: your price on the other price of other car [is different*

Dieter: [so* so you will say us you want [the*

Ant: [you*

         want compare a Volvo with a Ferrari? =

Others: = @[@*@@

Dieter: [no* so you will us say that we have (1) you will take us the same price as last

         year

Antoine triggers laughter and defuses a rather tense situation by cleverly

evoking the previous laboratory drill while simultaneously alluding to the

quality of his company's product (presumably, he is implicitly likening it to the

prestigious Ferrari). Of course, it is significant that an outsider hearing the

interaction for the first time would find it puzzling, not because the language

used is incorrect - although there is a slight grammatical error - but because

of the reference to a previously shared learning experience. The wit of

Antoine's utterance lies in its ability to evoke the previously shared context

through the reproduction of a phrase which, nevertheless, remains

congruous to the current communicative moment. It is also interesting that

Antoine does not use a phrase which the learners had to repeat in the

laboratory. Rather, he attempts to reproduce the trainer's cue for the

language drill. He, therefore, consciously voices the figure of authority and,

as in previously analysed exchanges, gently subverts that authority in the

process. The reaction of collective laughter can be explained, at least in part, by the purchase that the recontextualised phrase has for the learners. The laboratory session is still fresh in their minds and probably so is the grammar session that preceded it. This fresh association, coupled with the phrase's use by Antoine in a new and unexpected context, produces amusement. It is also noteworthy that the words, like many recontextualisations featured in this chapter, already have the potential to be entextualised - rendered extractable from their original context - by the teacher providing them as a readily reusable chunk of language. In this case they were was originally realised as a laboratory cue. In other cases, the recontextualisations are of phrases which the teacher had explicitly taught as useful language for the learners to master.

Another moment where the group's shared learning experiences are evoked occurs some ten minutes after the episode above. As the negotiation continues, the customers (Koji and Dieter) drop the bombshell that they are developing their own in-house product which, on the face of it, suggests that they are not tied to their suppliers (Antoine and Mario). This prompts some interesting exchanges which, to an outsider are unremarkable. However, to the participants, they are pregnant with added meaning:

EPISODE 12: GOOD QUESTION

Dieter: I [call* tomorrow with the (.) I call tomorrow with [the*

Mario: [how*   [how* long does it take to (.) to

        be (1) [to*=

Ant: [(xxx)*

Mario: =to produce ourself-yourself?

Dieter: p-pardon?

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Mario:          ho[w*
Ant:              [how* long time to produce (1) @@ do you need yourself? =
Mario:     = how long =
Dieter:     = oh it's very quickly very quickly (.)
Koji:     good question (.)
All:     @@@@
```

In fact, the group's trainer, Harriet, informed me that they had been practising questions about duration earlier that day. Laughter is precipitated by Antoine's efforts to get the form right. Koji's reply - "good question" - neatly refers to both the form of Antoine's question and to the negotiation context itself (in fact, in their pre-negotiation preparation, Dieter and Koji had realised that they didn't have enough time to develop their own product before their current agreement with the suppliers ran out, thus the latter's response is an acknowledgement of the pertinence of Antoine's enquiry). It could be argued here, rather as with Antoine's voicing of the trainer's laboratory cue in the previous episode, that Koji is assuming the mantle of authority by taking on the role of trainer in giving praise to the linguistic efforts of his fellow learner. After all, teachers typically give their students encouraging back-channelling feedback when the latter produce target words and phrases. So, as seen with the data in Section 4.4, the learner manages to blend the two frames of the simulation and the lesson by producing a phrase which simultaneously refers to and can be applied to both.

In the last two analysed episodes, voicing is used as a means of blending frames and evoking shared experience. It is this phenomenon which is focussed on in more detail in the next section, where language which has

been taught as having a particular communicative intention is infused with the speaker's own meanings, triggering irony and humour.

5.3.3 Subverting learnt language for the speaker's own intentions

It has already been noted (Section 2.4) that at the heart of Bakhtin's account of the nature of language is the idea that it is forever being recycled and reshaped by use. He sees all language use as involving the voicing of previous speakers (1984a: 193). When the speaker introduces a semantic intention which is opposed to that of the original, then he characterises this as vari-directional double-voicing. Such a phenomenon can be seen when someone quotes another in an ironic way, that is, there is a contrast between the 'dictum' (what is said) and the 'implicatum' (what is meant) (Kotthoff, 2003). The vari-directional nature of the utterance is often signalled through tone of voice or other cues. This concept seems to relate closely to Goffman's (1981) footing, the alignment that a speaker takes up in relation to the words that he or she utters.

The simulated negotiation featured in the last two analysed episodes contains a couple of moments which are noteworthy for vari-directional double-voicing. During a particularly heated series of exchanges between Dieter and the representatives of the other party, Antoine and Mario, Koji interjects:

EPISODE 13: LET'S SUM UP

Dieter: before we give a price (1) we will (.) show you a picture from the situation
        [from Koenig*

Mario: [another picture?*=

Ant: = another picture no =

Dieter: = please can you let me speak [xxx*

Ant: [you know you need a picture to speak about the
        price? (1)

Mario: speak the price [and then talk about the picture*

Ant: [@@@* (.)

Dieter: OK um (.) we have no problem to finish the er [conversation*

Ant: [it's not to* it's not to finish =

Koji: = let's sum up =

All: = @@@

The group has grown somewhat tired of Dieter's loquaciousness, and the simulated meeting provides Mario and Antoine with the cover they need to to vent their feelings about this. Koji, Dieter's partner in the role-play, finds a way to defend him by cleverly utilising a phrase explicitly taught as a means of structuring and clarifying one's message in the feedback after a previous simulated meeting. The contrast between this taught function and its use as a way of shutting up the other party in the negotiation seems to provide the source of the humour which everyone appreciates. Conveying a meaning which is opposed to that for which it was originally taught can also be seen moments earlier when Mario interrupts Dieter:

EPISODE 14: SORRY, MAY I STOP YOU FOR A MOMENT

Dieter: and you didn't can lost (1) and you didn't can (last) (.)

Mario: sorry (.) may I-may I stop you (.) for a moment? (.)

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Dieter:  [yes*
All:     [@*@@@
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Mario's contribution produces seemingly disproportionate laughter from everyone in the room. Again, the humour seems to lie in the contrast between Mario's real meaning and the phrase used. 'Sorry, may I stop you for a moment?' had been taught as a 'polite' form of taking the floor in part of the same feedback package with 'let's sum up' (see EPISODE 13). The humour seems to come from the contrast between the surface meaning of the phrase - the dictum - and what is really meant - the implicatum. Interestingly, in neither case is the irony signalled clearly by any shift in intonation, although, in this case, Mario subtly enhances the comedy with a brief pause before he says 'for a moment'. Nevertheless, as Kotthoff (2003: 1389) points out, the cues to signal irony can be purely contextual. Both these extracts show the learners using language ironically. These examples are not so different from the way in which a native speaker might take an overtly 'polite' phrase such as 'Can you possibly see your way clear to...?', associated with a particularly delicate request as a means of asking an everyday favour such as passing the salt. In both the episodes, the gap between what is said and what is meant is simultaneously the source of the ironic humour and the potential defence against any riposte to it, as the speaker could point to the dictum of the phrases and refute their implicatum. What is also noteworthy is the fact that this ironic flavour allows the learners to take ownership of the recontextualised language. Rather like Viktor using the words of the recorded dialogue for his own ends (see EPISODE 2), both

Koji and Mario break free of the role of mere animators and become authors of the words they utter.

An interesting example of the process in action whereby a group takes charge of the meaning of a particular phrase and uses it to evoke a shared experience whilst also teasing one of its members can be seen at the beginning of Group B's training day when they are revising language from earlier in the week. Their teacher, Ray, has been trying to elicit the phrase 'miss the target' which the group had first encountered a couple of days previously. In the original context they had been discussing graphs which they had produced pertaining to their jobs:

EPISODE 15: YESTERDAY YOU MISS

Mich: the target? =

Ray: = hit the target? (.)

Andrei: ((*whistles*)) =

Mich: = errr (.) miss the target (.)

Ray: yeay (.) bravo well done (.) miss the target good (.)

Viktor: ((*puts his hand on Michele's arm*)) yesterday you miss (.)

Andrei: mmm-hmm (.)

Mich: miss the target? =

Andrei: = yeah you promise- you promised a drink everybody (1)

Ray: aa[hh yes*

Andrei: [remember yeah* ((*whistles*)) (.)

Mich: err (.)

Ray: <@ and? > (1)

Mich: on lunch (.) [very good lunch*

Ray: [at at lunch* (.)

Andrei: imagine (.) not-not only to drink <@ and feed > =

Others: = [@@*@@

Mich: [no sorry*

Viktor: ((*over continuing laughter*)) I don't [understand*

Mich: [(I don't* understand) (1)

Andrei: popularity (2) ((*points at M*)) not only to drink (1) and plus to feed ((*gestures*
         eating)) (2) feed (.)

Ray: feed? (.)

Thom: ((*also simulates* eating)) mangiare (.)

Mich: plus (2) I-I promised (.) one drink (.) for [each person*

Ray: [yeah yeah yeah* this is a single [drink*

Mich: [a single*
         drink for each person (.) if you want (.) table dance (.) lunch(.) dinner (1)

Others: @@[@@*

Mich: [well (2) <@ I'm stupid*> (.)

Ray: we didn't- we didn't win the lottery (.) come on (.) OK =

Others: = @@@@

Michele missed the target the day before by not standing his round at the

pub. Obviously, the above exchange would be puzzling to an outsider for a

couple of reasons. Firstly, the phrase 'miss the target' is, by native

standards, semantically misapplied. It is extended to encompass a context

(the pub) with which it is not usually associated (except perhaps when

playing darts!). Here can be seen an example of overextension, much as a

child might overextend a meaning when learning a first language. However,

the phrase is, within the group, pragmatically successful: Andrei immediately

follows up Viktor's opening and everyone seems to understand what he is

referring to (except, briefly, Michele himself). Secondly, an outsider would not know about the original context to which the group alludes. Much of the pleasure of the moment seems to derive from this reference to a shared experience. It would not be surprising if this episode were discussed again at some later stage (maybe at the next pub visit) and become part of the group's active repertoire of reference points.

The importance of the allusion to shared experience is affirmed by BizLang colleagues who viewed these exchanges. One of them, Ruby, commented:

> "What struck us on watching the group dynamics and the laughter in the first situation, it was shared experience. The group was able to refer back to shared experience." (Appendix 1)

The episode shows how a learnt phrase is employed for the group's own social ends. 'Miss the target' had been learnt in the serious-minded context of a discussion of business trends. The group recontextualise it and imbue it with their own intentions, thus reframing, indeed hijacking, an exchange which is originally about revising job-related vocabulary as a teasing reprimand to one of their number about his social obligations.

Another noteworthy element of the recontextualisation is that it alters the structure of talk here. These exchanges take place in a revision phase of the class. As such, the opening exchanges follow the 'classic' IRF structure of Sinclair and Coulthard's (1975) model. Ray asks Michele a question (Initiation). After an initial check, Michele answers (Response) and then Ray provides him with feedback (Follow up). This structure is then disrupted by Viktor's 'Yesterday you miss' which is quickly taken up by Andrei: 'You

promise you promised a drink...'. This restructuring of the talk can be seen as a subversion of the power dynamic in the group, albeit sanctioned by the teacher who encourages the group to develop their anecdote by prompting with an 'And?' when Michele's initial promise to the group is first mentioned.

5.3.4 Using language associated with the trainer

Voicing of the trainer has already been witnessed as a means of fusing the simulated frame with the outer frame of the language lesson (see EPISODE 11 and EPISODE 12). There are other moments outside simulated role-plays where the learners take on the voice of the trainer. Within the classroom setting itself, authority is typically embodied in the figure of the teacher. Within the framework of the lesson, the person in this role has, within reason, the power to tell the students what to do, at least with regard to the objective of improving their second language skills. Of course, the teacher's authority does not go unquestioned in every context (e.g. Rampton, 2006a), but the BizLang classroom is rarely one that witnesses real rebellion. However, this does not mean that it is one which is immune to forms of power play between teacher and learners and among the learners themselves. Assuming the role of teacher is one means the learners have of claiming power, however fleetingly and symbolically. Just such an episode can be found in the phase of Group B's lesson of which EPISODE 2 forms a part. The group are repeating from a recording that provides some of the background to a meeting in which they will participate:

EPISODE 16: REPEAT!

Ray: ok Takeshi (.) here we are (2)

TAPE: ((*Knock, knock*)) *ladies and gentlemen* (.)

Andrei: ((*knocks on table*)) @@@ repeat (2)

Tak:　　 ((*knocks on table*)) ladies and gentlemen =

Others: = @@@@

Figure 6 'Repeat'

Andrei takes the procedure, now familiar to the group, whereby the trainer asks the students to repeat what they hear on a recording, and turns it into an absurdity. He firstly adopts the role of unthinking student, simply repeating what he hears. However, in this case, he does not repeat a particular word or phrase but imitates the knocking sound from the recording. This, of course, has no merit in terms of helping with his language acquisition. After knocking on the table, he immediately changes footing and assumes the role of the group's trainer, asking his colleagues to repeat and, in so doing, passes judgement on the usefulness of the exercise itself. He would probably deny that he had any such intention. However, part of the fun of the episode is its subversive dimension, however ritualistic that might be. It is noteworthy that Takeshi, the most reserved and least playful of the group on the evidence of the collected data, enthusiastically joins in by rapping on the table. As a

BizLang trainer, I have used the particular pre-meeting dialogue that features here on a number of occasions and Andrei's exhortation to repeat is not the first time, in my experience, that a student has reacted as he does, suggesting that such behaviour is not uncommon.

Another moment where one of the learners mouths words which are associated with the group's trainer, happens in the same group. It is later on the morning of the listening exercise, and the group members are deciding who will chair a simulated meeting for which they have been preparing. There is a general reluctance to take on the responsibility that chairing entails:

```
EPISODE 17: TAKE ONE AND PASS THEM ON
Ray:    so (1) whose turn to chair the meeting (3) whose turn (1) you were yesterday in  (2)
        who's next (.) who's next (.)
Andrei: Viktor (2)
Viktor: mm? (.) no (1)
Andrei: yes (1)
Viktor: Takeshi (2)
Andrei: Takeshi no (.) Michele (.) Michele no (.) Andrei (.) Andrei no (x) @@ =
Ray:    = and roll around round two (.)
Mich:   take one and pass them on (1)
Viktor: <@ take one and pass them on > =
Others: = @@@
```

At first glance, Michele's last contribution makes no sense yet is appreciated by the others because it evokes something that their teacher, Ray, had said regularly over the week when passing out papers to the group. It could represent another example of overextension (see EPISODE 15), where the

meaning of the phrase has been stretched beyond its usual semantic boundaries. It seems that Michele may well have wanted to convey the idea of passing the buck, although this is not recoverable from the data alone. However, like the previous example, it shows that there is a strong impulse to re-use language and test out the limits of its meanings. Michele's utterance carries with it associations with its past uses, a dialogical dimension which has an important social function as it produces a shared laugh of recognition amongst those present even though they may not have a secure grasp of its semantic meaning.

A further example of a learner assuming the trainer's role is taken from Group C. It is the beginning of the day and Bilel and Joseph are explaining to Harriet and David how, on the previous evening, they had come to miss the London gig of their fellow group member, Sandro, a keen musician. The narrative has become recriminatory in nature, with Joseph and Bilel blaming each other for being late for Sandro's performance. However, the exchanges are never less than good humoured. In this excerpt, they have just talked about their visit to the British Museum which preceded their attempt to get to Sandro's gig. After the museum, Joseph called his wife:

EPISODE 18: YOU SHOULD

Joseph: after the British Museum I call her (.) and say maybe I-I will call you later (1) maybe
       I will go to see Sandro (1)

Bilel: ((*points at Joseph*)) you spoke with your wife in French (.) I hear you (2)

Joseph: ((*shrugs shoulders*)) <@ yeah > =

Bilel: ((*continues to point*))= I heard you (.) you should (1)

Joseph: ((*smiles*)) you should =

Bilel: = you should =

Joseph: = [speak*

Bilel: [speak* with your wife in English

Figure 7 You should

Here, Bilel recontextualises a structure that the group had practised the day before. The modal form 'you should..' had been used to generate various examples of commands and strong advice. Bilel takes on the role of the authority figure by assuming that of the teacher and using the role for his own ends. In the BizLang context, as previously mentioned, the ''English only' rule is one of the few that is explicitly reinforced with students during their stay. Perhaps because it is difficult for him to modify his accent or voice quality in English, Bilel accompanies his words with finger wagging, lending the episode a pantomimic quality which signals that it is humorously keyed and should not be taken too seriously. Joseph reacts in the light-hearted spirit in which it was meant and, despite being the object of the rebuke, smiles and prompts Bilel with the correct form. Both students take clear pleasure in the process of recontextualising language from the previous day's lesson. Interestingly, Bilel asserts power through a teacher-student role reversal whereby he reinforces institutional power while, at the same time,

asserting his own power within the group. Humour allows him to do this in a way which would not otherwise be possible. It is reminiscent of Dieter's rebuke to Antoine when arriving late for his simulated meeting (see EPISODE 7) and is carnivalesque in nature (Bakhtin, 1984b: 112-3).

As has been discussed previously (see Section 2.5.4), the ambiguity that play allows means that Bilel's assertion of power does not really threaten the authority of the teacher. Indeed, in this case, it could be said to be reinforcing it. In fact, there are no moments in the data which suggest any serious bid to usurp the institutional power embodied in the teacher's role. In part, this may be because the power dynamic in an organisation like BizLang is rather different from that in the state sector such as the schools in which Rampton (e.g. 1999; 2006b) researches. In the latter, it is clear that real power is manifested in the educational institution and its staff. The children are subject to it and, however much they might undermine or demoralise its representatives, they can never completely overthrow its power over them. In BizLang, on the other hand, who holds power is a more open to question. Although the staff generally dictate the learning agenda, the students are also the organisation's clients, retaining the prerogative to go elsewhere if they are not happy with the service provided.

5.3.5 Using language associated with a fellow learner

Evidence of the learners voicing their fellow group members is rare in the data. This is understandable as the face threat in so doing is considerable. The instances involving voicing the trainer have a less personal element to them: the voicing is more about uttering words associated with the role

rather than the person who, at any given moment, is fulfilling that role. There is no such generalisable element to voicing one's fellow learners. However, there is some evidence of it in the data. When Harriet signals a coffee break while teaching Group C, the following exchanges occur:

EPISODE 19: YOU SHOULDN'T BE TIRED

Harr: right so (2) what do I want to say about this (.) we're going to have a coffee break
        (1) quite soon (.)

Bilel: why? (.)

Harr: why (.) because we need a break *I* need a break (xxx) I need a break (.)

Bilel: <@ I can understand > (.)

Harr: thank you (.) we will have a coffee break [soon*

Joseph: [<@ why* are you tired > (1)

Harr: @@@ (.) what did you ask me (1)

Joseph: <@ y- yesterday you asked to I (.) I'm tired to Sandro (.) yeah? > (1)

Harr: I? (.)

Joseph: I'm tired (.)

Harr: I am tired (.) [uh-huh?*

Joreph: [I'm tired* (.) <@ why are you tired > (2)

Sandro: you shouldn't (.)

Joseph: <@ ah you shouldn't be tired > (.)

All: @@@[@*

Joseph: [< @ you shouldn't* be tired > (.)

David: who said that (1)

Harr: (xxx) we were practising should as a form of advice (.)

David: <@ [OK* >

Harr: [I was*expecting something like you should- you should go to bed (2) or
        something like that but I was told you [shouldn't be tired*

Joseph: [<@ you shouldn't* be tired > =

Harr: = all right

Here we have a clear evocation of a previous learning experience that the group had had together. Joseph is attempting to recreate a moment from the previous day's lesson where Sandro had not made a mistake with the structure of the target phrase but had misapplied it in terms of its semantic content.[39] At first, Harriet does not catch on to Joseph's reference. However, he persists and, significantly, the group collaboratively recreate the moment with the help of their teacher's promptings. Significantly, Sandro, despite being the one to have originally made the mistake, assists in this. The group derive pleasure from the absurdity of the directive. The face threat seems to be diminished by the collaborative nature of the re-creation, something which seems to signal that any of the learners could have made the mistake which Joseph voices. The remarks of Geraint, a BizLang colleague, point to both the everyday nature of such play on language mistakes and the social motivations behind it:

> "And so she [Harriet, the trainer] goes 'I'm tired' and one of them says 'well you shouldn't be tired' you know and then a recognition from the group that it was an attempt to use it and whether or not it was wordplay or a mistake, there's a face-saving moment where it's set up as a joke and that's again that's something that I think we see a lot of." (Appendix 3)

By voicing Sandro's mistake, Joseph has provided the group with a shared reference point which has the potential to be referred to again at a later

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[39] Experience tells me that students become so focussed on the structural element during drilling that they lose sight of the semantic content of their utterances. This can even apply to teachers who will occasionally find themselves prompting students to repeat nonsensical phrases.

stage. Errors as a source of HLP come to prominence in the analysis of the pair of learners studied over two days of their course in Chapter 7.

5.3.6 Evoking assumed shared knowledge through associated language

It has already been seen how the learners assume that they share schemata for particular situations and events, even when they have not experienced those situations and events together. Dieter's utterance 'Do you want a glass of champagne?' (EPISODE 1) only works as a dual reference to the simulated frame and classroom frame that he is simultaneously operating within, if his fellow group members understand that successful negotiations are sometimes sealed with a drink. Similarly, his exclamation of 'hands up!' as he points at his adversaries (EPISODE 8) is only successful as a means of releasing tension because his interlocutors grasp that the phrase is intimately connected to and metonymically stands for a children's game of Cowboys and Indians or Cops and Robbers.

Another episode, again involving Dieter, exemplifies the impulse to find common ground by making a specific intertextual reference which he presumes the others will understand. At one point in the simulated negotiation in which he is taking part, he sums up the dynamic of the meeting as he sees it:

EPISODE 20: SAME PROCEDURE

Dieter: and so I think it is a normal situation (.) you want the highest price and we want the
(.) smallest price it's a normal thing (2) it's (a thing) every year (.) same procedure
as every year

Here, he quotes from a TV sketch that, despite being in English, is well known in the German-speaking world and is shown annually during the Christmas and New Year holidays on the networks there.[40] The sketch features the catchphrase 'the same procedure as every year' and it is to this that Dieter refers (something he confirmed to me in the coffee break later). Needless to say, this goes unrecognised by the other group members at the time. Indeed, Harriet, the BizLang colleague who viewed some of my raw data, was also unaware of it. This is noteworthy because the speaker uses a phrase which is relevant to the communicative needs of the moment in the simulated frame. At the same time, he attempts to activate another potential framework to which the group could refer and possibly play with by using an associated phrase to metonymically stand for the TV sketch. However, this recontextualisation has no purchase for the other students because it holds no resonances for them. As a result, the moment passes unnoticed by everybody except me. My BizLang colleague, Toby remarked on listening to Dieter's words:

> "There was embarrassment wasn't there when the German tried to make a joke that had no cultural reference for anybody else at all and there was a long... pause" (Appendix 2)

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[40] *Dinner for One* was first broadcast on German TV in 1963 and featured the English actors, Freddie Frinton and Mary Warden. When I first joined BizLang, I had no idea what my German students were talking about when they referred to it. Perhaps because it is in English, a lot of Germans seem to think that it is universally recognised. Of course, had I not known about the broadcast, Dieter's words would have appeared unremarkable. Thus, the students may well make a number of culturally-specific references which go unnoticed.

Although the pause is not particularly long, there is a noticeable silence where it could be hypothesised that Dieter is waiting for a reaction from the other group members that does not materialise.

5.3.7 The inherent joys of recontextualisation

This chapter has looked at the ways in which learners take possession of learnt language by using it to evoke shared experiences or as a vehicle for their own particular meanings and intentions. However, there is another motivation which is more difficult to pinpoint but which the following episodes give an inkling of: the pleasure that lies in the novelty of using the TL. In previous discussion (Section 2.6), it has been noted how the second language learner has a position akin to that of a child learning its first language where its phonetic and semantic properties have not yet lost their novel sheen. A fellow BizLang colleague, Kate, explains it thus after looking at some of my data:

> "If I had learnt a phrase in Chinese and I was pleased I got that, I would be using it wherever I wanted on every occasion. Isn't that what they're doing? They find that funny whether it is the right situation or not. It's the joy of the sentence." (Appendix 3)

This 'joy in the sentence' can be seen when Group C is preparing for a role-play and Harriet, their trainer, reminds them of some language which they had previously learnt and which may help them to structure their ideas for the forthcoming simulation:

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EPISODE 21: LET'S SLOW DOWN. IT'S FOR ME.

Harr:      before you start (2)

Bilel:      OK (1)

Harr:      what was the language we talked about with the feedback yesterday(.)

           do you remember? (2)

Sandro: ss[sh*h-

Joseph:     [st*=

Bilel:     = steering language (.)

Harr:      steering language good good (.) so phrases like (.)

Bilel:     ((simulates steering a car)) toot (1)

Harr:      phrases like (.)

Bilel:     phrases like we're running out of time (1) I like this one =

All:       = @@@

Harr:      <@ you like this one yes yes > we need to (.)

Bilel:     move faster move faster =

Harr:      = OK (.) we need to speed up or we need to [move on*

Bilel:                                              [move* faster (1)

Harr:      ((indicates B)) or he's going too quickly (.) what do you want to [say to him*

Bilel:                                                              [quickly* let's slow

           down =

Harr:      = @@[@*

Bilel:        [let's* slow down (.) it's for me =

Joseph:  = @@@ =

Harr:      = all right (.) and Joseph (.) you were needing to interrupt yesterday and you

           couldn't find the words (.) what could you say if you want to jump in (.) ah I've just

           said [it*

Joseph:     [@*@@ =

Harr:      = so can I can [I*

Joseph:              [ju*- can I jump in
```

There is a clear pleasure in recalling the language from the day before

although it is only recontextualised as a language-revision exercise here and

so is somewhat divorced from its communicative function. However, it is also an opportunity for Bilel to satirise himself. He has a growing reputation within the group for being impatient and for speaking too fast. His accompanying remarks to 'we're running out of time' and 'Let's slow down' simultaneously take ownership of the terms and reinforce this in-group identity that he has. Furthermore, it is noteworthy that Harriet contributes to this process by using the example of Bilel to elicit the phrase 'let's slow down' which the student himself then supplies. This throws light on the process by which individuals' identities are shaped, at least in part, by the groups that they inhabit. On the rare occasions where I have taught a student in sequential courses, it is interesting to note how their behaviour and thus their identity are subtly modified by the experience of being in different groups.

A note of caution should be sounded here. The above exchanges seem to indicate a particular phenomenon with regard to identity projection in another language. Bilel's manic simulation of driving a car is reminiscent of the behaviour of the eponymous hero of A.A. Milne's *Toad of Toad Hall.* Because of limited resources, some students seem to project what Harder (1980) calls 'a reduced personality' where their identities in the second language are rather like pastiches of the selves that they are able to negotiate in their native tongues.

A further example from the same group and, again, primarily involving Bilel reveals how one of the motivations for recontextualising language is comedic in nature. The day before the exchange below, they had been taught various set phrases following a role-play. These phrases were given to them to help

them to structure and control proceedings. The group is preparing another role-play where they will present a proposal to a client. They have been talking for some minutes about the arguments that they will use to promote the advantages of their proposal. Bilel is impatient to press on and draws on the phrases they had learnt in order to do so:

EPISODE 22: I KNOW I JOKE

Bilel: it's very er (.) we don't have noise =

Joseph: = mm*[mm*

Sandro: [yeah* =

Bilel: = it's- it's not noisy (2) OK? (.)

Sandro: so (.)

Bilel: let's go? =

Sandro: = t-to make [erm*

Bilel: [I think* we're running out of time (.)

Others: @@[@*

Bilel: [<@ we're* going round in circles > (.)

Joseph: no (.)

Bilel: (xxx) I know (.) [I joke*

Sandro: [we have* also to (.) divide the- our (1) presentation

Bilel is in a hurry to get on with the task and he uses the phrase 'we're running out of time' appropriately. It is noteworthy that his usage triggers laughter. This encourages him to use another of the phrases that they had been taught. Interestingly, Joseph challenges the use of the second phrase as he deems it inappropriate – they are not going round in circles. Tellingly, Bilel's pragmatic failure at this point forces him to openly admit that he is only joking. This exchange reveals that his motivation for recontextualising the learnt language is, at least in part, a desire to amuse his listeners. Of the

phenomenon of drawing on learnt language, my BizLang colleague Geraint
said:

> "The collective consciousness of using language that they've been
> drilled on, that moment in the first two syllables of it where people
> recognise it and go 'aah' and its funny because they know it's not
> natural to them and they're using drilled language" (Appendix 3)

5.3.8 Playing with the semantic properties of the language

The last two chapters have revealed the ways in which learners use the
resources available to them. They creatively blend the frames that the
language classroom provides. They also use learnt language to evoke
shared experiences. However, as posited at the beginning of the thesis, the
kinds of wordplay which NSs sometimes indulge in (e.g. Carter, 2004;
Chiaro, 1992; Crystal, 1998; Holmes, 2007) is not much in evidence.
Figurative play among the research participants tends to be metonymic in
nature, where a word or phrase stands for a previous, usually shared,
experience. Even so, there is some evidence of play with the literal and
metaphorical meanings of words and it is to these that the discussion now
turns.

In the following example, Takeshi from group A has just been talking about
something which he has found 'impressive' in a recent visit to Paris. Under
the teacher's prompting, he checks whether the others have understood
what he has been saying:

EPISODE 23: I'M ON THE LEFT OF YOU

Tak: thinking (2) ((*points to head*)) impression ((*looks at others*)) (4)

Thom: the first impression(.)

Ray: are you with me? (.)

Tak: are you with me? (2)

Andrei: yeah yeah (.) I'm on the left of you (.) Michele on the right of you (.) [we're here*=

Viktor: [@@@*

Andrei: = don't worry (2)

Ray: joker on the left (.)

Others: @@@@

Here, Andrei plays with the literal and metaphorical meanings of Takeshi's question. Measured in terms of native-speaker wit, this is a rather laboured pun. However, in the context of his and the group's language level, it is an impressive piece of wordplay although it produces little laughter until the teacher's contribution. Indeed, a couple of colleagues who witnessed the exchanges, interpreted Andrei's words as hurtful to Takeshi. Robert commented "Laughter is nervous laughter by the others. Crushed... He crossed the line" while another, Ruby, remarked with regard to this exchange:

> "What hit me particularly was the just very very subtle relationship between laughter and cruelty". (Appendix 2)

Both Ray's contribution and the group's reaction to it are also noteworthy here. Firstly, 'joker on the left' is an intertextual reference to a song from the early 1970s.[41] The fact that the teacher uses it here shows that the impulse

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[41] The words are a slightly inaccurate quotation from a song called 'Stuck in the middle with you' which was a hit for Stealers Wheel in 1972. The song also features in Quentin Tarantino's film,

to join in with play is a strong one for many people. In fact, it is unlikely that all those who laughed would have understood the allusion. However, they still laughed. In part, they might have enjoyed the surface meaning of his words but the laughter was probably also indicative of one of its social functions – to please its receiver. Indeed, evidence elsewhere (Bell, 2007a), suggests a certain tolerance of attempts at humour among NSs and NNSs where the social benefits of laughter can override any actual understanding of humorous language play.

Interestingly, the second example of clear wordplay involves the very same clarification phrase 'I'm with/not with you'. Group C are preparing for a simulated meeting which involves allocating equipment and staff to new offices. At the beginning, they are ascertaining how much equipment and how many staff they have:

EPISODE 24: WITHOUT

Bilel: twenty-three people (.) we have twenty-three people (.)

Sandro: no (.)

Bilel: wha? (3) what (2)

Joseph: you have two salemen (.) two secretaries (.) two technical [assistants*

Sandro: [not twenty*-three (.)

Bilel: how much (.)

Joseph: one two three (1) four five (4) seven =

Sandro: = twelve =

Joseph: = nine =

Bilel: = twelve OK (1)

Joseph: twelve yes twelve (.)

Bilel: I check only if you're with me or [not*

Reservoir Dogs, to accompany a famous torture scene. The lyrics are actually 'Clowns to the left of me, jokers to the right. Here I am, stuck in the middle with you.'

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Joseph:                              [@*@@ without (.)

Bilel:    <@ without (.) OK >
```

Bilel initially gets some of the information wrong. However, he covers himself by pretending that his mistake was in fact a strategy to check on the others' understanding. In doing this, he uses the phrase '..if you're with me or not'. Joseph then plays between the idiomatic/metaphorical meaning and the literal meaning to create an absurd response. Significantly, Bilel repeats it. On seeing this, my colleague, Geraint, said:

> "if a very linguistically adept and deft native speaker did that, if a kind
> of Mick Smith[42] said that, we'd all kind of arch our eyebrows and go
> 'clever bit of word play, clever bit of wordplay, Mick'. But from a D level
> from a D level non-native speaker, it looks kind of just OK, as a bit
> resourceful but maybe it was more than that" (Appendix 3)

This again raises the question of native privilege and the notion of the NNS's 'reduced personality' (Harder, 1980). However, although there is the danger that some NNS wit may go unacknowledged, the fact that only two instances of punning are present in this data and that they both involve playing with the same expression suggests that native-like wordplay is rarely attempted by learners at the lower end of the proficiency scale.

5.4 Conclusion

This chapter and the one preceding it have shown the resourcefulness of the research participants in using what they have available to them in order to

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[42] Mick, not his real name, is a BizLang colleague known for his wit.

play. The analysis shows that the learners exploit the simulated and language learning frames (Goffman, 1974) of the classroom, often blending them to invert established roles or to create absurd scenarios. They also use recontextualisation as a means of generating humour. The locus of their humour and play lies primarily in the process of transposing words, phrases or other communicative elements from one context with which the learners associate them to a different context. It does not lie in playing with the ambiguity of semantic meaning *within* the words and phrases themselves which is common in some NS play and is the focus of Raskin's (1985) analysis. In the process of recontextualisation, the learners often use certain words and phrases to metonymically stand for shared experiences of which the words were originally a part. The importance of shared experience points to the social and cultural dimension to such play. However, an investigation into the socio-cultural element of HLP is very restricted if its development is not traced, especially given its incremental nature which allows in-group references to accumulate as a potential resource bank for future exchanges. This expression of group identity through shared humorous reference points is a phenomenon which has been noted by researchers in the talk among groups of native speakers (e.g. Carter, 2004; Coates, 2007; Holmes and Marra, 2002; Tannen, 1989). For this reason, the next three chapters are dedicated to analysing the play of a pair of learners over two continuous days of their course together, as the role of HLP in the establishment of relationships and in-group culture are tracked and analysed.

6 The case study: searching for common ground and using available resources

6.1 A rationale for recording a group's interactions over a continuous period

I mention at the outset of this thesis that the idea for my research was born out of my long experience of teaching English as a foreign language. This experience indicates that HLP among learners is one of the reliable indicators that a class is functioning well together: when I first start teaching a group whose members have already been together for a number of days, I can expect to hear in-group language and references which trigger laughter and whose meaning is not necessarily immediately accessible to me. The exclusive nature of such behaviour is commonly recognised and has been noted in research contexts such as the workplace (Holmes, 2000: 159) and the adult numeracy classroom (Baynham, 1996: 194).

By the nature of humorous in-group language, its meaning arises in its context of use. As Boxer and Cortés-Conde (1997: 277) point out, '[i]n situational humour *being there* becomes a very important part of *getting it*.' However, being there at any one moment is not enough. As my own experience of puzzlement when taking over a group shows, the humour's exclusive quality has grown out of the learners' shared experiences. So, it is not just a question of *being there* but also of *having been there*. This provides a strong rationale for recording and analysing interactions over a

continuous period that encompass more than one activity or one session.[43]

True, my own extensive knowledge of BizLang's classroom practices and routines together with post-recording discussions with a group's trainer can provide insights into the types of shared experiences and language that the learners draw upon in order to play. Nonetheless, recorded data of these shared moments and how they are subsequently played with provides even more compelling evidence of the phenomena that are the focus of this research. Furthermore, an extended recording enables an investigation into how in-group reference points and language develop and change with each instance of use, thus assisting in answering the first two research questions about how play manifests itself and the social functions it fulfils. Analysing interactions over a continuous period not only allows for an investigation into play's incremental nature but also an examination of the frequency, duration and distribution of playful episodes, and the likelihood of their occurrence in or around particular types of classroom activity which pertains to the fourth research question.

6.2 The incremental nature of play as indicated by my previous data

The data analysed in previous chapters indicates that, despite the challenge of communicating in a language over which they do not have mastery and despite lacking the cultural common ground which facilitates the formation of a cohesive social unit, learners are adept at forging social links. Play is an

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[43] By 'session' here, I am referring to an unbroken period in the classroom. Although there is no formalised timetable at BizLang, teachers and their groups usually have short breaks from the classroom every hour and a half to two hours.

integral part of this process, especially as it is an important means of evoking their limited shared experiences together. So, for instance, learners exploit the frameworks of interpretation (Goffman, 1974) that a classroom in particular makes available in order to call forth experiences that they have had together. It has been noted how learners exploit the lamination of frames where the role-play represents '..the innermost layering, wherein dramatic activity can be at play to engross the participant' (Goffman, 1974: 82) while, in the outermost layer, the role-play can be viewed as a mere vehicle to a learning end. Learners often blend frames to comic effect by highlighting the contrast between the 'real' world and the 'simulated' one (e.g. EPISODE 3).[44] These contrasts can create a world of carnival (Bakhtin, 1984b), a place where the most junior members of a group can assume power (e.g. EPISODE 5) and where the impossible becomes possible, such as the dead rising again and speaking (see EPISODE 4). In this blending of frames, learners not only mix the available here-and-now frameworks that a particular moment supplies but also bring in references to their preceding shared experiences. As noted in previous chapters, these can include nights out together in the pub (EPISODE 15), language laboratory drills (EPISODE 11) and other learning experiences. In this, the role of language is important in that words and phrases associated with one context of use are recontextualised, often producing an incongruity which is humorous in effect. These shared moments are more easily traced and their development analysed when learners are recorded for a continuous period together.

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[44] The terms 'real' and 'simulated' are in inverted commas because, as has been seen, the simulated role-play can be used in ways which have social consequences beyond its make-believe framework.

6.3 Background on the participants and methodological approach

Two people were recorded on a one-week 'blend' course in April 2012. A 'blend' consists of three days in a group followed by two days of one-to-one training. I taught the pair for the opening phase of their course and recorded them continuously on their second and third days. They then had different trainers for their final two days.

As their teacher, I was an integral part of the social dynamic that developed within the classroom's four walls, and the three of us could be seen as a community of practice, '..people who come together around mutual engagement in an endeavour' (Eckert and McConnell-Ginet, 1992: 464), the endeavour in this case being an improvement in the English language skills of two of its members.

An objection that might be put forward is that my taking part in the exchanges under scrutiny compromises my position as researcher. In fact, I would say that being actively involved in the interactions gives me a privileged insight into their nature. Furthermore, the observer's paradox (Labov, 1972b: 209) is lessened by the fact that the interactions were recorded by a continuously running camera rather than a mute observer sitting in a corner. This holds especially true in the relatively intimate context of three people together in a room. It is also important to add that nearly all of the play was instigated by the learners themselves. This is not to say, however, that my presence did not influence the playful behaviour of the two learners or, indeed, that I did not participate in noteworthy episodes of play.

My role in the playful behaviour evident in the data will be analysed in Chapter 8.

My selection of particular episodes as worthy of analysis is informed, in part, by the patterns which had emerged among the three groups I had recorded previously.[45] So, in choosing particular exchanges to analyse, I was sensitive to any manipulation by the learners of the frames available to them in the classroom (see Chapter 4). I was also interested in their recontextualisation of language (Chapter 5). The significance of these recontextualisations became apparent over the course of the two days as particular words and phrases were recycled for humorous purposes and became part of the in-group repertoire (see Chapter 7). Of course, of themselves, neither exploiting frames nor recontextualising language constitute HLP, so accompanying laughter and other contextualisation cues (Gumperz, 1982: 131) such as exaggerated prosody, and body language were also important in identifying significant exchanges (see Section 3.3.3). In addition, any times where the learners stepped out of the official 'business' of the moment (Section 3.3.3 again), whether that business was taking part in a role-play or practising a target structure, were regarded as potentially meaningful. I was also alert to other features such as repetition, a feature of both NNS play (e.g. Belz, 2002) and NS play (e.g. Tannen, 2007), and figurative language which is also associated with creative play (e.g. Carter, 2004). However, not all the episodes that feature in the 'case study' chapters contain features such as repetition or contextualisation cues. Indeed, some

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[45] My colleague, Harriet, was unavailable to help in the process of deciding which episodes in the data from this group were significant. However, she did view and pass comment on most of the episodes which I had selected. She emailed her remarks to me and they have been incorporated into my analysis.

do not contain HLP at all. Recording over two days gives particular exchanges retrospective significance because they are subsequently referred to and eventually lead to HLP. Looking back over the data allowed me to identify patterns and trace significant play to its source in a way which would not have been possible otherwise. Finally, I was interested in uncovering unsuccessful attempts at play, although, by their nature, many of these may have gone unnoticed. However, as mentioned previously (Section 3.3.3), discordances, arrhythmic exchanges or seemingly misplaced laughter could all be indicative of such failure. During the selection process, particular themes emerged which had not been so prominent in the previous data, such as play triggered by learner error (Chapter 7) and play as part of narrative (Chapter 8). The continuous and extended nature of the recording may have contributed to bringing these features to prominence.

Although I did not have the chance to show clips from the case study to a group of colleagues, I did send those which feature in the chapters that follow to Harriet. She emailed a response to me on the 5th February 2013 and these can be found in Appendix 7. Some of her observations appear in the analysis that follows.

The two learners were initially classified as 'low C' in BizLang terms which, roughly speaking, translates more widely into something like 'low intermediate'. In terms of the CEFR (see Section 3.2.4), they would fall into the B1 standard of Independent User, being able to understand and talk about most aspects of subjects with which they were familiar. Although they could be said to have more grounding in the language than some of the participants featured in this research, their general level of English was such

at the time of the recording that language play as it is commonly understood was usually beyond their capability. I am referring here to the kind of play where the speaker manipulates some linguistic property of the language by bending and breaking its rules for enjoyment (Crystal, 1998: 1). Although this type of play which is classified as wordplay in this thesis does feature in my data, it is not the main means by which the learners have fun with the language.

The two learners were:

- Marek from the Czech Republic, CEO of the Czech subsidiary of Caslo. The company's main activity is road construction and most of their business is with the state. Marek needed his English to talk to French Caslo directors in Prague and Paris. He was self-taught and spoke a number of languages (as well as Czech, he stated that he was either fluent or competent in Russian, Polish and Italian).

- Juan from Spain, in charge of a Business Intelligence Unit at Hatwins. The company's field is Information Technology, and its primary function is to provide consultancy services to corporate clients. Coincidentally, like Caslo, its headquarters are in Paris. Juan's job involved giving advice to customers in the financial sector, such as insurers and banks. He needed his English to talk to fellow BI leaders from Hatwins in other countries. Juan's clarity was somewhat hampered by pronunciation problems which are not untypical of Spanish speakers of English.

Juan was the more outgoing of the two. They had not met prior to the course and neither had been to BizLang before, although both had previously visited London. Their use of English was usually, although not exclusively, with fellow NNSs, and they could be said to be part of the world of global communication where English as a Lingua Franca is the preferred mode of interaction (Seidlhofer, 2011).

As mentioned above, the class was recorded on its second and third days together. As the opportunity to ask their permission to be part of my research could not be obtained prior to the start of the course, I decided that they would have felt more pressure to say yes if asked at the outset. I therefore broached the subject in the afternoon of the first day, thus giving them the evening to think about it. Their having willingly agreed to be part of the research, I recorded them on the subsequent two days in which they were together. Everything that happened in the classroom was filmed on a video camera placed on the corner of the table in the classroom. This amounted to about twelve hours of recordings, including moments where I was not present. Approximately forty-five minutes of classroom time were lost where, unbeknown to me, the camera did not record because its memory card was full. Despite this minor mishap, the data captures the ever-evolving culture within the classroom and the role in that process of the linguistic behaviours that are the focus of this research.

I now turn to the analysis itself where particular characteristics of playful interactions are pinpointed. I have identified those episodes which I deem to be significant in terms of HLP, primarily in the light of emerging threads from

my previous research and through my understanding of interactions as both a group participant at the time and, subsequently, as an analyst.

6.4 Outline of the next three chapters

Given that one of the claims in my thesis is that HLP among second language learners is essentially cumulative in nature, I dedicate three chapters to looking at the data generated by the exchanges of these learners and their teacher over the two-day period. In this chapter, I consider the risks and challenges that these non-native speakers face in playing with the language and how these are evidenced in this data. I then highlight the resources which they use to overcome these challenges, including those which native speakers typically draw upon in the socialising process. In the chapter that follows, my main focus is on the ways in which learners playfully exploit the prior experiences and language that they share together and how these help create a culture and sense of group cohesion. The last of the three chapters is dedicated to features of the data which do not find a home in the first two chapters but which, nonetheless, throw light on the nature and manifestations of HLP within this group. It explores the ways the learners use narrative as a means of engendering a sense of solidarity and as a resource for play. It also considers the significance of playful episodes in relation to the classroom activities during which they occur and, finally, looks at the role of the teacher in instigating, perpetuating or discouraging play. The findings of the three chapters are then brought together and their significance examined in relation to the main ideas in the thesis.

6.5 The challenges of playing in the target language as revealed by the data

As has been mentioned previously, NNSs at the lower level of proficiency in the TL face two main challenges when attempting to play in the language. Firstly, they lack the linguistic resources to accomplish with ease the types of language play that are commonly witnessed among native speakers (e.g. Carter, 2004; Chiaro, 1992; Coates, 2007; Holmes, 2007), involving, as they do, a knowledge and exploitation of the sounds, morphology and semantic properties of English. Some researchers in the field point to what they perceive as a need for such mastery in order to play in the TL (e.g. Tarone, 2002: 293). Furthermore, the learners also lack the common cultural reference points upon which so much play is based and which allows a lot of what is meant to go unstated. The assumed need for such knowledge has also been seen by some as a pre-requisite to the use and appreciation of play (e.g. Chiaro, 1992: 122; Davies, 2003: 1363-4), at least when it involves interactions between native speakers of the language.

The risks involved in attempting to play in a language over which one does not have mastery inevitably means that some speakers avoid doing so. By their nature, such missed opportunities do not show up in the type of data I have collected. Furthermore, failed attempts at humour may easily go unnoticed by interlocutors and researchers alike. Because of this, the exchanges from the previous recordings featured in this thesis are not particularly rich in noticeable attempts at HLP which do not succeed. However, partly due to the fact that I am familiar with this pair of learners as

both teacher and researcher, a number of failed attempts at humour are identifiable. The first of these occurs during the revision session at the beginning of Tuesday's training where David is going over some useful lexis which the group had encountered on their first day:

EPISODE 25: LOSERS

Juan: our main competitors (4) are (.) are? Accenture and EBM (.)

David: good good =

Juan: = IBM (.)

David: IBM good (.) give me another word for competitors (2)

Juan: another one? =

David: = yeah (.)

Juan: Infosys (.)

David: no no (.) for competitors (.) the word (.)

Juan: ah (1) rivals =

David: = rivals (.)

Juan: ((*raises eyebrows*)) losers (.)

David: rivals yeah (.)

Juan: @@ (.)

David: rivals OK

Here Juan says something which is witty by native speaker standards but which is lost simply because his pronunciation means that neither David nor Marek react to what he says, even though he signals that he is in play mode through his smile (Bell, 2007a: 39) . It is only after going over the recording on a number of occasions that I was able to catch that he utters the word 'losers'. Juan seems to suffer embarrassment, albeit fleeting, from this communication breakdown. There are other moments where Juan's unclear enunciation of words causes moments of non-understanding or misunderstanding. However, he usually attempts to repair problems when

they arise and perhaps his persistence is a trait which marks him out as a 'playful' learner.

It is not only pronunciation which thwarts attempts at play. Another revealing moment comes during a simulated meeting where Juan is breaking the ice with a visitor. The exchanges are recoverable from the feedback session where the recorded simulation is played to the learners and paused at moments where the teacher wants to comment. In the simulation, Juan asks whether his guest had seen an event from beyond the simulation in the real world, the football game the night before, a game in which his team, Barcelona, lost. His guest says that he went to bed early so didn't see the match:

<div style="border:1px solid">

26: I WOULD HAVE GONE BACK TO SPAIN

Tape:　((Juan's recorded voice)) *don't worry(.) if I know in advance the result I can (.) <@ go to sleep>* (.)

Juan:　@[@*

David:　　[I think* I understand what you meant I think I- are you saying if I had known the result (.)

Juan:　I have (.)

David:　if I had known the [result*

Marek:　　　　　　　　[@@@*=

Juan:　= I have I have

All:　@@@[@*

David:　　　　[<@ I would have* gone to bed yeah > =

Others: = @@@ =

David:　= yeah =

Juan:　= I would have (.) <@ (gone) back to Spain > =

David:　= <@ [gone back to Spain yeah yeah ok* >

Others:　　　[@@*@

</div>

The third conditional tense is beyond Juan's grammatical capabilities and, in the feedback, David provides him with the language which he needs, although he still struggles to master it. The exchange is also noteworthy because Juan actually manages to retrieve the situation with his punch-line during the feedback session. This is something he had been unable to do during the actual role-play.

These two episodes show how the lack of mastery of the phonology and grammatical structures of the TL can thwart or, at least, hamper attempts at play. The next three sections look at the resources the learners draw upon which do not rely on a mastery of the TL.

6.6 Overcoming obstacles: the search for common cultural ground

Although, as will be seen, common ground is developed between members of the group in the process of sharing a learning experience together, there are other attempts by Juan to search out connections and commonalities in terms of experiences, viewpoints and cultural references from beyond the immediate context, much as anyone would when meeting other people for the first time (Brown and Yule, 1983: 11). What is noteworthy about these attempts is that Juan figuratively relates these references from outside the classroom to their shared experiences within it.

All three episodes identified refer to internationally recognised products of the American media - a PC game, a TV series and a Hollywood film. These are worth looking at briefly as they not only illustrate this search for shared

cultural connections, but bring out other themes which are characteristic of the data from this group and the others that I have researched. The first occurs in the middle of the Tuesday morning, the second day of training and the first of recording, where the group are listening to a pre-recorded business dialogue:

27: I REMEMBER A PC GAME

Tape: *all doom and gloom* (2)

Juan: doom and gloom (.)

David: doom and gloom (.) yeah =

Juan: = I remember a (.) I remember a (.) PC (.) game =

David: = ahh [called Doom something?*

Juan: [named Doom* (.)

David: Doom yeah =

Juan: = and I understand now the (1)

All: @@[@*

Juan: [you know* Doom (1) [<@ terrific >* terrific game terrific game (.)

David: [that's right *

Juan: very bloody(.) bloody? (.)

David: yeah (.) violent and bloody yeah (.) ok (.) Doom (.)

Juan: sorry (.) Doom

Juan relates the story in the listening exercise to a PC game called *Doom*. The amusement seems to come from the nature of the link forged between the violent computer game and a comment in the recorded dialogue about prospects for a particular industry through the phrase 'doom and gloom'. It is Juan's unfinished phrase 'and now I understand the...' which triggers the laughter as the common nature of the worlds of business and of blood-letting violence dawn on him. This link is hardly novel, given that many everyday

metaphorical expressions used in business relate its activities to warfare. Interestingly, the fact that Juan fails to finish his sentence does not hamper the impact of his utterance. Indeed, it could be argued that it enhances it because much humour lies in what is left unsaid or in the gap between what is said and what is meant, leaving the audience to complete the sense (e.g. Coates, 2007: 32). Furthermore, it is also noteworthy that he apologises after making the reference, suggesting that he is aware that his initial comment about the PC game might be perceived as 'off task'.

A second reference to the American media is made again by Juan, and again, at the end of a comprehension exercise. David is just handing out the transcript of the dialogue which they have been listening to:

EPISODE 28: DO YOU REMEMBER FALCON CREST?

Juan: but I'm I'm waiting for the- I'm waiting for the end of the history (.)

David: well (2) you're here for five days (.)

Juan: yes oh =

David: = the story has five parts as you can see so who knows (.) maybe @ (.)

Juan: OK (.)we will continue with the history? OK ((*mops brow in mock relief*))

David: absolutely absolutely (.) [OK alright*

Marek: [@@@* =

Juan: = this is a film (.) a Falcon [Crest* (.)

David   [@@*

Juan: do you remember Falcon Crest? (.)

David   <@ I remember Falcon Crest yes>

As in the first example, Juan relates a classroom activity to the world beyond by likening the business story they have been using as a means of improving their listening skills to a well-known American soap opera about

feuding families from the 1980s. Again, the comparison is a humorous one and, it could be argued too that it is slightly subversive in nature as there is an ironic flavour to the utterance with a contrast between the dictum (what is said) and the implicatum (what is meant). Juan's superficial eagerness to hear the rest of the story can be interpreted as meaning the opposite, thus representing an evaluation gap between the superficial and real meaning of his utterances (Kotthoff, 2003: 1390). This impression is reinforced by the exaggerated gesture of mopping the brow.

Finally, at the end of the last day of group training, as everyone is preparing to leave, Juan alludes to the Spielberg film 'Minority Report', a thriller set in a dystopian world where the authorities know every detail of its citizens' lives. During the brief exchanges below, David starts to remove a couple of sheets of flipchart paper from the wall on which are written key dates and events in Marek's private and professional life. These had been used on the very first training day and subsequently as a vehicle for consolidating and practising certain tenses in English:

EPISODE 29: MINORITY REPORT

David: shall I- shall I remove your life from the wall? (.)

Marek: from the wall? [yes please*

Juan: [ooh ooh* (2) the Minority Report (.)

Marek: don't worry

Juan's reference to the film does not draw any strong reaction from David or Marek. However, it is noteworthy for a number of reasons. It has commonalities with the previous examples cited: Juan refers to a product of

the American media and links it to a shared classroom activity, in this case a primarily grammatical exercise. The plastering of details of Marek's life on the classroom's walls is likened to the totalitarian nightmare that the film portrays. As with the previous allusion to Falcon Crest, this link can be seen as carnivalesque in nature (Bakhtin, 1984a: 122-3) as it blends the potentially mundane world of language learning activities and the fantasy world of sci-fi film. As in examples of the data from the other groups in the research, the subversion here speaks of carnival rather than rebellion as Juan's comparison is not to be taken seriously.

The attempts at finding common ground that feature in this section all involve likening the classroom activities or the business world featured within them to violent video games, overblown TV series or dystopian sci-fi films. As such, they are figurative and hyperbolic in nature, characteristics which are indicative of creativity and playfulness (Carter, 2004: 119 ff; Coates, 2007: 45). However, although more successful than Dieter's attempt to allude to a cultural reference (see EPISODE 20) in that they mostly trigger amusement from the other two group members, they are not taken up and developed. In fact, there is no real evidence that Juan's fellow learner, Marek, recognises any of these references. Of course, the fact that he spent his childhood behind the Iron Curtain probably restricts his recognition of American cultural reference points from twenty years before. What is more, it is significant that the allusions to shared experiences (see especially Chapters 4 and 6) are much more successful in terms of the participants deriving pleasure from them as they clearly carry much more resonance. In fact, the most engaging area of shared interest outside the classroom for Marek and Juan, both in

terms of the number of times they refer to it and the passion with which they talk about it, is football. By the beginning of their second day together, they have already spoken about the sport on a number of occasions and, as the following analysis of various interactions demonstrates, it features heavily in their conversation, especially during play frames. Juan is a Barcelona supporter, and the important game between Chelsea and Barca which took place on the evening of the second day of their course, sandwiched between the two days of recording, is a recurring theme, both in its anticipation and its aftermath.

6.7 Overcoming obstacles: body language and other resources used in play

One of the means by which learners can compensate for the challenges of attempting to play without mastery of a TL is to draw upon resources from beyond the language itself. As in the previous data, there is some significant use of body language and physical 'props' as resources in play episodes. Its use has already been noted as both a contextualisation cue (Gumperz, 1982: 131) for a play frame (EPISODES 2, 4 and 8) and as a means of pointing out contrasts between the 'simulated' frame and the 'real' one (EPISODE 3). This exploitation of non-linguistic resources is hardly surprising, given the speakers' limitations in English. Indeed, it features in the data from the pair of learners here: both Juan and Marek use physical resources to play or as a means of signalling and enhancing their play.

The first instances of such play can be seen in the revision session at the beginning of the second day of the course. Part of this includes going over some of the social questions one might ask when first meeting someone:

EPISODE 30: OR YOU PRESENT A QUIZ

David: ask me? nationality (2)

Marek: what's your nationality (.)

David: yes (.) police officer (3) [police officer *

Marek: [@@* (1)

David: ((*mimes taking notes*)) what's your nationality? (2)

Juan: police officer? =

David: = police officer (3)

Juan: ah @@[@*

David: [what's your nationality?* OK =

Juan: = or you present a quiz ((*shuffles the cards he has on the desk in front of him*)) =

All: = @@@

Figure 8 Or you present a quiz

There are a number of noteworthy points in these exchanges. Firstly, Marek's initial question 'what's your nationality?' is socially inappropriate for a conversation, although forgivable given David's initial cue. In Goffman's terms (1974: 128), his utterance unintentionally projects an alignment between the speaker and his interlocutor which puts them on the footing of

interrogator and interrogated. This footing actually reframes what is already a 'keyed' conversation into something more likely to happen in a police station than a social gathering.[46] David points this out through mime rather than language. The incongruity between the intention and realisation of the utterance causes Marek to laugh. It takes Juan a moment longer to understand what is happening, but once he does so, he builds upon the play frame that the teacher has opened up by using the blank cards on the desk to reframe the interaction still further as a quiz. The gap between what is said and what is meant is a recurring theme in this data and it is one which will be revisited during the course of these chapters.

The second piece of physical comedy happens a minute or so later during the same revision session and has a number of commonalities with its predecessor:

EPISODE 31: ARE YOU MARRIED?

David: family? (.) what's a question you would ask (.) family? (2)

Marek: are you married? =

David: = yes ok are you married (.) it's quite direct (.) are you married (.) it's perfectly good grammatically (2)

Juan: it's quite direct? =

David: = it's quite direct (3) are you married ((*mimes taking notes*)) =

Others: = @@[@*

Juan: [what about* your family? =

David: = yes (.) do you have family? repeat (.)

Juan: do you have family? =

David: = yeah and you can answer that question any way (.) you can say yeah I've got brothers and sisters or (2) I'm married or whatever it is (.) but I think er (.) are

---

These exchanges echo the previous ones in a number of ways. Firstly, the initial question put by Marek is socially inappropriate, something which David points out and, when Juan needs further clarification, David again mimes taking notes, suggesting once more that Marek's question aligns the speaker to his interlocutor in terms of interrogator and interrogated. Although both learners laugh at David's mime, the moment for further humour seems to pass before Juan brings in his own mime. This takes up David's observation that the question is too direct but, unlike the teacher's mime, frames it as something which sets up a relationship between speaker and listener of potential adulterers rather than interrogator and interrogated. As with the preceding episode, the teacher deems a question inappropriate and points this out through mime that demonstrates the discrepancy between what the speaker means by the question and what it actually means to the listener. This gap between intention and impression is taken up by Juan and, again, played with through mime.

There is a third significant episode where, in this case, Marek uses gesture and body language playfully which is then developed further by Juan. These exchanges happen at the beginning of the third day of training. The group has been discussing the football match between Chelsea and Barcelona from the previous evening and, Juan, a fan of the Spanish side, has been

cursing his team's luck after they hit the woodwork a number of times during

the game. At this point, he decides to tell a story:

EPISODE 32: SQUARE

Juan: I want to tell you a good history a good history about the goal (.) you know the
        history of Barcelona with (.)the Euro Euro Cup? (3) Barcelona (.) play the final of
        Euro Cup (.) I think forty years ago? =

David: = right (.)

Juan: or forty-five years ago in Berne (2)

David: yeah (.)

Juan: beside of (.) against Benfica =

David: = Benfica right OK (2)

Juan: in this in this in this (.) time of football history =

David: = yeah =

Juan: = the post and the bar (.) are (2) no no no round no circle (.) ((*forms circle with
        fingers*))

David: OK (.)

Juan: it's (2) they are um (2) ((*traces a square in the air*))

David: square? =

Juan: = square (.)

David: square =

Juan: = square (2) in this final <@ Barcelona team in this final > (.) only in this final
        (.)Barcelona team (.) shot three times to the post (2) and a square post =

David: = it comes back out OK =

Juan: = return the ball outside (3) since this match =

David: = yeah =

Juan: = the posts have been changed to (.)

David: [round *

Marek: [@@@* =

Juan: = round (1)

Marek: < @ do you think that [from yesterday *

Juan: [because this because this* (.)

Marek: from yesterday evening < @ the post and bar will be > (.) ((*gestures with his hands
        to show a shrinking bar*))

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```
All:       @@[@*

Juan:         [plastic plastic* ((gestures ball bouncing in off a flexible post))

All:       @@[@*

David:        [ yes OK* =

Juan:      = since yesterday, the posts will be(2) plastic (.) < @ flexible > =

All:       = @@@
```
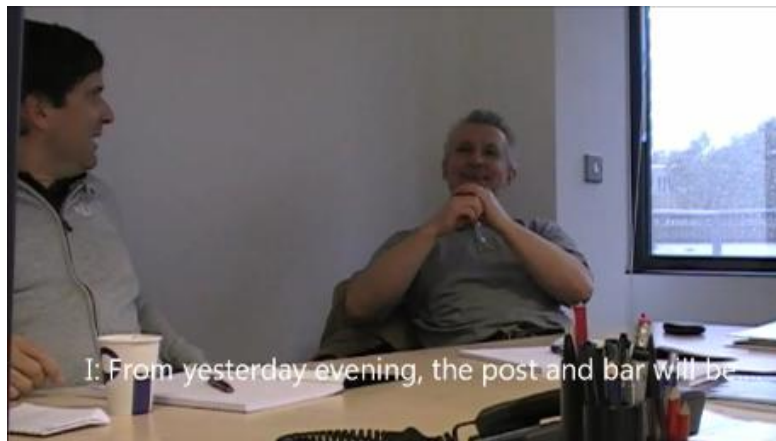

Figure 9 From yesterday evening, the post and bar will be..

Marek builds on the true story that Juan tells in order to create a hypothetical and cartoon-like scenario where the posts and bar of a goal are shrunk to almost nothing to accommodate the needs of the Barcelona team. Juan then develops the play further by imagining a world where the materials of the goal facilitate shots bouncing in off posts and bar. Both learners use gesture to convey their message in a way which prevents the exchanges from losing momentum as they undoubtedly would if the interlocutors had to draw exclusively on their own limited lexical resources. Indeed, the speed of the interaction is one which Harriet remarks upon in this episode. On viewing the clip, Harriet emailed the following reaction:

There's a nice collaborative, accelerating aspect to the humour that

isn't in most of these examples. (Appendix 7)

Although different in kind from the exchanges previously discussed, it has a

number of commonalities with them: it sets up a hypothetical and amusing

scenario which develops naturally out of preceding talk; it involves the

development and co-construction of play, a collaborative dimension that has

already been noted in research into native speaker play (e.g. Carter, 2004;

Coates, 2007), albeit that the focus of such research has been on talk rather

than mime.

It would be a mistake to see the use of gestures and body language as

merely a means of compensating for the learners' comparative lack of

linguistic resources. It is an integral part of the participants' toolbox of

resources which is drawn upon in the process of socialising and projecting

identity. It is not only a means of playing but also a contextualisation cue to

frame accompanying language as play. As has been noted elsewhere in the

literature (DaSilva Iddings and McCafferty, 2007: 42), use of gesture can

stand out as signifying carnival.

A final example of the strategic use of non-linguistic resources for playful

purposes involves not the use of gesture and body language but that of a

pictorial stimulus. The exchanges below occur about fifty minutes after those

analysed in EPISODE 32. As becomes clear, the two episodes are intimately

connected. The following exchanges take place in the context of a discussion

of the word *euphemism*. David has just explained that, when visiting the

USA, he was puzzled when he first encountered the sign *comfort station* meaning *toilet*. Marek takes up the theme:

EPISODE 33: AND THIS IS FOR BARCELONA SUPPORTERS

Marek: in Poland you have (.) two marks (.)

David: yeah yeah (5)

Marek: ((*draws a triangle and circle in his notebook and shows the others*)) I always confuse (2)

David: and that is for (.) toilet? (.)

Marek: that is for woman and for for man (.) ((*points to the symbols*))

David: oh really? (2)

Marek: I didn't- I didn't- (.) I can't <@ I can't (.) remember what is what > =

All: = @@@ =

Marek: = <@ and [I waited for... I waited* for someone who will =

David: = OK =

Marek: = who will (.) (come) in > =

All: @@@[@@*

David: [serious Marek (.) serious* (3)

Juan: ((*leans across and draws a square in Marek's notebook*)) and this is for Barcelona supporters =

All: = @@@@@@

J: And this is for Barcelona supporters.

Figure 10 And this is for Barcelona supporters

Marek's story triggers amusement for reasons which will be looked at in the section on narrative later in this chapter. What is noteworthy here is that Juan uses it as a means of connecting it to his own account of the history of the changing shape of goalposts. The two stories have nothing in common thematically except shapes. Juan's wit lies in his identification of this commonality, and, thus, his drawing of the square metonymically evokes his anecdote. It has been seen in previous data (e.g. EPISODES 11 to 19) and will be seen again in the data from this group that certain words and phrases are used to represent and evoke a particular shared experience. Through its telling, Juan's goalpost story has itself become part of that shared experience. In this case, a sign from a semiotic system other than language is used in exactly the same way as a particular word or phrase might be used to forge a link between the two anecdotes, although it would not be funny without the accompanying utterance.[47] As noted previously with regard to in-group references, Juan's drawing and remark make no sense to anyone who has not heard the previous anecdote. As a consequence, it has at least the potential to take on significance as a marker of an emerging in-group culture. Indeed, Harriet's comments are revealing in this regard. Although she had viewed the preceding linked EPISODE 32, she did not make a connection between them:

> The separate sign for Barcelona supporters I don't really get - don't
> quite understand why that is funny and what he's saying with that. Is
> this a running joke of some kind? (Appendix 7)

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[47] Juan could have simply used language to make the connection - 'and a square is for Barcelona supporters'. However, whether this would have been as funny as his using the same semiotic mode as Marek is debatable.

Harriet's puzzlement shows the potential for such play to exclude those who are not in the know, making it a significant in-group marker. There are further notable occasions in the data from this group where body language and other non-linguistic resources are used to comic effect by the learners and these appear elsewhere in this chapter.

We now turn to the use of the language itself and the ways in which the learners are able to exploit its properties for their own playful and creative purposes, despite the constraints imposed by their own limitations in it.

6.8 Playing with structure and sound

It has been noted in the literature on play amongst native speakers that people take pleasure in the sounds of the language (e.g. Cook, 2000; Crystal, 1998) and in the repetition of words and phrases (e.g. Carter, 2004; Tannen, 2007). Indeed, the two can be linked, given that repetition creates a certain rhythm which must, in part, account for its appeal. There is evidence of just such pleasure in the present data.

There are various moments in the two days where David corrects the learners' intonation or pronunciation of particular words or phrases. He then asks them to mimic his realisations of the target language. This often induces laughter. Of course, in part, this laughter may be the result of embarrassment or any number of other factors. However, it is not unreasonable to surmise that the sounds of English itself are 'foreign' and pleasurable to the learners. Unlike their native tongue whose use has dulled their aesthetic appreciation of its sound qualities, the TL presents new and entertaining phonetic combinations to them. This has similarities with the pleasure that young

children take in nonsense rhymes and repetitions when acquiring their first language (Cook, 2000). It could be argued that both children and NNSs have a comparatively fresh perspective on the language which allows them to see its potential for play in ways in which adult native speakers may not. An example of this pleasure in sound can be found when Juan is recounting how unlucky his football team, Barcelona, was in its game with Chelsea the evening before. The following exchanges form the preamble to Juan's anecdote about the history of the shape of goalposts (see EPISODE 32). The extract is closely linked to some talk that occurs some fifteen minutes later, so the two series of exchanges will be looked at together:

EPISODE 34: WOODWORK

Juan: four in the in the (1) I don't the name of ((*makes shapes with his hands*)) (4) we
           have (.) two match (.) here in Chelsea (.) stadium and in Barcelona (.) what is what
           is [the name* of these =

David: [two legs*

Marek: = two legs =

David: = two (.) legs =

Juan: = two legs (.)

David: and so you have the home leg and the away (.) leg (.)

Juan   leg? =

David: = yeah (.)

Juan: two legs? =

David: = legs (.)

Juan: erm (2) in two legs (.) two legs we shot [four times* (.)

David: [yeah*

Juan: to the ((*traces the shape of a goal*)) I don't know the name of the (.) goal (.) what is
           the name of the (.)

David: yes, goal yeah so er (2) we say shots on target =

```
Juan:    = on target =

David:   = target (.) [is that* what=

Juan:              [no no*

David:   =you mean (.)

Marek:   on stands (.) on the stands (1) ((traces shape of goalposts)) on stands (.)

David:   ooh I see (.) I understand (.) you mean we- we (.) Barcelona (.) hit the woodwork (.)

Juan:    hit the? =

David:   = wood (.)work (.)

Juan:    wow (.) the woodwork (1)

David:   woodwork
```

In this instance, the word 'woodwork' emerges from Juan's story and he returns to it shortly afterwards when David signals that it is time to get down to some serious study:

```
EPISODE 35: WOODWORK

David:   OK guys (1) work (1)

Juan:    work =

David:   = work (.) [alright*

Juan:              [work* =

David:   = um (.)

Juan:    woodwork =

David:   = good work (.) woodwork @@ =

Juan:    =[disaster woodwork*

Marek:   [@@@*
```

Juan's reference to 'woodwork' in the second series of exchanges does not in any way follow on from David's utterances from a semantic viewpoint. It is the form of the word 'work' which triggers his response, and he seems to be drawn to the alliterative quality of the sound. Indeed, a case could be put

that, in his first encounter with the word, his response 'wow the woodwork', whether consciously or not, highlights this alliterative element. Sound is privileged over meaning, much as it is in children's nursery rhymes (Cook, 2000: 11ff). Thus, the word itself becomes an objectivised plaything. Juan then uses it to refer to the story of Barcelona's bad luck in hitting the woodwork so often by modifying the word with *disaster*. Thus, he reminds his audience of the dialogical flavour it has taken on in the context of its use within this group. This process of recontextualisation is an important one which will be revisited in the next chapter.

There are also significant moments of parallelism where Juan repeats particular structures for effect. One of these occurs at the end of an anecdote which he has been telling in order to illustrate how the English course has made him forget his Spanish:

EPISODE 36: WHAT HAPPENED?

David: <@ so after one week in- > after one week in (2) BizLang you- you lose your first language OK @@@ (.)

Juan: but don't lose or forget my team (.) my football team =

David: = don't forget your (.) no [no no*

Juan: [never* =

David: = never forget your football team (.)

Juan: ((*counts on fingers*)) @@ you can forget your family you can forget your language you can forget your work but not your football [team*

David: [not your* football team

As can be seen, Juan uses the simple stem phrase 'you can forget your...' and a series of substitute nouns. This cumulative pattern is then broken by the negative '..but not your football team', thus reinforcing his message.

A similar use of repetition by Juan can be found when David is setting up a negotiation and asks the learners about their own experiences of negotiating in their professional lives:

EPISODE 37: HEAD

David: let's move on (2) fine (.) and what I want to do is (4) is run a meeting (2) with you
         (2) you said you negotiate (2) do you negotiate? (1)

Juan: yes (.)

David: who do you negotiate with? (2)

Juan: I negotiate with (.) my bosses (.) with my team (.) with my customers (.) with my
         providers (.) with my partners <@ and with my family > =

David: = @@@ OK good good =

Juan: = and with- and with the barman @@[@*

David: [@*@ OK (.) that's good (.) that's good (.) so
         you are a very experienced negotiator (.) [good*

Juan: [last* night I had a bad experience
         negotiate with the barwoman

Here, Juan answers David's question about who he negotiates with by using 'I negotiate with my...' as the stem phrase, adding appropriate nouns related to his professional life. What seems to be his final word in the list takes a departure from the expected by adding something from his personal life, his family. Harriet sees this reference as part of the theme of the speaker belittling himself, a strategy that Juan often seems to employ:

> When a man says he negotiates with his family - he is subverting his own authority. (Appendix 7)

Juan's words humorously emphasise the fact that life is a constant negotiation, whether at work or not. He then sees the chance to engineer the

introduction of an anecdote about his experiences in the bar from the previous evening. This anecdote will be explored in the next chapter, but for the moment, suffice it to say that his use of repetition in this and the previously cited instance shows that he is able to indulge his penchant for rhetoric even though he is operating in a language other than his own.

Tropes such as hyperbole, irony and metaphor are also seen as signs of creativity and playfulness among native speakers (e.g. Carter, 2004: 119 ff; Coates, 2007: 45) The use of irony by Juan has already been noted when he compares classroom activities to the stories from American TV soaps and films (see EPISODES 27, 28 and 29). It can also be found at other moments in the data. A simple example can be found at the beginning of the second day of the course when David is revising question forms:

EPISODE 38: WITH ONLY FIVE YEARS?

Juan: how long has you known (.) your wife? =

David: = good (.) good (.) I've known my wife for (1) 29 years (3) I think (2) 29 years (.)OK
         good alright (.)

Juan: with only five years? (1)

David: sorry?(.)

Juan: with only five years? =

David: = absolutely yeah (.) she was only five I was six (.) yeah [incredible*

Juan: [@*@

It is noteworthy here that Juan's utterance 'with only five years' which deviates from native speaker norms is recast by David as 'she was only five'. However, it actually takes him a moment to understand Juan's remark. For someone without regular exposure to such NNS features, this might have led

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to a breakdown in communication. However, in this instance, the learner manages, with the teacher's collaboration, to be gently ironic.

It has already been noted how Juan likens classroom activities to products of the American media. As well as making connections through cultural allusions, he also uses metaphor as a means of commenting on the nature of particular taught phrases. During the feedback from the telephone calls, David gives them the phrases 'I'm afraid' and 'the problem is' as a way of preparing one's interlocutor for bad news. This amuses Juan and he uses a word to describe these phrases which neither David nor Marek understand initially. Having failed to find the word in the dictionary, Juan is forced to explain it:

EPISODE 39: WHEN THE DOCTOR NEED TO OPERATE YOU

Juan: with the doctor when the doctor (.) need to operate you ((*gestures towards his arm*)) (3) before the (.) the operation (2) an assistant put you in (.) um (2) ((*gestures a mask over the face*)) anaesthesia @[@*

David: [OK* gives you an anaesthetic (.)

Juan: anaesthetic =

David: = yeah (.) anaesthetises [you*

Juan: [<@ an*aesthetise> @@@@@ =

David: = anaesthetise OK (.)

Juan: I'm af[raid*

David: [<@ I'm* afraid is > a way to anaesthetise yes

Juan seems to take pleasure in the metaphor and in the sound of the verb 'anaesthetise', an aesthetic appreciation which seems to echo his reaction to the word 'woodwork' as noted previously. Indeed, his liking for the word

whether as a metaphor or simply for its sound is seen again the following day

during a feedback session on a simulated meeting:

EPISODE 40: THIS A FORM OF ANAESTHETIC

Tape: ((Juan's voice)) *as- as you know the standard (1) the standard size of the drums in*
         the market (.) are 50 (.) 50 KG (.)

David: good good (.) and actually a simple expression as as you know is a good
         expression(.) especially in a negotiation OK (1) so she has to concede that point (.)
         as you know the standard size is 50 K (.) OK (1)

Juan: this a form of anaesthet-etic @@[@*

David: [yes absolutely* absolutely yeah

Juan's reaction to these words seems to be significant in a number of

ways.[48] Firstly, he obviously enjoys the words 'anaesthetise' and

'anaesthetic' for themselves. Although the equivalent words in Spanish are

very similar, he seems to take pleasure in the ways they are realised in

English. Secondly, the use of these words as metaphor is important because

it suggests an outsider's perspective on the language. The fact that he can

poetically liken everyday phrases to an anaesthetic is indicative of a fresh

perspective on TL and the norms of behaviour revealed through it, the type

of perspective which, as I suggest earlier in this thesis (see Section 2.6) is

the stuff of a good humorist's armoury. Indeed, in my experience of language

teaching, learners often comment on the 'politeness' of British English. A

third reason for Juan's enjoyment of the word 'anaesthetic' is that he has the

opportunity to utter it again more than a day after its first use in the

classroom. This recontextualising of language previously encountered and

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[48] On the occasions where Juan refers to particular words and phrases as an anaesthetic, Marek does not participate but smiles from the sidelines. Whether this is a polite or amused reaction is difficult to ascertain.

shared together is an important feature of play amongst these learners and the others in my research cohort. As stated previously, it forms an important part of the rationale for recording the interactions that take place over a two-day period and is the focus of the next chapter.

6.9 Conclusion

We have seen in this chapter's data that attempting to play in another language is a risky business. At times, a speaker's pronunciation or shaky mastery of grammatical structure can jeopardise any attempt at being humorous. Unsurprisingly, the data also bears out the fact that the search for common reference points is more likely to be challenging among people from different cultural backgrounds than it is among those who are able to share and draw upon a mutually understood reservoir of allusions from history, the media and so on.

Yet, despite these challenges, there is evidence here that Juan and Marek are able to exploit resources from beyond the language to be playful. They can also use the language itself to be gently ironic or to create effective rhetorical impact through parallelism. However, it is worth pointing out that the manipulation of structure in this data is not complex. There is, for example, no play with prefixes and suffixes as you might find in some native play (Crystal, 1998: 30). Also, as Attardo (2000: 814) points out, irony is a completely pragmatic phenomenon rather than a semantic one, and there is no evidence of the exploitation of the semantic dimension of the language by these learners, such as the use of puns (Carter, 2004: 90-7). Indeed, the meaning of certain words and phrases in play episodes comes from their

significance in context rather than their dictionary definitions. This becomes clearer in the next chapter where we see how the learners' shared learning experiences are summoned up through the language associated with them. Thus, these manifestations of play through language are similar in nature to Juan's drawing of a square in order to evoke a previous anecdote (see EPISODE 33). Like this pictorial representation, words and phrases function metonymically and emblematically rather than linguistically (Blommaert, 2010: 181) as speakers draw upon their previous utterances and exchanges in order to have fun.

7 The case study: the importance of prior talk as a resource for play

7.1 Introduction

The importance of in-group references and shared experiences in understanding playful conversational behaviour has been noted in the literature on native speaker humour (e.g. Baynham, 1996: 194; Coates, 2007: 31). Yet, as Gordon (2000: 684) points out, too often in the research into this facet of communicative behaviour, 'play episodes are not linked to prior interactions or utterances'. There are exceptions. Tannen (2006), for instance, is able to trace how family arguments are subsequently rekeyed in a humorous frame as a means of re-establishing the speakers' shared family identities and values. However, such investigations are rare. In part, the logistical challenges of doing this kind of research help explain this gap. It is difficult to follow the development of particular ideas, events and the language that goes with them when speakers, in their daily lives, move from setting to setting and interlocutor to interlocutor. Even a seemingly enclosed space such as a classroom does not mean that its members do not meet in other contexts and at other times. In this regard, my research setting presents particular advantages as the class and their teacher are together all day and so provide a relatively enclosed environment for investigation (Section 3.2.3). Furthermore, their time together is not only relatively self-contained but also short-lived. Indeed, in the case of Juan and Marek, they did not spend the evening between the two days of recording in each other's company, so it can safely be claimed that a large slice of their time together

was captured on the classroom video camera.[49] The evidence that emerges from that camera reveals that, as with the data from other classes, prior talk is a vital resource which the learners draw upon when playing. With this pair of learners, one of the features of the prior talk that they utilise for play is paradoxical in nature: they have fun with their own limitations as performers in the language.

7.2 Errors as a resource for play

Instances of the exploitation by the learners of the errors that they themselves make have already been noted in the exchanges where Juan takes up and plays with David's observations about the inappropriate nature of the questions which Marek asks in EPISODES 30 and 31. Indeed, learner errors as a source of play are evident in other research into NNS interactions (e.g. Broner and Tarone, 2001; Cekaite and Aronsson, 2005). Such play is not a prominent feature amongst the other groups recorded, although it is clearly the basis of the humour in EPISODE 19). Errors are potentially memorable, especially for those who make them, primarily because of their face-threatening nature. Play is one means of laughing them off and showing an awareness of weakness, so enhancing one's positive face (Dynel, 2009: 1295). In the next section, a particular error is focused on. It is not actually linguistic in nature but arises from a mix-up in role-play identities. The fact that it is referred to on a number of occasions gives an insight into how such phenomena may come to take on a role in the building of a sense of a collective identity among the three participants.

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[49] Juan, of course, had an important football match to watch on the TV on that Tuesday, while Marek decided to go with the rest of the group course for a walk in London.

An unremarkable incident triggers a number of subsequent references to it, making it part of this pair of learners' repertoire of shared allusions. It occurs during a simulated phone call where they each have to call a colleague called Harry and ask him to send on some figures early because their boss, Jens, urgently requires an analysis of them. Marek is the first to attempt the task:

EPISODE 41: I WOULD LIKE TO SPEAK TO JENS

David: ((on phone)) *hello Sales?* (1)

Marek: hello Marek Simek speaking (2) how are you Jens (1)

David: *sorry? who do you- who would you like to speak to?* (2)

Marek: er (2) Marek Simek speaking and I would like to speak to- to Jens (1)

David: *to Jens?* =

Marek: = yeah (.)

David: *I'm afraid that this is the UK Sales* =

Juan: ((*points to paper in front of him with information about the scenario*))

Marek: = <@ sorry (.) sorry I- I- I made a mistake> =

David: = *OK no problem no* [*problem*

Marek: [sorry sorry (.) I'm looking for (2)

Juan: Harry =

David: = *Harry* =

Marek: = for Harry sorry for [Harry*

David: [*for* Harry oh right right (.) I'm very sorry (.) I'm afraid you're out of luck

---

It is not untypical for learners in simulations such as this to lose track of the different roles in the scenario. Here, Marek mistakenly asks to speak to his hypothetical boss (Jens) rather than his colleague (Harry). Juan is sitting next to Marek during the call. His status is not straightforward as, within the inner frame of the telephone call, he is 'not there'. On the other hand, in the

outer rim of the language lesson, he has, in Goffman's (1981) terms, the role of 'official audience', his presence being sanctioned as part of the learning experience. During the call, he points to the right name on the sheet in front of him and, when that does not work, actually intervenes during the call with a prompt. There is no play during this episode, merely the laughter of embarrassment when Marek realises his mistake, and he remains on task despite this fleeting distraction.

At the end of this same call, a brief exchange occurs between Marek and Juan before David returns to the training room, having 'stooged' on the phone from another location:

EPISODE 42: I'M HELMUT

Marek: ((on phone)) OK (.) nice to hear you and- and- and I will wait for- for your call =

David: = *alright then (.) thanks very much (.) bye* [*bye**

Marek: [thank you * (.) bye (2) ((*replaces*

         receiver)) @[@@@*

Juan: [@@@* =

Marek: ((*puts hand to forehead*)) = <@ and so (am I)? I'm Helmut > @[@*

Juan: [where is* the bl- the

         bloody Harry @[@@@@@*

Marek: [@@@@@*

One of the main aspects of note here is that Marek misremembers the nature of his own mistake, actually thinking that he had confused his own identity rather than that of his interlocutor (in the background information that the learners receive about the scenario, the character whose position he assumes is called Helmut). This is significant in that it is this idea that he had not known who he was which he develops in later references. However, it is

also interesting to note how Juan reacts. His utterance of 'where is the bloody Harry?' can be seen as an act of solidarity where he puts the blame for the confusion onto the interlocutor in the simulated frame. Harriet's comments on this also point to this:

> Juan makes it a collaborative laugh by saying "bloody Harry" - it's then confirmed as a 'we're in this together' - the 'bloody Harry' for me is the key here. As well as showing sympathy for Marek, that's a subversion of the exercise - and, being possibly more disrespectful than they would be with the trainer in the room - it's a very uniting moment. (Appendix 7)

The first time that Marek refers to his confusion of identities occurs only moments later when David returns to the classroom:

```
EPISODE 43: I CAN'T CHANGE MY IDENTITY
((David returns to the room))
Marek:  I'm sorry David (.) [< @I can't... I can't change my identity*>
Juan:                       [@@@* =
David:  = <@ it doesn't matter (.) it doesn't matter > (.) that's OK (.) that's fine that's [fine *
Marek:                                                                                       [< @it
        was* -  it was surprising for me > (1)
Juan:    he wants to (2) talk with er (.) Jens and say (.) you can- you need forget your
         figures and your analysis goodbye (.) ((gestures putting phone down))
David:  <@  forget it (.) forget it >
```

A feature of these exchanges is that Juan voices Marek in an alternative outcome to the telephone call. Here, he imagines a situation where Marek's asking for Jens is not a mistake but actually what he wants to do. This

reframing of an event where the accidental is re-imagined as a deliberate act occurs elsewhere in this data set and is worthy of comment. The rekeying of a conversation as something different has been noted in literature on native speaker interactions. As previously mentioned, Tannen (2006), for instance, looks at the ways in which family arguments are reframed in a humorous key for the sake of harmony and as part of the way in which the family unit projects itself to the world beyond it. Juan here does not really think that Marek actually wanted to speak to his boss in order to tell him to forget his analysis. However, his act can be seen, as in EPISODE 42 as one of solidarity with his fellow learner. Again, Harriet notices the implicit support that Juan gives to Marek through this rekeying. She also comments on a subversive dimension that gently undermines the rationale for the whole simulation:

> They are both laughing together - students united. Juan again pushes the subversion harder - suggesting to Jens that he should forget his figures - goodbye. (Appendix 7)

Furthermore, Juan uses voicing here as he does on a number of occasions in this data, a phenomenon which will be revisited later in this chapter.

Some twenty minutes after this episode, the group are listening to Juan's telephone simulation during feedback:

EPISODE 44: MY NAME IS

David: what's happening tomorrow? (4)

Juan: what's happens (.)

David: yeah what's happening tomorrow (.) tomorrow I'm? (.)

Juan: tomorrow Wednesday? =

```
David:   = yeah yeah (.) no no (.)

Juan:    ah tomorrow = ((gestures towards piece of paper related to the role-play))

David:   =  in this - [in this situation * (.) I'm getting confused (.)

Marek:              [ (xxx) *

Juan:               [well *

Marek: < @my name is > @[@@*@

David:                     [ <@ my name is *
```

David's question 'what's happening tomorrow' is misinterpreted by Juan because the two of them are referring to different frameworks of interpretation and, thus, different timeframes: David to the simulated frame of the telephone call context, Juan to the real world. This confusion is taken up by Marek, who uses the phrase 'my name is' to metonymically stand for his own confusion during the simulated call that he had to make. It is significant that he not only perpetuates the myth that he confused his own identity but also uses a phrase which was never spoken in the original call as a means of doing so. Thus an utterance which was never said in the conversation to which it refers comes to represent an occurrence that never happened. Here can be seen the potential that a phrase has to become part of the cultural mythology of the group (I comment further on myth in the conclusion to this chapter). In fact, it does not attain such a status as it is not said again, although, as will be seen, there are words and phrases which do acquire a mythological standing.

After listening to and evaluating Juan's phone call, the group then go over Marek's recorded call. When the beginning of the call is played back (see EPISODE 41), both Juan and Marek laugh and continue laughing as, in the

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original call, Marek struggles to remember who he needs to talk to. Juan points to the sheet of paper exactly as he did at the time of the call in order to prompt his colleague. Although there is no language play in this instance, it is easy to see how such an event might attain a particular status in the group because it is revisited and, thus, to some degree, relived. The language classroom context offers rich opportunities for the reliving of shared experience, as performances are revisited and analysed as part of the teaching and learning process.

Figure 11 During the phone call

Figure 12 When the call is played back

Finally, some forty-five minutes after the original identity mistake by Marek, Juan refers to it again when David is explaining the phrase 'you're out of luck' to the two learners:

EPISODE 45: NO JENS NO HARRY

Juan:　luck? =

David:　= you're out of luck (2)

Juan:　and what mean? (3)

David:　OK (.) first of all notice (.) when I said it I packaged it with this little phrase I'm afraid (.) just to prepare the ground (.) if you're out of luck (.) you have no luck (2) you're unlucky (.) OK (.) in other words harry is not here (.) [OK? *

Juan:　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　[@@ *@ =

David:　= I'm afraid you're out of luck (.)

Juan:　< @ nay Jens no (1) no Harry > @@[@ *

David:　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　[<@ no Harry *(.) no Jens >

Again, Juan reframes the whole incident, portraying it in terms of luck rather than error. Thus, in his alternative reality, Marek wanted to speak to Jens but simply could not get hold of him because he was not there. The accumulated references to Marek's original identify confusion intensify the learners' amusement. As Harriet remarks about this particular episode:

> I think they are just at the point of any mention of Harry bringing back the giggles! (Appendix 7)

The original mistake by Marek triggers a number of references to it over the next hour, and in these various instances can be seen the potential for such errors to trigger play and to be incorporated into the group's pool of shared allusions. Harry's name has become synonymous with, or more accurately,

metonymic of the confusion over identities that Marek originally had. The name evokes not merely this rather commonplace slip-up but a myth which has subsequently been build around it where, variously, Harry is impossible to get hold of (EPISODE 42) or where Marek wants to challenge his hypothetical boss, Jens, but he also proves elusive (EPISODE 43). These stories seem to have developed through moves by Juan to protect Marek's face.

Something else in the very same simulated telephone calls prompts play that actually spans the two days of training and leads to a particular phrase becoming, quite explicitly, associated with the group's sense of identity. Its source lies in the feedback session to Marek's telephone call where the following exchanges occur while listening to the call:

```
EPISODE 46: IT'S NOT MY PROBLEM
David:  ((recorded voice)) because I'm afraid he's not very well (.)
David:  I'm afraid he's (1)
Marek:  not very well (2)
Marek:  ((recorded voice)) OK (.)
David:  <@ OK? (2) that's alright actually > (.) ((turns to Juan)) I'm afraid he's not very well
        (2)
Juan:   ((shrugs shoulders)) <@ OK > =
David:  = [OK*
Others:  [@*@
David:  I'm afraid he- =
Juan:  = <@ it's not my problem (.) my problem is the figures >
All:    @@@
```

In the simulation, Marek's initial response of *ok* to the news of Harry's ill health seems to signal a lack of interest. In fact, a common problem that learners in such phone calls have is that they are so preoccupied with communicating their own message that they often do not listen to or hear what their interlocutor is really saying. Juan plays with this moment by reframing Marek's response as a deliberate act rather than being the result of shortcomings in performance, something he also does in EPISODES 43 and 45.

This episode seeds the idea that the group is indifferent to the situation of their interlocutor. What happens moments later is instructive from this viewpoint. The group is still listening to Marek's call:

EPISODE 47: MMM-HMMM

David: ((recorded voice)) *um* (1) *and so yeah I'm afraid he's- he's not very well he had to go home* (2)

Marek: ((recorded voice)) m*mm-hmmm* (.)

All: @@@@@@

Juan and Marek both laugh when they hear the latter's original monotone reaction. It seems very unlikely that this would have occurred if it had not been for the previous episode 'priming' them for it. Although this brief episode contains no play, it reinforces the comic potential in the idea of the learners' seeming indifference. It is only a matter of another five or so minutes before this potential is actually realised in play:

EPISODE 48: BUT BEFORE YOU DIED

David: we're short-staffed (1) OK (5)

```
David:    ((recorded voice)) as you can imagine (.)

Marek:  ((recorded voice)) yeah yeah =

David:   (recorded voice)) = yeah =

All:       = @@@ =

Juan:     ((dismissive hand gesture)) = < @ yeah yeah > (2)

David:    <@ yeah yeah yeah OK > =

All:       = [@*@@ =

Marek:  = [(xxx)*

Juan:     = <@ but before you (died) you can (xx) and send me the figures please > =

All:       = @@@@@ =

David:    = you're having a heart attack now? (.) oh really? (.) OK (.) send me the figures first
           =

Others: = @@@ =

Juan:     = please (.) ((raises hands in placation)) please
```

As with his previous utterance 'mmm-hmm', Marek's 'yeah yeah' triggers laughter. However, on this occasion, Juan develops this point to an absurd degree. He continues the conversation with the attitude that Marek's response implies, imagining a scenario where he asks for the favour before his interlocutor breathes his last, an idea which David takes up. This carries a distinctly carnivalesque flavour to proceedings, especially when Juan imagines the need to remember the social niceties in such an exchange by adding 'please'. As with a number of exchanges already cited, the original shortcoming in performance is reframed as something intentional, thus triggering laughter. Interestingly, it is again Marek's mistake which Juan feels free to exploit here. Marek laughs freely at these episodes rather than taking offence. In part, this seems to be because Juan's contributions give the impression that they are actually an act of solidarity with his fellow learner,

that he is laughing at their common predicament. This becomes explicit

some hours later at the end of training, when the group is packing up and

disbanding for the day:

EPISODE 49: THE CALL EXERCISE WAS VERY FUN

Juan: the (.) the (.) the call exercise was er was very fun @@@ <@ was very very fun >
          (2)

David: the core exercise (.) did you say? (.)

Juan: the? (.)

David: the what exercise? (.)

Juan: the call (.)

David: oh the call (.) yeah yeah =

Juan: = was very fun(.) for me (2)

David: yes I think we had a (2) a slight identity crisis but (1)

Marek: < @ yeah we had > (2)

Juan: < @ and you have the video> =

David: = < @ I have (.) I have all the evidence I need > =

Others: = @@@@@@ =

Juan: = Harry is dead (.) OK =

All: = @@@@@@

Juan: ((*continues over laughter*)) < @ where is my figure (.) my fig (.) I have no computer
          (1) OK (2) it's your problem > (2)

David: <@ fantastic >

It is noteworthy here that Juan explicitly says how much he enjoyed the

telephone calls. Yet, as his comment about the video suggests, he is aware

of the way in which the simulations highlight the learners' own shortcomings

when communicating in English and, thus, have the potential to embarrass

and even humiliate. Despite this, he takes pleasure in evoking the moment

through reconstructing and voicing the conversations. He utters something

which was not said in the simulations themselves - 'Harry is dead' - but which, through the previous reference and comments about it (see EPISODE 48), begins to assume a mythological status within the group. Furthermore, he evokes his own particular call when 'Harry' told him that the computer was down. Again, he uses the term 'OK' to symbolise his own indifference to his interlocutor's situation. Furthermore, the utterance 'it's your problem', like 'OK', explicitly embodies the attitude that he and Marek inadvertently create during the telephone conversations rather than echoing anything they actually say at the time of the calls.

Juan seems to actively seek out moments where he can indulge in self-denigrating humour. This seems to be an important strategy in terms of face for a number of related reasons. Although Brown and Levinson, in explaining their influential politeness framework, say nothing about humorous language play, they do make a passing reference to joking as a positive politeness strategy (Brown and Levinson, 1987: 102). However, it has been left to others (e.g. Boxer and Cortés-Conde, 1997: 281; Norrick, 1993: 47) to point out that such behaviour can actually enhance the speaker's positive face by showing him or her not to be a threat and to be approachable. In addition, admitting to such failures shows a certain composure and control in that it demonstrates self-awareness, even under stress (Dynel, 2009: 1295). Furthermore, by sharing their weaknesses with others, speakers implicitly send out the message that they trust their audience (Holmes, 2000: 170). The self-denigrating nature of much of the humour between this pair can also be found in the stories that Juan and Marek tell, something which will be explored later in the chapter on narrative.

A further significant element of the series of references to the learners'

reactions, or lack of them, during the simulated calls is that they carry over to

the next day's training. Unsurprisingly, they re-emerge during the revision

session on the following morning:

EPISODE 50: OOOH... OK

David: so I think the main point there (.) and I think we mentioned this (.) just that

       reaction ok (.)   just more reaction (1) Harry's ill (3)

Marek: ((*smiles*)) [how is he ill*

Juan: ((*smiles*)) [ooh (.)* oooh (.)

David: oh really?

Juan: oooh OK (.)

David: <@ OK> =

Juan: = oh [I'm sorry*

David: [@@*@ he's dead (.) OK (.)

Juan: <@ poor Harry (.)> where are my figure

There is a three second gap between David's first prompt and the

simultaneous reactions of Marek and Juan. They both utter their words

together and smile as they do so. The juxtaposition of the initial reaction of

concern with the seeming indifference of the follow-up phrase in 'oooh... ok'

symbolises the gap between what was said and what was meant. This recurs

in 'poor Harry... where are my figure'. As noted with previous examples,

these voicings do not reflect what actually happened in the calls. In fact, in

the original conversations, one criticism that could be levelled at the learners

is that they did not utter words of sympathy such as 'oooh' or 'poor Harry'.

Thus, through these evocations Juan is not recreating the event but

demonstrating an awareness of the indifference that he and Marek originally

and inadvertently communicated. He does this with humour by juxtaposing contradictory phrases, the first being words of sympathy, followed moments later by those which actually indicate a callous self interest.

Another point worth mentioning here is that the vocal realisation of what could be called the indifferent 'OK' has progressively become more stylised with each repetition. Juan delivers it with a flat monotone that helps to contrast it with its co-text. This entextualises it, allowing it to be decoupled from its textual environment and capable of being recontextualised elsewhere. One of the reasons for the distinctive and stylised delivery may be the fact that 'OK' is such a common feature of everyday talk that it is necessary to differentiate the use to which Juan puts it in these exchanges from the other frequent instances where it is uttered. It would not be fanciful here to say that such a quality shows that it is beginning to assume one of the characteristics of the language of ritual in its 'stylised intonation contour' (Du Bois, 1986: 317). As such, it is indicative of the culture that is emerging within the group.

That *ok* has come to represent the pair's identity is made explicit some time later that morning when they are doing a comprehension exercise together part of which involves listening to and repeating elements of a pre-recorded dialogue:

EPISODE 51: AND FOR US OK
Tape: *really?* (.)
Marek: really? =
David: = yeah second most useful word in English (.) really (2) what's the most useful word
        in English? (.)
Juan: sorry =
David: = absolutely (1)

```
Marek:                                    @[@@*
Juan:    ((gestures to himself and Marek))[ <@ and for us* OK > =
Others:  = @@@
```

By now, the flat delivery for 'OK' is already established. However, what is
most significant is Juan's use of the collective pronoun when referring to
himself and Marek in relation to the word. 'OK' has become part of who they
are, something emphasised by the accompanying gesture.

The final references to the telephone calls and to the special status of *ok* in
the collective culture and identity of the pair of learners occur, aptly enough,
very near the end of Juan and Marek's training time together. David explains
to them both that he will be speaking to their individual teachers that evening
prior to their one-to-one training commencing on the following day:

```
EPISODE 52: BE CAREFUL WITH THE OK
David:  I've (.) written a little email but I will speak to them this evening to say who you are
        (.) OK (.)
Others: @@@@@@ =
Juan:   = <@ be careful > (.)
David:   just to- yeah (.) I will I will give them a warning(.) [yeah (.) prepare them for*
Others:                                                        [@@@* =
Juan:   = < @ good guys but but not (.) so much pol- polite > =
Others: = @@[@*
Juan:       [don't worry* =
David:  = < @don't worry don't worry (.) don't take it personally (.) OK (.)
Juan:   be careful with the OK =
Marek:  = @@@ < @ OK >
```

Both learners laugh at the prospect of David speaking about them to their
next teachers. Juan pinpoints their use of 'OK' as what characterises them

both. He does this by voicing David in the imagined conversation to come. Again, the use of the collective pronoun to associate them both with the expression is significant, as is the distinctive realisation of 'OK'. Unlike the previous examples of Juan re-enacting the telephone call, he does not reframe their use of 'OK' as indicative of an indifferent attitude. Indeed, his reference to them being 'good guys' implicitly concedes that their use of the term shows up their linguistic shortcomings rather than revealing anything about their characters.

In the preceding episodes we see the gradual development of the significance of the word 'OK', until it becomes an integral part of the pair's identity. In this regard, Harriet comments:

> there is that 'running joke' feel to this... there is a voicing, reliving of the earlier conversation, a reinvention.. and it has become a 'humour touchpoint'.. all they will need to say is 'OK' for the rest of the week, and they will have this release of laughter. There's a joy in discovering these touch points, and playing on them. (Appendix 7)

Juan uses 'OK' to represent their collective shortcomings in the telephone simulation.[50] He evokes the conversation by re-enacting it. However, it has been noted before that reported speech in everyday conversation is, in effect, a construction (Tannen, 2007: 132). Juan's re-enactments are not attempts at an accurate recreation of what was originally said but creative

---

[50] Marek does not instigate any play around the word *ok*. This does not mean, of course, that he does not take part in the process of giving the word cultural status. His reaction and laughter is a vital component in the development of the word as part of his and Juan's collective identity.

and symbolic constructions of his own making, for social and humorous ends.

With regard to the build up of *ok* over the course of the two days, Harriet makes a point about a cultural dimension which may be present here.

> The 'OK' response compared to the very English 'ohhh I'm so sorry' touches on culture - and Juan particularly mocks that English insincerity - and plays rebel with it. (Appendix 7)

Whether this was Juan's intention is difficult to ascertain. However, it seems to link in with Juan's observation about the anaesthetising effect of phrases such as 'I'm afraid' (EPISODES 39 and 40). In addition, there is an interesting echo here of the way in which Mario in Group A subverts the polite form 'May I stop you for a moment' (EPISODE 14) for his own assertive purposes.

It is noteworthy that the errors that are playfully exploited in the data can be categorised as performance mistakes. They involve confusion over identities in a role-play and pragmatic shortcomings in the learners' reactions to particular moments. They do not involve errors with formal properties of the language, such as tense, word order or semantic meaning (Corder, 1981).[51] Furthermore, they cast doubt on Aston's assertion (1993: 229) that '[r]ole-played interactions are without effective social consequences, since the relationships between characters are, in the final analysis, fictional and temporary'. In one sense, role-plays are indeed fictional and temporary.

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[51] Corder differentiates 'errors' which he says as reflective of the learner's present state of language knowledge, and 'mistakes' which are simply indicative of moment-to-moment performance. I do not differentiate these terms in my discussion.

However, the comment fails to take account of the lamination of frames (Goffman, 1974: 82) pertaining at any one time in a classroom simulation where, as Appel (2007: 286) observes, the simulation forms the core of the activity while the English lesson is at its rim. These layers are permeable in that, as observed in the learners' exploitation of errors, actions at the simulated core can have real social repercussions in the outer frame beyond it. Furthermore, the data analyzed in the previous chapters shows that learners exploit the frame-rich environment of the language classroom for their own humorous purposes by deliberately blending the frames of interpretation that are open to them. Juan too merges frames when the opportunity arises and, as the next section reveals, the telephone simulations provide just such an opportunity.

7.3 The blending of frames as a means of playing

The impulse to blend frames for humorous purposes is first evident in the data during the comprehension exercise on the Tuesday morning (the first day of recording):

EPISODE 53: YOU'RE WELCOME

Tape: *a question and answer session in room 3 starting at 4: 45* (1)

David: what time's it starting (2)

Juan: two thousand and forty five? (1) no no (1)

David: what time's it starting (6)

Tape: *session in room 3 starting at 4: 45*(.)

Juan: four forty five OK =

Tape: = *thank you* (2)

Juan: you're welcome

Juan responds as if in the frame of the recorded conversation. Although his 'you're welcome' elicits no response from his audience and only the trace of a smile from him, it does illustrate that the urge to merge the frames available at a given moment is a strong one.

An instance of this merging of frames which produces a more evident response from its audience comes at the end of training on that day. As seen above, the telephone simulation assumes significance for the group and thus becomes a useful resource and reference point for them. Once it is established as such, Juan brings its simulated world into the here and now of 'reality' at the end of training as they are leaving the room:

EPISODE 54: TOMORROW JUAN IS GOING WITH HARRY

David: OK guys (.)

Juan: <@ (xx xx)> (.)

David: so have a good eveni- are you beginning to feel nervous? (1) is the stomach going? (2)

Juan: yes (2) [I'm concentrate*

Marek: [@@@*

David: how long have you got (.)

Juan: I'm concentrate (2)

David: mm (.) it'll all be over tomorrow (.) If er (.) we will know the result if- if Juan doesn't turn up tomorrow [morning*

Others: [@*@@ (2)

Juan: I have butterfly in my [stomach*

David: [butterflies in* your stomach (3)

Marek: <@ don't laugh > @@[@*

David: [it's a* serious matter (.)

Marek: in every case (.) <@ in each case (.) [(xx xx)*

Juan: [it's possible tomorrow* Juan is going with Harry (.)

```
David:   <@ OK > =
Juan:    = [OK?*
Marek:     [@*@@ =
Juan:    = you understand me? @@[@*
David:                          [to have* the afternoon off you mean? =
Juan:    = yes =
David:   = yeah OK
```

These exchanges follow on immediately from the discussion about the fun
nature of the telephone call earlier in the day (EPISODE 49). David turns to
the big football game that evening and asks Juan how he feels. If Barcelona
lose, David speculates that Juan may not show up for the next day's training.
It is at this point that Juan brings in the details of the simulated telephone call
where Harry had to go home because he wasn't feeling well. Juan's wit lies
in making the connection and the humour is triggered by the blending of the
two scenarios. As Harriet notes:

> Lovely example of mixing different levels of reality (frames) - no doubt
> it's the shift that causes the laughter. (Appendix 7)

The topsy-turvy, mixed-up and carnivalesque world that the learners create
is shown again in the middle of the following day as the group are about to
watch a video of themselves in a simulation which they have just taken part
in where they welcome a visitor to their respective offices:

```
EPISODE 55: WHO'S THAT?
Tape:    ((sound of knocking on the door))
Others: @@[@ =
David:       [OK so I'm just going to play it back
```

```
Others  = @@@@@@ (.)
Juan:   who's that =
David:  = who's [that*
Others:        [@*@@
Juan:   (xx)? =
All:    = @@@ =
Juan:   = <@ or Harry > =
All:    = @@@
```

In this case, the two frameworks that Juan blends are not those of the 'real'
and the 'simulated' frames but, in fact, two simulations -the telephone call
and the role-play meeting. Once more, Juan evokes the scenario with Harry.
This evocation carries with it all its accumulated associations of Marek's
identity crisis and the pair's seeming indifference to their interlocutor which
have already been explored in this chapter.

The data demonstrates that, on occasion, the learners' professional lives are
summoned, not only into the classroom, but into the simulations that they
take part in. A couple of examples of this can be found when Juan and
Marek are involved in a meeting on the afternoon of their second day of
training. In this meeting, they and Rosie, a BizLang colleague 'stooging' as a
fellow manager in their imagined company, have to decide whether to
introduce flexitime into their organisation. Juan is chairing the meeting. To
make sense of these exchanges, it is useful to know that, in preparation for
the meeting, Marek, Juan and David had built up a picture together of their
imagined company, including its main departments:

EPISODE 56: WE LOST I.T. DEPARTMENT DAVID

Juan: the second objective is to (.) to define how we can we monitor this problem (.) I

        talked with the IT department (2) ((*looks at David*)) we lost IT department (.) David

        (1)

David: ((*exaggerated intake of breath*))

Juan: my customer (1)

Rosie: yes @@[@*

Juan: [sorry* (2)

Rosie: again (1) <@ we've lost them again (.)

Juan: no (.)

Rosie: <@ we've outsourced them (1) OK > (1)

Juan: I talked with the IT director

The mild amusement here comes from the fact that Juan, in the world out there beyond BizLang, actually works in IT and his customers are also IT people. Juan, having realised that he, Marek and David had overlooked the need for an IT department in their pre-meeting discussion, breaks out of the simulated frame to comment to David about this. Within the role-play frame, of course, David is 'not there', although of course, in terms of the lesson frame, he is a sanctioned observer, making notes for the subsequent feedback. It is also worth noting that Rosie picks up on Juan's breaking of the frame and takes it further, gently teasing him that the IT department has been outsourced. This interlude is a short one and Juan soon puts the meeting back on task.

Juan's real job re-enters the simulation some fifteen minutes later when the meeting is discussing the thorny issue of overtime pay:

EPISODE 57: IN ANOTHER LIFE I WORK FOR I.T.

Rosie: OK but what's going to happen in R and D and in HR and the technical and IT department (.) IT are very difficult (.)

Juan: very very difficult I know (.)

Rosie: they're always trouble (.)

Juan: of course in other life I work for IT =

Rosie: = really? well then you know =

Juan: = mm-mm (1)

Rosie: it's like trying to you know trying to (1) it's very difficult to keep them together (.) IT (.)

Juan: OK (.) let's go

Rosie again uses the fact that Juan's real job is in IT to tease him gently. Although he smiles, he does not really respond in kind, soon taking the opportunity to get the meeting back on track. The reasons why he does not fully enter into the play frame that Rosie has opened up can only be guessed at. Possibly, he feels compelled to keep the group on task because of his role as chairman in the core frame of the simulation. On the other hand, he might in part feel constrained by the fact that, in the outer frame of the BizLang setting, Rosie is the Course Director and thus embodies the figure of authority in that setting. Nevertheless, although there is little play in these episodes, they again illustrate that the divisions between the various frames of interpretation that are operative at any one moment in the classroom are permeable in nature and are exploitable for playful ends if those present so desire.

7.4 The recontextualising of learnt language

It has already been noted how the learners' performance errors form the basis for extended play (Section 7.2) where, for example, *ok* assumes a particular cultural and comedic significance for this group, and its recontextualised use becomes pregnant with meanings beyond its rather empty semantic definition. The impulse to make connections to shared experience through words and phrases can also be seen when the class is listening to a dialogue on the Tuesday morning. At one particular moment, they are practising the social responses to 'Are you free for a drink?', an expression that appears in the recorded dialogue that they listening to and repeating:

EPISODE 58: ARE YOU MARRIED?

David: sorry I'm afraid not (.) repeat =

Juan: = I'm afraid not =

David: = yeah ((*sighs*)) (2) I can't (.) repeat (.)

Juan: I can't (.) are you married? [<@ no>

David: [@@@

These exchanges occur about an hour after the learners had been practising social questions when Juan had mimed taking off his own wedding ring as he asked the question 'are you married?' (see EPISODE 31). It is noteworthy here that he once again suggests a covert motivation in the question, giving the same situated meaning to the utterance as when he first says it. It is also significant that his use of the question allows him to break free of the rigid format of exchanges imposed upon the learners at that moment where they are required to repeat the phrases David feeds them. In Goffman's (1981:

144) terms, he is no longer merely the 'animator' of the words he is asked to repeat but also the 'author' of his utterances.

This need to use language for their own purposes and thus take possession of it is particularly noticeable when the learners use words and phrases which are new to them. Needless to say, one of the reasons that people attend courses such as those provided by BizLang is that, as part of their objective to improve their performance in English, they want to extend their vocabulary base.[52] Once on the course, as seen in the exchanges above, their teachers often exhort them to repeat the language that they encounter in order to remember it and assimilate it into their active repertoire. However, it is only when they are able to move linguistic elements from one context to another that they can truly be said to have learnt them. It has been noted before (Section 5.2.5) how this process does not run smoothly even in a first language, where children are often likely, in their initial stages of using a newly-learnt lexical item, to either over-extend or under-extend its conventional meanings. In the data obtained from Juan and Marek, there is clear evidence, especially with the former, of attempts to re-use new language that is encountered in the classroom. In this regard, Bakhtin's assertion (1981: 276-7) that words carry the flavour of their previous uses is particularly pertinent. For adult native speakers, most words carry a myriad of associated meanings accumulated in a life-time of encountering instances of their use. They also expectations of the words and meanings which will co-occur with them:

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[52] My experience tells me that the wish to build up their active pool of vocabulary is the most common objective given by BizLang participants on their pre-course questionnaires, although I have done no statistical analysis to support this claim.

> As a word is acquired through encounters with speech and writing, it becomes cumulatively loaded with contexts and co-texts in which it is encountered, and our knowledge of it includes the fact that it co-occurs with certain words in certain kinds of contexts. (Hoey, 2005: 8)

For language learners, however, those items which are encountered for the first time in the classroom *only* carry associations with that context while even those which they have met before are sure to carry fewer associations than they do for native speakers.

A clear example of the recontextualisation of a newly acquired lexical item can be seen when the group are looking back at the recording of their negotiation with Rosie. During the meeting, she had pointed out that she wanted her supplies of resin delivered in 20 kg rather than 50 kg drums as the content of the latter tended to dry out. In response, Marek suggested that they needed a cover or top for the drums. However, he couldn't find the right word. Afterwards, the group discuss which word he was looking for:

EPISODE 59: HEAD

Tape: ((Marek's recorded voice)) *appropriate er (2) appropriate (1)*

David: [<@ appropriate er (1) er >*

Juan: [@@@*@ =

David: = what was the word (.) what was the word you were fishing for (2) appropriate? (2) cover maybe? (.)

Marek: [cover*

David: [cover* perhaps (.) is that what you were looking for yeah maybe OK (2)

Marek: in the bottle you (1) ((*draws something on his notepad*)) [if- if you have* a bottle (2)

Juan: [@@*

Marek: and you need a (2)

```
Juan:   (tap)? (.)

Marek:  ((drawing in his notepad)) if you have a bottle and er (2) this (.) this is (.)

David:  oh (.) top (.)

Marek:  top? =

David:  = top top (.) yeah the appropriate top top (.) yeah OK (2)

Juan:   <@ the head >
```

Marek struggles to find a word and both David and Juan feel free to laugh at his predicament. However, what is noteworthy here is that Juan brings in one which he had only recently been taught by David - 'head'. In fact, it was a word that he had needed the previous evening in the bar, and which, because he had not known it, had led to a misunderstanding with the woman serving him. Juan's anecdote about this features in the next chapter but what is interesting here is that he evokes his story through the simple word *head*. Indeed, nothing in his demeanour when he utters it suggests that he thinks it is the word that Marek needs. In fact, Marek and David have already agreed on the word 'top', so, as a suggestion, it is redundant.[53] His use of the word illustrates the fact that its semantic meaning is irrelevant here. Its significance lies in its particular associations that are shared by the three people present.

There are other moments where he uses new words or phrases which gives him ownership of them. For example, during the morning revision programme, the language of schedules comes up and David practises it with the group:

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[53] In retrospect, 'cover' seems more appropriate.

```
EPISODE 60: AHEAD TO THE SCHEDULE

Marek:  how far (.) are you behind schedule (.)

David:  good what's the opposite (.) we are? (2) we are early (.) we are? (.)

Juan:   how are you behind (2) are you (4) how are (.) no (.) how are (.)
        you ahe-ahead (.)[of* the schedule =

David:                    [good*          = good (.) how (.) far are [you ahead* of the
        schedule (.)

Juan:                                                              [how far*

David:  repeat (.) how far (.)

Juan:   how f- how far are you (.) ahead to the schedule =

David:   = good
```

Here, as seen earlier, the teacher strictly controls the language which the
learners utter through prompts and through the simple directive to repeat.
The learners are 'animators' of the words they utter, they are 'the sounding
box' (Goffman, 1981: 144) that relays the words. Often, in certain types of
language classroom, the student has little opportunity to move beyond this
role (Rampton, 2006b). Yet the data reveals again how the learners take
possession of the words and phrases they encounter. An hour or so after the
above exchanges, when the group are about to take a short break from a
comprehension exercise that they are doing, the following conversation
occurs:

```
EPISODE 61: WE ARE AHEAD THE PROGRAMME

David:  good OK (.) let's- that's the end of the first scene (1) no real problems there actually
        (1) maybe it's too easy for you (3) maybe I'll give you something more difficult
        tomorrow (2)

Juan:   (nah )(1)
```

```
David:   maybe not anyway OK (.) [let's have a break (.) after*
Juan:                            [but but* our English is improving =
David:   = of course absolutely yeah (.) twenty-four hours =
Marek: = @@@ =
Juan:    = <@ we are ahead the programme> =
David:   = @@@
```

David's observation about the comprehension exercise possibly being too easy for the group, prompts Juan to say that their English is improving. This could be taken ironically and David's response 'twenty-four hours' suggests that he takes it this way. Juan then decides to take the phrase he had learnt earlier and applies it to the moment: 'we are ahead the programme'. Although his entextualisation of 'we are ahead the + noun' is grammatically erroneous, the mere ability to recycle the phrase appropriately can be seen here as a form of wit, as it is, for example, when Viktor manages to use the word 'impressive' without having it prompted by the teacher. As Aston (1993: 239) notes, in non-native discourse, '..even the routine may be problematic, with the result that its successful bringing-off can appear a noteworthy accomplishment that provides grounds for mutual satisfaction.' Also, by so doing, Juan aligns himself to the phrase as its author (Goffman, 1981: 144).

We have already seen how Juan recycles the newly-acquired word 'woodwork' (see EPISODES 34 and 35). In this case, the evidence for his taking possession of the word comes from the fact that he utters it for the mere pleasure that he derives from it, rather than for its communicative appropriateness at the time.

None of the above examples of learnt language are recontextualised more than once in the recorded data. However, for the people involved, words like 'head' and 'woodwork' have accumulated particular meanings which have the potential to be evoked at any time when they are together. However, as Tannen (2007: 56) notes in her discussion of playful talk among native speakers, locally emergent phrases do not usually outlast the conversation in which they first appear. Even so, the fact that particular words and phrases come to characterise any in-group demonstrates that some outlive the immediate context of their first usage. Indeed, it can be surmised from the data I have collected from this group and others that the chances of a phrase outliving its initial context of use are probably higher among NNSs than NSs. Their active repertoire of language is inevitably less extensive and, so, they are more likely to draw upon those words and phrases that make up their pool of shared language. It has already been noted how Juan takes up the word 'OK' and uses it to represent the group. Something similar happens with a particular phrase which features on a number of different occasions over the two days of recording. This series of occurrences make up the final part of my analysis of recontextualisation in this group.

One particular phrase is introduced as David is going over the simulated telephone call, a call which, as has been seen, becomes a significant reference point for the three people present. Together they are listening to Marek's call:

EPISODE 62: THESE THINGS HAPPEN

Tape: ((David's recorded voice)) *unfortunately (.) yeah we- we (.) there has been this virus going around the office (.)*

```
Tape:    ((Marek's recorded voice)): no it's no problem as I would like to (2)

David:   yeah good no problem (.) these things happen (.) repeat (1)

Juan:    this is happen =

David:    = these things happen (1)

Juan:     ah (.) these thing (.) these things happen (.)

David:   these things happen (1)

Marek:   these things happen =

David:   = yeah happen so sometimes people get a virus or whatever (.) these things
         happen (.)

Juan:    these things happen =

David:   = yeah (2)

Juan:    OK (6)

David:   ((at the flipchart)) OK (.) we've run out of paper (2) these things (1)

Juan:    these things happen (.) don't worry (.)

David:   good OK (.) give me two seconds (.) I'll get some more paper =

Juan:    = OK ((David leaves room))

Others: ((look at each other)) @@@

Juan:    <@ what a disaster> @[@@*

Marek:                          [<@ a disaster*>
```

David introduces Marek and Juan to the phrase 'these things happen' as part
of a pool of phrases which can be used to signal an empathetic attitude to
one's interlocutor's situation. As is often the case in the language classroom
context, the participants are asked to repeat the new phrase. One reason
why this particular episode might stick in the mind and stimulate subsequent
uses of the phrase is that David runs out of flipchart paper at the moment he
is going to write it up for the group. He uses this unexpected occurrence to
prompt Juan to say the phrase in response to the moment. After he leaves,
the learners laugh about their disastrous performances in the phone calls
which they have just taken part in.

There is no further reference to the phrase until the following morning, during the day's revision session. In fact, the group has just finished going over the language that arose from the telephone calls when Juan decides to utter the phrase 'these things happen':

EPISODE 63: THESE THINGS HAPPEN

David: good OK (.) then um (4)

Juan: ((*looking at his notes from the day before*)) these thing happens (1) ((*turns to Marek*)) these things happen (.)

David: these things happen (2) Barcelona hit the woodwork four times (.) these [things happen*

Juan: [these things* happen (2) <@ it's not possible but happen> =

All: = @@@

Juan's use of 'these things happen' does not actually follow on from the previous talk. He is obviously attracted to the phrase for some reason and decides to give it an airing before the opportunity to do so disappears.[54] David then links it to Barcelona's defeat which, in turn, causes Juan to joke about the impossible happening. It is perhaps this linking of the phrase to the football game which causes him, consciously or not, to use it during a simulated meeting with a visitor to his office an hour or so later:

EPISODE 64: THESE THINGS HAPPEN

David: I hear that it was a bad result for Barca last night (.)

Juan: sorry? =

David: = it was a bad result for Barca (1)

Juan: is? =

David: = it was a bad result for Barca last night (.)

---

[54] As noted previously, it may well have been the memorable nature of its original occurrence which attracts Juan to the phrase.

```
Juan:    it was a bad result? yeah very bad very bad =

David:   = I'm sorry (.) sorry to hear that (.) yeah yeah =

Juan:    = don't worry (2) these things [happen*

Marek:                                [@@*

David:                                         these things happen (.) this is true =

Marek: = @@@
```

The use of the phrase here reveals, through the reaction of the people present, that it is beginning to assume a particular status among the group. Marek, an onlooker in the simulation, silently laughs when Juan first utters it and all laugh on David's repetition of it. Indeed, when the recording of the meeting is played back, this triggers even more laughter. Again, as hypothesised earlier, it seems that the rituals and routines of the language classroom, where new language is revisited and practised on more than one occasion, increases the chances that particular words and phrases can attain a social and cultural significance within a group.

A final use of the phrase comes when David is priming the pair for an exercise in expanding their vocabulary for budgets by discussing their own involvement in budgeting in their jobs. Juan has just explained that the French bosses in his company, Hatwins, seem to accept the Spanish office setting their budget late because the whole Spanish market is always late anyway:

```
EPISODE 65: THESE THINGS HAPPEN

David:   if the customers are also late then you're not late (1) this is the thing yeah (1)

Juan:    this- this (1) this could be the reason (.)

David:   yeah yeah (2) alright (.) what [I want*

Marek:                          [these* things happen =
```

```
Juan:    = [these things happen (.) yes of course of course*

David:     [these things absolutely (.) these things happen* (.) these things happen =

Marek: = @@[@*

Juan:          [OK* =

David:  = this is the phrase you're going to go away with
```

This time it is Marek who comes out with the phrase. His interjection is not witty by native-speaker standards as he seems to overextend the phrase's meaning to comment on people's behaviour rather than events beyond their control. Even so, the reaction to it is significant. As soon as he utters 'these things happen', there is a choral response from Juan and David. This reflects the position that the phrase now holds within the group. Furthermore, Juan links it to that other phrase with a privileged status within this particular social unit, 'OK' delivered in a monotone (see EPISODES 50 to 52).

As in any community then, however small and ephemeral it may be, an in-group language seems to emerge spontaneously from the experiences and associated words and phrases that its members share. Of course, in a language classroom, the reuse of words and phrases holds a particular significance anyway, as it represents a barometer of the learners' success within their community of practice. Furthermore, the nature of the classroom's activities, with its repetitions and revisions, together with the limited linguistic resources of the learners present, mean that words and phrases are more likely to become significant within a language-learning group than they might do in other social settings.

7.5 Conclusion

This chapter demonstrates how, for these learners, prior talk and the events that surround them are important sources of subsequent play.

The particular risks and pitfalls for this pair of learners of attempting to play in English have already been noted in Chapter 5. However, this chapter shows that one very effective strategy that they employ is to turn their potentially negative experiences into positive ones by literally laughing them off. They take their own shortcomings in performance and make them part of their playful repertoire. Despite their pratfalls, or indeed, maybe because of them, Juan is able to declare in all sincerity that 'the call exercise was very fun... very fun'. This is one means of taking control in a situation where they may sometimes feel the lack of it. Similarly, they assume mastery of the TL by taking possession of it and making their own. In Goffman's terms, they make themselves more than mere animators of newly-acquired language: they are also its authors. Play forms an integral part of this process of acquiring ownership of their new language.

The episodes featured in this chapter reveal that when the learners allude to their previous performance errors or to particular phrases which are linked to a shared experience, then these allusions themselves form a common repertoire. Furthermore, the phrases can become ritualised as witnessed in Juan's stylised realisation of the word 'OK'. As such, the words and phrases symbolise a shared history and sense of community.

The importance of shared experience has been highlighted in this chapter. The next one explores a means by which the learners are able to bring into

the classroom their experiences from outside it - narrative. Through stories, their individual experiences become shared ones and, in the process, resources for play. As in this chapter when highlighting their own errors, self-denigrating humour is a feature of the anecdotes the learners tell.

8 The case study: narrative and play, the timing of play, and the role of the teacher

8.1 Introduction

This third and final chapter is dedicated to the data collected over two days with Juan and Marek looks at various noteworthy aspects of the data which are not covered in Chapters 6 and 7. It investigates narrative as a resource for play. It also looks at the timings of play episodes and how they relate to the classroom schedule. Finally, it considers the role of the teacher in the promotion of play before drawing together what has been learnt from recording the two learners over a continuous period.

8.2 Narrative as a backdrop to play

There is plenty of research evidence that narrative, whether it be conversational anecdotes (e.g. Coates, 2007; Eggins and Slade, 1997) or fictional stories (Broner and Tarone, 2001), attracts play. It is also a means of assessing and confirming affiliations and shared viewpoints (e.g. Norrick, 1997: 121ff) because the narrator is able to imbue a story with his or her own evaluations (Labov, 1972a: 370-5). Furthermore, stories are one of the main tools by which speakers can bring their experiences into the social arena and, by that process, share them, thus giving them the potential to become part of a mutually recognised pool of allusions. It is perhaps no surprise, then, that storytelling features in this data.

Before continuing, what constitutes a narrative needs to be ascertained. Toolan (2006: 54) identifies its defining characteristics:

> A narrative is an account of a sequence of events that are perceived to be non-randomly connected, typically involving one or more humans or other sentient participants, these being the experiencing individuals at the centre of events; there is always a point to narratives - we human addressees can learn something from the experiences of others.

The crucial element in any narrative is what Labov (1972a) calls a 'complicating action', a report of something happening without which there is no story. Furthermore, narratives have a distinctive structure in that speakers can lay claim to speaking time in a way which is impossible in ordinary conversation. Narrative has already been looked at in the previous chapters: Juan tells the story of the changing shape of football goalposts (EPISODE 32) and manages to link this to Marek's anecdote about confusing the Polish signs for public toilets (EPISODE 33). Another anecdote emerges on the afternoon of the group's last day together. As David will not be seeing them on the last two days of the week, he decides to give them some brief feedback about his impression of their English. It is during this that Juan tells a story about a conversation he had with his wife the night before:

EPISODE 36: WHAT HAPPENED

Juan: through Skype (2) I all night (.) connect with my wife (1) and yesterday (.)
         [<@ and yesterday night* > =
Marek: [@@@*   = <@ (xx)> =
Juan: = [yeah*

```
Marek:    [@*@@@ =

Juan:    = I recognise that(.) in some cases (.) in some phases of the (3)

David:   con[versation*

Juan:        [ video* conference (2) my brain have problems with =

David:   = <@ with [Spanish* >

Juan:                    [with* find the word in Spanish =

David:   = <@ right > @@@ =

Juan:    ((gestures confusion with his hands)) = and then (1) no (.) my colleague (1) we share
         the (2)  what happened @@@ (.) I recognise it (.) this is a good news for me =

David:   = @@ <@ so after one week in- > after one week in (2) BizLang you- you lose your
         first language OK @@@ (.)

Juan:    but don't lose or forget my team (.) my football team =

David:   = don't forget your (.) no [no no*

Juan:                              [never* =

David:   = never forget your football team (.)

Juan:    ((counts on fingers)) @@ you can forget your family you can forget your language
you      can forget your work but not your football [team*

David:                                               [not your* football team
```

Part of these exchanges have already been discussed in relation to the way
in which Juan repeats the phrase 'you can forget' for dramatic effect
(Section 6.8) but the focus here lies elsewhere. As with all of Juan's personal
stories, he uses voicing to bring it to life. He signals clearly where this voicing
occurs, not by any change in voice quality but by his facial expressions, hand
gestures and by the dramatic hesitations that accompany the English words
which blocked him in his original talk with his wife. Clearly, there is no
attempt at verisimilitude as he does not include the Spanish part of the
conversation.

There are a number of aspects of these exchanges which are noteworthy with regard to play. Firstly, Juan's story is about potential embarrassment. In this sense, it links to Marek's anecdote about his confusion over Polish signs for toilets (EPISODE 33). Indeed, one of the commonalities of the personal stories that can be found in this data is that they are about embarrassment or even humiliation. In this sense, they link to the play derived from errors analysed in the preceding chapter. The benefits to the speaker's positive face in self-denigrating humour have already been noted (Section 7.2), and, perhaps because of this, narrative often seems to attract just such humour (Norrick, 1993). Another salient feature worth commenting on is the upbeat nature of what Labov would call Juan's 'evaluation' (Labov, 1972a: 359-60) of the story. He concludes his narrative with the observation 'this is a good news for me'. Indeed, it could be argued that all the stories in this data set allow the storyteller to laugh at his own misfortunes, and thus turn them into positive experiences. They may also signal solidarity between learners. After all, learning a language is full of potential hazards, so self-denigrating stories can signal that the learners are all in the same predicament together, much as their laughing at their own mistakes conveys a community of spirit. Finally, as already discussed (Section 6.8), Juan is able to use effective parallel structures to add punch to his own particular 'coda' or moral to the story.

I now come to the narrative which, in terms of the laughter it generates and the subsequent references to it that follow, is the most successful of those told over the two days. It has the aforementioned element of embarrassment at its core. On the final day of group training, David decides to give the learners a role-play involving negotiating a contract. As a means of putting

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them in the frame of mind to engage with the scenario, he asks the learners about their own experiences of negotiating:

EPISODE 37: HEAD

David: let's move on (2) fine (.) and what I want to do is (4) is run a meeting (2) with you (2) you said you negotiate (2) do you negotiate? (1)

Juan: yes (.)

David: who do you negotiate with? (2)

Juan: I negotiate with (.) my bosses (.) with my team (.) with my customers (.) with my providers (.) with my partners <@ and with my family > =

David: = @@@ OK good good =

Juan: = and with- and with the barman @@[@*

David: [@*@ OK (.) that's good (.) that's good (.) so you are a very experienced negotiator (.) [good*

Juan: [last* night I had a bad experience negotiate with the barwoman (.)

David: oh really? [what happened?*

Juan: [@@* no not bad experience (.) it's a bar survival (.) if you want you- we can talk <@ at the end of the class> (.)

David: sorry? (.)

Juan: bar survival (.)

David: bar survival =

Juan: = bar survival (.)

David: oh right OK (.) what happened (1) what happened (.)

Juan: can I (say) now? (.)

David: yeah yeah (2)

Juan: I don't know if here you have the- this habit (1) habit? (.)

David: yeah OK (.) habit (.) custom? custom [maybe*

Juan: [custom* (.) in Spain we app- we appreciate the beer with (.) the spume (.)

David: ah with a er (.)

Juan: <@ I don't know the name of > =

David: = what's the- what's the name in English (.) do you know? (.) head in English (.)

Juan: head (.)

```
David:   head =
Juan:    = head? =
David:   = head (.)
Marek:  like [head?* ((points to head))
Juan:        [head?* =
David:   = like head yeah
```

Part of the above exchanges have already been discussed in terms of Juan's exploitation of sound and structure (Section 6.8). Unfortunately, the recording stopped at this point before Juan got to the heart of his story. In it, he tells how, in the pub where he watched Chelsea against Barcelona, he went back to the bar to ask for his beer to be given more head. As he did not know the word, the barwoman misunderstood his gestures and poured more beer into his glass which was already overflowing. It is an anecdote he revisits at the end of the day but it is noteworthy here that his initial skill lies in his ability to connect his anecdote to David's original question about negotiating, thus allowing him to gain control of the conversational agenda. Thus, he is able to topicalise (van Lier, 1988), steering the conversation away from the learners' professional experience of negotiations (David's preferred theme) towards his experiences in the bar the night before. However, he explicitly states that he is ready to accede to the teacher's authority on this - 'if you want we can talk at the end of the class'. He then evaluates what happened in rather negative terms - 'I had a bad experience'. However, he immediately modifies this, reframing the events as a learning experience. The day before, David had taught them a number of useful 'survival' phrases for the classroom and restaurant, and Juan chooses to describe the incident in these terms as 'bar

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survival', so explicitly framing it as a language lesson as much as an embarrassing event.

Juan comes back to the bar anecdote at the end of final day of the group training when my specific research purposes have been revealed to them:

EPISODE 66: SHE DON'T BUY NOTHING

David: <@ I've got a lot of good data> @[@@@*

Others: [@@@*=

Juan: = <@ we- you have a good (.) good (.) good (.) good (.) example > @@ =

David: = absolutely (.) perfect examples =

Juan: = with the bar @@[@@@*

David: [the bar anecdote is fantastic*=

Marek: =[@@*@

Juan: [this is real* really @@[@*

David: [of course* it's real (.) [it's real (.) it's real*

Others: [@@@* (.)

Juan: I don't want more (.) beer (1) I don't want (.) I don't want- I don't want more beer (.) no @@

David: I don't want more beer (.) what do you mean (.) more beer (.) [but er*

Juan: [(xx)* ((*uses his thumb and forefinger to represent the beer's head*)) the problem is that in my pint don't have (.) head (.) and I can't- I can't (2) ((*holds cup up*)) I can't (.)

David: explain (.)

Juan: explain <@because my beer don't have head > =

Others: = @@@ =

Juan: = and <@ how I can say that I need more head > I (.) nothing =

Others: = @@@ =

Juan: = she don't buy (.) <@ buy nothing >

Figure 13 Juan gestures for more head on his beer

Juan retells his story again, and through his gestures, facial expressions and voicing, he brings his anecdote to life, despite the obvious language shortcomings that his performance reveals (for example, in this short extract, he confuses 'because' for 'why', 'buy' for 'sell'). Harriet's remarks:

> This is fun. First they are laughing at themselves - they are 'research subjects' - which immediately implies that they are strange in some way - and puts them in a disempowered position. Then they start reliving the story again, and actually it's more vivid this time - mainy because he voices it, gesturing etc - he verges on physical comedy when he measures out the head and grimaces... He tells a classic comic story, in that he reaches an impasse - a possibility to explain or get what he wants - which of course is based on his linguistic incompetence (laughing at their own incompetence is a big theme). (Appendix 7)

With regard to this notion of incompetence, it is clear that, although there is laughter, there also seems to be genuine frustration. On reflection, this is unsurprising, given the inherent ambiguity of humorous play which allows

Juan to express his ambivalence towards the language that he is attempting to master.

The impulse to connect experiences and to blend frames that is a common feature of the data from this group is also evident with regard to Juan's bar anecdote. During a simulated negotiation involving the two learners and a BizLang colleague, Rosie, there is a good deal of confusion caused by a mix-up over the figures 40 and 40,000. Although I did not understand it at the time, in the heat of the negotiation, Marek attempts to relate this confusion to that of Juan in his encounter with the barwoman. He makes this clear when the recording of the meeting is played back:

EPISODE 67: WHAT THE BARMAN WANTED

Tape: ((M's recorded voice)) <@ *we- we tried to solve it in a restaurant in the Czech Republic* > (.) =

Others: ((on tape)) = @@@ =

Tape: ((M's recorded voice)) = <@ *we couldn't understand (.) what the barman wanted* > (.)

David: is this true? (.) is this a true story? (.)

Marek: <@ it is a true- it's a true story of Juan > (.)

David: oh of Juan that's true (.) yeah yeah absolutely

Marek's comment triggers laughter both during the meeting and in the feedback session after, despite the fact that I, for one, did not initially understand the reference. Indeed, some moments later, Juan points out to Marek that his allusion would have made no sense to Rosie. However, everyone, including Rosie, laughs at Marek's comments. This seems to illustrate an important point with regard to the data here and elsewhere. As

Bell (2007b) has noted in her own research, humour comprehension in cross-cultural communication seems to involve an element of tolerance that may not pertain in exchanges between native speakers of similar backgrounds. This does not mean, however, that the laughter is merely polite: 'Non- or partial-understanding does not preclude appreciation of humor' (Bell, 2007b: 377). Such elements as voicing and delivery form part of the enjoyment of a performance.

In this section, we have seen how narrative is one of the social tools that the learners use to build a common culture and set of reference points together. It might be expected that these learners would tell stories involving their professional roles. After all, both hold down important jobs in their respective internationally-renowned companies and such anecdotes might be seen as a way of establishing an identity beyond the 'reduced personality' (Harder, 1980) that the English language classroom seems to offer. In fact, their stories seem to do quite the opposite. They embrace failure, whether it is an inability to distinguish the signs for men's and women's toilets or to communicate a simple need to bar staff. In fact, it is no accident that these narratives are about the cultural and linguistic challenges of being in a foreign country. As such, like the way they play with their own performance errors, they are a sign of social solidarity, a means of laughing at their own predicament and, in the process, showing themselves to be above it. Narrative provides the conduit for doing this. As Norrick (1993: 47) remarks:

> [Funny personal anecdotes] present a self with an ability to laugh at
> problems and overcome them - again an admirable character trait. So

apparently self-effacing personal anecdotes redound to conversational rapport and positive face for the teller in several ways at once.

Furthermore, relating a story, by its very nature, allows a speaker to distance himself or herself from it. The 'I' of the story is not the 'I' that is the speaker but rather, a character in an anecdote, a figure in a scene who is, as Goffman (1981: 147) points out, '..someone, after all, who belongs to the world that is spoken about, not the world in which the speaking occurs'.

8.3 The timing and rhythm of play episodes

Recording learners continuously for two days allows an investigation into when play episodes occur in relation to the rhythms of the classroom timetable. This should throw light on which types of classroom activity and which stages within these activities attract language play and the extent to which specific behaviours can be related to particular learning activities.

Below is set out a table relating those episodes of play discussed in the case-study chapters to the classroom activities with which they co-occur. The categorising of episodes is not an exact science, given that the behaviours witnessed are multi- functional. The same could be said of the selection of episodes as some exchanges are chosen to exemplify behaviour that occurs at other times during the recording period. Despite the fact that not all episodes that can be classified as playful are included, there are still 37 instances of play over the two days (excluding those moments which are merely triggers to subsequent play). This is some indication of how central play is to these participants' learning and socialising experience.

Figure 14 The Timing of Play Episodes

TIME	EPISODE	CATEGORY	CLASSROOM ACTIVITY
Tuesday First Session 15 mins 17 mins 30 mins 31 mins 1 hr 20 m 1 hr 30 m	30 Or you present a quiz 31 Are you married? 25 Losers (60 Ahead to the schedule) 53 You're welcome 61 We are ahead the programme	Non-linguistic resources Non-linguistic resources Failed humour Recontextualisation trigger Blending frames Recontexualisation	Revision Revision Revision Revision Comprehension Comprehension, break signalled
Coffee break			
Second Session 6 mins 7 mins 1 hr 17 m 1 hr 24 m I hr 26 m	58 Are you married? 27 I remember a PC game (41 I would like to speak to Jens) 42 I'm Helmut 43 I can't change my identity	Recontextualisation Cultural reference Error trigger Error comment Error play	Comprehension Comprehension Telephone simulation Telephone end Telephone end
Lunch break			
Third Session 7 mins 9 mins 31 mins 33 mins 34 mins 41 mins 51 mins	44 My name is 39 When the doctor need to operate you 45 No Jens no Harry 46 It's not my problem (47 Mmm-hmm) 48 But before you died (62 These things happen)	Error play Metaphor Error play Error play Error trigger Error play Play trigger	Telephone feedback Telephone feedback Telephone feedback Telephone feedback Telephone feedback Telephone feedback Telephone feedback

Coffee break			
Fourth Session 7 mins 23 mins I hr 20 m 1 hr 21 m	56 We lost IT department 57 In another life I work for IT ==49 The call exercise was fun== ==54 Tomorrow Juan is going with Harry==	Blending frames Blending frames Error play Error play	Meeting simulation Meeting simulation Winding down Winding down
End of day			
Wednesday First Session 4 mins 6 mins 15 mins 36 mins 39 mins 56 mins	==(34 Woodwork)== ==32 Square== ==35 Woodwork== ==50 Oooh. OK.== ==63 These things happen== ==33 And this is for Barcelona supporters==	Trigger for play/ narrative Non-linguistic resources/narrative/blending Recontextualisation Error play Recontextualistion Non-linguistic resources/narrative	Small talk Small talk Small talk Revision of telephone Revision of telephone Background to comprehension
Coffee break			
Second Session 4 mins 37 mins I hr 04 m I hr 12 m I hr 25 m I hr 26 m	==48 And for us OK== 28 Do you remember Falcon Crest? ==64 These things happen== ==55 Who's that?== 26 I would have gone back to Spain ==65 These things happen==	Error play Cultural reference Recontextualisation Blending frames Blending frames Reaction to recontextualisation	Comprehension End of comprehension Meeting simulation Meeting simulation Meeting feedback Meeting feedback
Lunch break			
Third Session 17 mins 24 mins	36 What happened? ==66 These things happen==	Narrative Recontextualisation Trigger to	End of general feedback Prelude to trend/budget language session Prelude to

59 mins (tape ran out)	(37 Head)	recontextualisation/narrative	negotiation
Coffee break			
Fourth Session 13 mins 45 mins 53 mins 55 mins 59 mins	59 Head 67 What the barman wanted 52 Be careful with the OK 66 She don't buy nothing 29 The Minority Report	Recontextualisation Blending frames Error play Narrative Cultural reference	Meeting feedback Meeting and feedback Winding down Winding down Winding down

Table Key

Colours show episodes that are connected, either by theme or recontextualised word/phrase

The telephone simulation

The goalposts story

The bar story

Recontextualisations

(triggers for later play)

8.4 Observations about the rhythm and pattern of play

It is interesting to note that a lot of play clusters around the very end of training on the two days as the learners are winding down and packing to leave. There is also a concentration of playful behaviour at the beginning of the Wednesday (the second day of recording). This pattern seems to relate to some extent to Holmes's observation (2000: 179) that a lot of the humour

she encounters in workplace interactions occurs at the beginnings and ends of meetings. So, humour seems to top and tail the business of learning, much as small talk does to more serious activities (Goffman, 1981: 125). Much of the humour that features at the beginning and ends of the training day results from reflections on the day's activities and events. It is perhaps no surprise then that revision exercises and feedback sessions also attract playful behaviour. After all, these are the occasions which are designed for the class to reflect upon preceding activities and, more especially, the learners' performances during them. The telephone simulation in particular triggers a rich vein of play which endures over the two days. As noted before, feedback allows for the self-denigrating humour that is a hallmark of the observed play. It also places a distance between the speakers and their performances as they become an audience to those performances. As noted previously, by making fun of their own errors, they acknowledge them and, by being able to identify their nature, take a first step towards rectifying them. The nature of the classroom timetable allows for this revisiting of language and the activities associated with them on frequent occasions.

There is play not only in the aftermath of simulations but also during them and it can be seen, for instance, in the blending of frames which sometimes occurs, a phenomenon already seen in data from other groups. However, it is interesting to note that the learners remain very much on task during the telephone calls which produce so much subsequent play. It is also noteworthy that Rosie, the native-speaking 'stooge' in the meeting about flexitime, is only allowed to take her play so far before she is gently guided back to the task at hand by Juan (EPISODES 56 and 57).

The comprehension exercises produced few moments of play. One attempt by Juan to blend the frame of the recorded dialogue to that of the lesson goes unnoticed at the time (EPISODE 53). The others occur when he attempts to compare the comprehension exercises to products of the American media - a TV series and a PC game. Again, these are reflective in nature, commenting on the nature of the exercises themselves rather than playing with them. Indeed, it is interesting to note that the phase of the listening exercise where the learners work together on comprehension questions while listening to the recording produce no play whatsoever, despite the fact that the authority figure as embodied by the trainer is not present at these times.[55] A vocabulary-building session where David takes them through the language of budgets and trends is also devoid of play.

So, the above suggests that this pair of participants take their learning seriously. Unsurprisingly, play episodes occur at more relaxed moments in the day that mark the time at the beginning and the end of activities. However, they also frequently occur at those times where the class is looking at and reflecting upon the learners' performances. These occurrences seem to show that play is a means by which the learners acknowledge their shortcomings in the language while, at the same time, demonstrating that they can overcome them.

In terms of the occurrences of recontextualised language, apart from 'OK' and 'these things happen', none of them endure for more than one repetition. However, this does not mean that the potential to play with particular words

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[55] The usual BizLang practice is to allow learners to work together or individually in attempting to understand listening material before the trainer guides them through it.

or phrases does not remain. For example, it is easy to imagine that the words 'head' and 'woodwork' can hold significance for Juan and Marek for the duration of their five-day stay at BizLang should one of them care to reintroduce them in the other's company.

8.5 The role of the teacher in play episodes

As mentioned previously when discussing the research setting (Section 2.2.3), the BizLang classroom is a particularly intimate one which does not have the 'unofficial spaces' (Maybin, 2006: 13) that allow unsanctioned discourse out of reach of the teacher's earshot or gaze. In such a context, the teacher's influence in encouraging or suppressing playful behaviour is particularly strong.

It has already been noted that much language play is implicit by nature, where something remains unsaid or where what is actually said is not what is meant. These features demand a fine tuning of understanding (Davies, 2003: 1381) which is why such behaviour is so challenging for NNSs to take part in. Furthermore, playful behaviour depends on a certain rhythm which is lost if too much time is spent by interlocutors clarifying each other's meanings. From this perspective, the teacher's role in successfully interpreting and, at times, recasting the learners' utterances is a crucial factor in the successful carrying off of language play. A simple example of this is when David mentions he had met his wife 29 years ago to which Juan jokingly replies 'With only five years?' (EPISODE 38). Although he has to repeat his utterance, David is able to interpret what he says to mean 'when your wife was only five?' and he replies accordingly, allowing the humorous intent of

the learner's utterance to be realised. The exchanges may have broken

down if they had involved someone with less exposure to non-native talk.

Similarly, David is able to interpret Juan's retelling of the bar story at the end

of the last day's group training (EPISODE 66), despite the fact that the latter

says 'because' when he means 'why', and 'buy' when he means 'sell'. Such

confusions are typical among learners in the process of acquiring English,

and David's teaching experience allows him to interpret Juan's intended

meanings. Here, he does not correct what Juan says as this would have

interrupted the story's dramatic flow.

Of course, in a classroom environment, learners expect their teachers to

draw attention to their mistakes in the language. As has already been noted

in the current data, these mistakes are one of the resources that the learners

use to play. The data shows that the way in which the teacher draws

attention to errors influences subsequent play by the students. For example,

when he points out the register errors in 'what is your nationality?' and 'are

you married?' as social gambits (EPISODES 30 and 31), his use of mime to

demonstrate the unintended footing that the utterances create, is taken up in

kind by Juan. Similarly, when the phrase 'these things happen' assumes a

significant status within the group, Marek uses it and David takes it up to

connect it to the ongoing theme of Barcelona's defeat the previous evening

(EPISODE 63). Juan subsequently also links the phrase to the football result

during a simulated meeting (EPISODE 64). Whether he deliberately follows

up David's cue must remain a matter of conjecture, given that his uttering of

the phrase occurs more than an hour after his teacher's. Although not a

focus of the analysis, it is significant that Marek's self-denigrating anecdote

about Polish public toilets follows on from David's own story about his puzzlement over the meaning of 'comfort station' in his first visit to the USA (EPISODE 33). This narrative seems to provide a context in which Marek feels safe to confide in the others about his own embarrassing confusion over Polish toilet signs.

One revelatory feature of the data (at least for this writer) is that David does not feel constrained about laughing at the learners' errors. One such example is EPISODE 59 where he joins with Marek and Juan in laughing at the former's attempts to find a word. However, the key characteristic here is that the laughter is a communal activity. In addition, it is an important means by which the three participants show appreciation of each other's humorous play. As Coates (2007: 44) points out, laughter is not only an accompaniment to talk but is itself a form of talk, validating and corroborating what is said.

8.6 Conclusion: gaps and connections

Recording a group over a continuous period demonstrates the importance of play in the socialising process and highlights its incremental nature. In many ways the behaviour witnessed can be summarised in terms of the notions of gaps and connections.

The learners have to overcome linguistic and cultural gaps in order to become a cohesive social unit during their short but intensive time together. The data shows that they use all the resources at their disposal e.g. references to globalised culture, their own bodies, drawings and so on, to compensate for a lack of common reference points and shortcomings in their own language ability. Those resources which have most purchase for them

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in terms of the building of a cohesive social unit are, in fact, those experiences which they share together. They summon these moments and forge a link to the here-and-now by using language associated with them. Thus, they make connections, for instance, between the different stories they tell (e.g. paying a visit to public conveniences in Poland and the history of goalposts), between simulations and their professional lives beyond the classroom, and between characters in different role-play scenarios. In making these connections, the words and phrases they playfully employ as the solder between events are not, for the most part, linguistically exploited for any homonymous or homophonic properties, but are used metonymically to represent particular shared experiences.

This brings us to another aspect of the learners' play. They not only use the language to make connections but also to highlight gaps. Thus, they foreground the unintentional differences between what they say and what they mean by juxtaposing the phrases they employ with the unintended meanings they communicate, such as 'poor Harry' and 'where are my figure'. This shows that the language that is used to evoke particular events does not in fact truly reflect what was uttered at the time of those events. Rather, it gradually becomes part of the group's identity. It creates a mythology rather than a history, one that the learners feel free to revisit. As Armstrong (2005: 111) comments, when discussing the importance of myth in human history, 'a myth (...) is an event that - in some sense - happened once, but which also happens all the time.' For the learners in this group, for example, the myth of their indifferent attitude on the telephone is one which endures for the length of their stay together. The subsequent evocation of those telephone calls are

not, in any sense, an attempt to recreate what actually happened but are used to represent the two learners. In this mythologising process, particular words and phrases are an integral part: the event which 'happens all the time' is one evoked by the continuous decontextualisation and recontextualisation of particular language items. This simultaneously decouples the language from its original context and allows that context to be re-imagined every time it is referred to.

The learners' highlighting of their own deficiencies is characteristic of the data here. Both have fun with the potentially negative aspects of their performances in the classroom and, through narrative, outside it. They transform the embarrassing into something positive and enjoyable. This presents a positive face to their interlocutors. It also, as Goffman observes (1974: 546-7), creates a distance between them as narrators and as protagonists in their own stories, a distance which they can use to laugh at their own troubles. It is interesting to note in this regard that Juan refers to himself on a couple of occasions in the third person. Whether this illeism is of psychological significance is open to discussion. What is more, the learners take possession of the language by using it for their own, often humorous, ends. In this way, they become the principals and the authors, of the target language, as well as its mere animators (Goffman, 1981: 144).

Although the data reveals some more conventionalised creative and humorous play, such as the exploitation of grammatical parallelism or the highlighting of an evaluation gap through the use of irony, the learners more commonly employ prior talk and the classroom's framework-rich environment

in order to create a unique world of multiple reference points, one in which they make their own fun.

Finally, it is clear from this data that, unsurprisingly, some people tend to play more than others. Juan is the instigator of much of the play within the group. However, his use of play as a social tool would not be possible without the active collaboration of both his fellow learner and his teacher.

9 Conclusion

9.1 Introduction

Despite the fact that language's primary function as a social instrument has long been recognised, this recognition has tended not to extend to the second language classroom. SLA research in this context has usually focussed on the acquisition of grammar, lexis and phonology. Language's role as a means of cultivating relationships has been overlooked, being generally seen as peripheral to the important business of acquiring the TL. Furthermore, in terms of classroom practice, apart from the simulated exchanges set up by the teacher to mouth the language of social interaction, the forging of relationships has been seen as accomplished outside the classroom or as incidental to whatever activities are going on at any one time. As a result, the vital communicative work that learners carry out to this end has largely gone unnoticed or disregarded as 'off task' by researchers and practitioners alike. This means that the role that language plays in the building of a group culture and the projection of identity in such a context has remained an under-investigated area. Even when the social dimension of the classroom has been looked into, HLP's place within it has largely been ignored. The reasons for this can only be surmised. However, as mentioned previously (see Section 2.8.3), play's potentially subversive nature may be one reason why researchers focussing on the acquisition process may regard it as irrelevant or even obstructive to their aims. Furthermore, there may be a general supposition that the wit and linguistic dexterity commonly associated with HLP is beyond language learners, at least at the lower end

of the proficiency spectrum. The paucity of research into the classroom as a community and HLP's part in the building of that community is one which the present investigation has attempted to rectify.

On the face of it, my research context is an unpromising one in terms of finding evidence of play. In the BizLang setting, time is limited and the courses are promoted as being 'intensive', so focussed learning is both promoted by the organisation and expected by its clients, leaving little space for a seemingly frivolous indulgence in play. In addition, the language classroom is a place where the teacher organises proceedings. In fact, if he or she did not do so, the learners would undoubtedly feel uneasy. Given the teacher's agenda-setting role, this begs a question about the conditions under which play is allowed. Furthermore, in the BizLang setting, there are no 'unofficial spaces' (Maybin, 2006: 13) that lie beyond the sanctioned arena within the teacher's earshot and line of vision, so accomplishment of anything 'off task' seems to be heavily constrained. In addition, the facts that the learners in the research have a relatively low level of proficiency in English and share few obvious cultural reference points would seem to act as brakes to playful behaviour. Yet, despite the unpromising context, the data reveals that HLP is a common feature of the recorded interactions.

In this chapter, the initial research questions are revisited and discussed in the light of the analysis in the previous chapters. The implications of my research findings are then explored. Finally, the areas for further investigation that are suggested by the findings are discussed.

9.2 The research questions revisited

9.2.1 RQ 1: How does HLP manifest itself among my research participants?

There is evidence in the data that the research participants, although constrained by a lack of linguistic competence in the TL, sometimes play in the language in ways which one would associate with native-like exploitation of the language. So, for instance, there is some evidence of the kind of humorous play that Raskin (1985) focuses on. His interest lies in the ways in which speakers exploit the semantic ambiguities in language to evoke two different scripts. Such play can be witnessed in two occurrences of play around the same phrase - 'are you with me?' (EPISODES 23 and 24) - by two different speakers in different groups. Both speakers play on the literal meaning and the commonly used metaphorical meaning of the phrase. There is also evidence of parallelism, a hallmark of creative speech that often features in humorous passages of everyday conversation, encompassing repetition (Tannen, 2007: 48 ff) and what Carter (2004: 101-2) calls pattern forming. For example, in the case-study data, Juan is seen to repeat stem phrases which he manipulates to dramatic effect (EPISODES 36 and 37). Imagery too can be found in Juan's description of certain phrases in English as a form of anaesthetic (EPISODES 39 and 40). Yet, despite some evidence of learners being able to play in ways commonly regarded as witty, creative and humorous, an analysis that concentrated solely on such aspects would overlook various manifestations of HLP through which the learners have fun.

NSs' familiarity with their own language may prevent them from playing in ways in which NNSs do. It can be argued that Juan's remarks about the anaesthetic qualities of English can be seen as evidence of a learner simultaneously having a critical distance from and taking pleasure in the language through his fresh perspective on it. In this sense, the NNS has the potential to be more innovative with the TL than the adult NS, much as young children marvel and play with the properties of their mother tongue (e.g. Cekaite and Aronsson, 2005; Cook, 2000; Gillen, 2006; Inkelas, 2006). This fresh perspective is also evident in some play around the phonological properties of English (e.g. EPISODES 34 and 35).

On the face of it, the great bulk of HLP in the data appears to be rather different to that found in NS play in that someone whose first language is English may find it unamusing on first hearing and, in some cases, puzzling. However, I would argue that it is, on closer inspection, similar in kind to that used in NS talk.

Two related themes emerge when looking at the resources the learners use to play. Firstly, they take advantage of the fact that the language classroom, and especially that at BizLang, is rich in frameworks of interpretation (Goffman, 1974: 8). This means that learners are constantly flitting from the 'real' to the 'simulated' and back again. As witnessed in the data, this allows them to blend frames and do such things as die and come back to life, conjure up shared evenings in the pub, put their most junior members in charge of proceedings, and operate in two simulated worlds at once. In short, learners conjure up Bakhtin's carnival world where the established order is suspended (Bakhtin, 1984b: 122-3). It is a world where boundaries can be

pushed at because those boundaries are themselves fuzzy and ambiguous, allowing speakers the fall-back defence of saying that they are only joking or are merely in role (see the next section) . This behaviour is not so different from that can be found, for example, in comedy shows on the radio and TV where different frames are brought together to incongruous and humorous effect.

Secondly, although learners do not generally subvert the forms of words and phrases they have learnt, they are forever recontextualising learnt language in surprising ways. A word or phrase associated with a shared experience is used in a new context to metonymically stand for that experience. The speakers' wit lies in their ability to use language which is appropriate to the moment and, at the same time, to the evoked shared experience. To take one example, Antoine's ability to use language that is apt in the moment of a simulated negotiation while simultaneously evoking a grammar drill (EPISODE 11) is not so different in terms of its wit to a speaker exploiting the semantic properties of a phrase to evoke opposing scripts (Raskin, 1985: 111). It could be argued that the evocation of shared experiences through the recycling of language means that a lot of play witnessed in the data would make no sense to the outsider without explanation. But this can be as true of language play among NSs as that among NNSs. As Baynham comments on the adult numeracy classes that he investigates:

> There are examples in the data of exchanges that clearly refer to on-going, in-group, joking, the full meaning of which it is hard for the analyst/outsider to gain access to. (1996: 194)

It is not unreasonable to assume that the 'locally emergent expression' (Tannen, 1989: 45) is actually more likely to outlive the conversation in which it first appears in non-native interaction than in its native equivalent because, inevitably, the linguistic repertoire of speakers in the former is narrower than that of speakers in the latter. This means that NNSs are more reliant on a shallow pool of expressions to communicate their ideas. Moreover, as Bakhtin (1981: 276-7) points out, language is rooted in its contexts of use and, in many cases, the learners' expressions are strongly associated with the limited experiences that the learners share, whether drinking together, doing a language laboratory drill, simulating a phone call or saying something inappropriate in the TL.

The words or phrases used in play may not always 'succeed' by native speaker standards. For example, there are instances of overextension (e.g. EPISODES 15 and 17) in the data. However, it could be argued that this is not particularly relevant when NSs are not the target audience. In this regard, Seidlhofer's words with regard to speakers of English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) are particularly pertinent:

> We can see ELF users absorbed in the ad hoc, situated negotiation of meaning - an entirely pragmatic undertaking in that the focus is on establishing the indexical link between code and context, and a creative process in that the code is treated as malleable and adjustable to the requirements of the moment. (Seidlhofer, 2011: 98)

Nevertheless, there are occasions where learners are made conscious of the fact that aspects of their language are regarded as erroneous by their

trainers or, less frequently, by their fellow learners. Such moments are potentially face-threatening. However, the data shows how the learners play with such moments, showing up the gap between what is said and what is meant by doing such things as pretending that their original utterances actually reflect their intentions (e.g. EPISODE 48).

Unsurprisingly, given the prevalence of recontextualisation as a means of playing, the learners also voice previous speakers. This usually means voicing the teacher. Antoine's utterance in EPISODE 11 is one such example, but there are plenty of others (e.g. EPISODES 13,14,16, 17, 63). Usually the original teacher's utterance is coloured with the learner's own intentions in what Bakhtin would call vari-directional double-voicing (Bakhtin, 1984a: 193). Potentially, there is irony generated by the gap between the dictum (what is said) and the implicatum (what is meant). This might be regarded as face threatening to the figure of authority as embodied in the teacher. However, the double-voicing in this data is generic rather than personalised in nature and is neither meant nor understood as a challenge to the teacher's authority. There are other examples of irony (e.g. EPISODE 28) within the data. Given its pragmatic nature, its production may not present the same challenge to learners as other forms of potentially playful behaviour.

The importance of signalling play clearly has been mentioned previously (see Section 2.4), and this is especially so for NNSs where misunderstanding is so often a part of the learning experience. The use of stylised delivery, such as Juan's 'OK' (e.g. EPISODE 50), and exaggerated body language as

exemplified by Viktor's theatrical gestures (e.g. EPISODE 2), all point to the participants' awareness of the need to signal play as clearly as possible.

So, HLP in the data does not take greatly different forms from that which it might in NS play. True, there is generally not the subtlety or nuanced allusions that are sometimes found in the wit and banter of native speakers. However, irony, repetition, figurative language and the simultaneous evocation of different frames all feature in the play to be found in this data. For reasons set out above, the use of language to metonymically represent shared experience seems to be more prominent in the data than it might in NS play, but this is a matter of degree rather than kind.

The forms that play takes mean little without considering its social functions, and it is to these that we now turn.

9.2.2 RQ 2: What social functions does HLP fulfil?

Given that learners in my research setting have come together primarily for the instrumental objective of improving their English language skills for their work, it might seem that the social dimension to their interactions is secondary, especially as any contacts forged and friendships made will probably be short lived. As mentioned previously, such social endeavours may be viewed as irrelevant or even as a distraction from the aim of achieving such an objective. However, my findings indicate otherwise. Indeed, it could be argued that socialising is vital to the smooth functioning of a learning group and, thus, facilitates the process of acquiring the TL. My data shows how important HLP is in this socialising process.

One of the initial social tasks of a BizLang course participant is to project an identity to their teacher and fellow learners. It needs to be remembered that, at the beginning of a course, the participants know nothing about each other. However, despite holding down responsible and, in many cases, senior posts within their organisations, it is rare, in my experience, that learners attempt to lay claim to social status through their professional standing. This is certainly not the case among my research participants, despite the fact that a number of them have managerial positions within big multinational companies. In fact, the data shows that the learners often project and establish a sense of identity with their fellow learners through HLP.

The classroom is a place where ostensibly the learner has little power. Play is one means of influencing the proceedings in such a seemingly constrained context. HLP's deniability - 'I was only joking' - allows the pushing of boundaries and the testing of the status quo. Similarly, the role-play has this same deniable property - 'I was only playing my part'. Because a change of frame involves a change of role, this inevitably means that speakers alter their alignment to each other and to their utterances, an alignment that Goffman calls footing (1981: 128). This allows them a certain leeway to say what would otherwise be too socially risky to utter. Thus, as has been noted in previous chapters, they are able to do such things as send up the ritual of the classroom by voicing the teacher's evocation to 'repeat', blend frames so as to elevate the group's drinking habits to mythological status, or berate a fellow group member for being late under the guise of a simulated meeting.

The data also reveals how learners are able to break free of the restricted role that is sometimes assigned to them in the language class. For example,

when being drilled or corrected, the learners are asked to assume the footing of what Goffman (1981: 144) would call 'the animator' - someone who gives voice to words which do not originate with them. The data reveals that learners, in order to 'own' the language that they learn and, thus, become its 'principals' and 'authors', often find ways through play of using it for their own communicative ends. So, they purloin a trainer's phrase originally uttered in the language laboratory for use in a heated negotiation or repeat a phrase from a recorded dialogue and transform it through a simple gesture that evokes the group's shared experiences. This authoring of learnt language is a clear manifestation of the participants asserting their identities. Furthermore, through humorous language play, the learners can seize the communicative agenda. It allows them to take control of the topic of talk, such that, for example, a revision session about business trends becomes a teasing exchange about the previous evening's visit to the pub (EPISODE 15). It is also a means by which the rigid structure of exchanges in certain classroom activities can be disrupted, such as the expected IRF format of interaction in listening-and-drilling (EPISODE 2). These play episodes show how even in their relatively powerless position as learners with limited linguistic repertoires, the speakers have at least some say in projecting their own social image - they 'do' their identities rather than merely 'have' them (Butler, 1990). The findings also reinforce the notion that identities emerge in interaction rather than simply being individually produced (Bucholtz and Hall, 2005: 587), as evidenced by the ways in which prior talk is taken up by learners and used for their own ends.

Of course, people do not project their identities in isolation but through their interaction with others. The language class is a community, however fleeting its existence. In the current research, HLP is shown to be an important means by which that community establishes itself and develops its collective identity. In this regard, Seidlhofer says something very pertinent when actually describing the features of what she calls English as a Native Language:

> ENL is full of conventions and markers of in-group membership such as characteristic pronunciations, specialised vocabulary, idiomatic phraseology, and references and allusions to shared experience and the cultural background of particular native-speaker communities. (Seidlhofer, 2011: 16)

Here, in the description of a variety of English which Seidlhofer actually contrasts with ELF, are the very characteristics that we find in my data. So, a phrase like 'you miss the target' (EPISODE 15) carries a particular idiomatic meaning ('you didn't stand your round') which is unrecoverable without its context of use and it evokes a shared experience (going to the pub together). It could be argued that such language is provisional in meaning and that its status is that of a work in progress. However, this is true of all language acquisition and use. After all, the linguistic behaviour witnessed in the data is a manifestation of language's dialogical, heteroglossic and incremental nature. The data reveals how words and phrases become part of the respective groups' collective identity. Thus, 'these things happen', 'take one and pass them on' and even the humble 'OK' carry a social and symbolic significance that only holds between members of particular groups. This

undermines Seidlhofer's assertion (2011: 48) that English (or even English-es) need not belong to a particular community. My data seems to indicate that every community that uses English inevitably develops its own variety of it, in the sense that it rapidly acquires its own unique characteristics.

The phrases that the learners use also show the birth of culture in that the first signs of the establishment of group myths can be discerned here. This mythologising can take the form of particular learners explicitly associating themselves with specific words and phrases (EPISODE 21) or the collaborative cultivation of a collective image of a group as hard-drinking (EPISODE 2). Interestingly, there are a number of moments in the data where particular phrases are used to conjure up previous exchanges. However, these phrases are not actually used in the original interactions referred to but are, in fact, uttered subsequently (e.g. EPISODE 44). Thus, they embody occurrences which are truly mythological in that they never actually happened as remembered. They become a subjective creation (McAdams, 1993: 53) much as particular historical events become part of each nation's collective consciousness.

As well as the development of a group culture, the inclusive nature of play can also be found in the way in which the learners deal with their communicative errors. For Juan and Marek, for example, two of these become ongoing humorous reference points which they can depend on to generate laughter. Although there is a surprising lack of inhibition about laughing over one another's mistake, the humour is communal and is actually a manifestation of solidarity. Indeed, on occasion, the learners explicitly link the errors to their communal identity (EPISODES 51 and 52) . However, the

data also reveals that HLP is not always benign, being used to criticise fellow learners in various ways, such as attacking them for a lack of punctuality (EPISODE 7), loquaciousness (EPISODE 14) and parsimony (EPISODE 15). As previously mentioned, the ambiguity at the heart of humorous play allows such criticism.

In short, the research data reveals the important role that HLP has in the socialising work that helps in the establishment and the development of the learners' identities, both individually and collectively.

9.2.3 RQ 3: Who instigates HLP? How is it sanctioned? What are its targets?

Ostensibly, the language classroom is one with a simple hierarchical structure in which the teacher as the embodiment of authority sanctions all that happens there. Much of the data seems to affirm this. The teachers who feature in this data sanction play by creating the conditions for it to flourish. They do this in various ways. For example, Ray allows play to develop through backchannelling (EPISODE 2) or asking questions (EPISODE 15), as does Harriet (EPISODE 19). Similarly, both Ray (EPISODE 23) and David (EPISODE 63) build on preceding play, creating clusters of playful behaviour. David also recasts one of the student's jokes to make it more comprehensible (EPISODE 38). However, much of the sanctioning of play has to be retrospective as it is instigated, for the most part, by the learners. When doing so, they often disrupt the business of the moment, be that a comprehension exercise (EPISODE 2) or a revision session (EPISODE 15). Even when play is integrated within the 'official' agenda, such as takes place

when the learners exploit the frames of interpretation open to them in a simulation, there is always the possibility that the exercise will disintegrate as students go 'off task'. In fact, within my data, this never happens, despite the fact that HLP can sometimes represent a detour from the timetable. In such circumstances, my experience tells me that the teacher is probably making continuous judgements at various levels of consciousness about how much play to allow. In this data, there is no discernible evidence of trainers disallowing play. Interestingly, however, there is one moment where a learner, Juan, returns Rosie, a trainer, to the task in hand when she attempts to build on previous play (EPISODE 57).

Perhaps the reason for the trainers' relaxed attitude to play in the data is that they are never the target of any playful behaviour. Although, as discussed in Section 9.2.1, trainers are voiced through their utterances, this never seems to be done with personal or malicious intent. The voicing does not focus on any identifiable feature of an individual trainer's idiolect or mannerisms. Rather, it seems to send up particular aspects of institutional practices, such as the manic instruction to 'repeat' (EPISODE 16). Classroom practices are also indirectly made fun of through the highlighting of the innate absurdity of simulated role-play (EPISODE 3). However, where there are discernible targets to the play, they are, for the most part, the learners themselves. There is clear self-denigration in the way in which they laugh at their own inadequacies in the language, whether it is the inability of Juan to ask for a head on his beer (EPISODE 37) or Bilel's mockery of his own hurried spoken delivery (EPISODE 21). The humour here seems to be a necessary means of making light of the potential humiliation of failure. Glenn (2003: 117-121)

notes how the butts of jokes can turn episodes in which they are laughed *at* into ones in which they laugh *with* their interlocutors. In my data, the participants not only laugh at each other's and their own performance shortcomings but simultaneously laugh with each other in mutual recognition of the fact that they are in the same learning boat. Their playing with errors allows them to demonstrate that they are above their linguistic limitations and can laugh them off. Such behaviour is not so different from that among NSs who use potentially embarrassing moments to laugh at themselves and reduce any potential face threat.

The learners also target each other, from the affectionate teasing of Michele for not standing his round (EPISODE 15) to the harder-edged criticism of Dieter's talkativeness (EPISODE 14) and Antoine's lateness (EPISODE 7). Even among a cohort of reasonably cooperative and friendly research participants, the ambiguity at the heart of play is occasionally exploited for less than benign reasons.

9.2.4 RQ 4: With which types of classroom activities does play occur?

Research among NSs indicates that play generally happens in situations which are relaxed, informal and intimate (e.g. Boxer and Cortés-Conde, 1997; Carter, 2004; Coates, 2007). One might expect, therefore, that HLP in the classroom will occur at those moments where the trainer has loosened the reins of control. Indeed, some of the evidence bears out this expectation. There is playful behaviour at the beginning of the day and, where recorded in the case study, at the end. These are moments, for example, where stories

can be shared and laughed at. However, play can also occur when the learners are in the middle of a simulation. For example, the shout of 'hands up' (EPISODE 8) can be a means of relieving the tension of the moment in a heated negotiation or the formality of a presentation can be undermined by the bestowing of a plastic biro on someone (EPISODE 3). This exploitation of the multiplicity of frames that particular activities allow can also be found in comprehension exercises where the outer layer of the lesson is blended with the hypothetical frame of the recorded dialogue (EPISODE 2). However, the activity type which seems to attract most play is feedback. It is during these sessions that the learners are able to collectively take pleasure in their own shortcomings in the TL and, in so doing, deal with them.

It is noteworthy that comprehension and feedback sessions are ones where the structure of talk is usually at its most rigid, often following the IRF model proposed by Sinclair and Coulthard (1975). Play tends to disrupt this structure (e.g. EPISODES 2 and 30). However, as has already been noted (Section 5.3.1), HLP seems to be a necessary means by which learners take ownership of the language, becoming more than mere mouth-pieces for the trainer's prompts. In addition, by the nature of these comprehension and feedback activities, the BizLang trainer focuses on particular chunks of language. These can either be phrases which are deemed useful for the learners to add to their active repertoire or moments where the learner's linguistic performance is regarded as being in need of improvement. On such occasions, particular words or phrases, through the very focus they are given, become ripe for entextualisation, allowing the learners subsequently to

recontextualise learnt phrases (e.g. EPISODES 15) and re-enact and embellish performance errors (e.g. EPISODE 50) for their own ends.

9.3 A word of caution: the generalisability of my findings

Even with my limited cohort of research participants, there are clear differences in the play behaviour exhibited by the individuals within them. Some learners play more than others: Juan, Viktor and Bilel tend to instigate episodes of HLP. In contrast, Marek rarely does so while Sandro and Takeshi only occasionally take part in such play, let alone prompt it. Also, although it is not systematically investigated in this study, there are clear differences in the collective playful behaviour of the different groups. The play in Group A is more aggressive in nature than any found in the other groups. For instance, Dieter is prepared to use it as a means of admonishing Antoine for his tardiness (EPISODE 7) while Mario's ribbing of Dieter for his talkative nature has an edge to it (EPISODE 14). At the other end of the spectrum, none of the HLP in the case study group could be described as anything other than good-natured. Furthermore, the gender imbalance is significant. There are no female learners among the research participants and only one female teacher. Given that patterns of playful behaviour seem to be rather different in male and female groups, at least among native speakers of English (e.g. Coates, 2007; Tannen, 1991), this needs to be borne in mind when considering how generalisable the findings are.

However, despite the differing dynamics across the groups that feature in this research, there are two clear features of playful behaviour which they all have in common. Firstly, they exploit the frame-rich environment of the classroom for their own humorous ends, allowing them to play in the no man's land between the 'simulated' frame and the 'real' one. Secondly, particular words and phrases which they encounter in the classroom are made by them into important reference points which are returned to and played with, becoming part of their collective identity as members of a particular group.

9.4 The significance of my findings

My findings reinforce the view that the learning of a language cannot be divorced from the social processes of which it is a part, and that such processes are always at work in the classroom. In the field of First Language Acquisition and, indeed, in SLA beyond the classroom, the importance of the social context of its acquisition has been acknowledged and investigated. Even in considering the acquisition of formal aspects of the language such as lexis and grammar, the play episodes which have been analysed highlight the fact that the meanings which words and phrases hold for the learners cannot be divorced from their experiences of encountering them. My data reveals how, for learners, words and phrases accumulate meanings beyond their dictionary and conventionalised semantic definitions, and that these meanings carry particular social significance for them. It would be wrong, however, to deduce from this that they stand apart from native speakers in this regard. For the latter too, words and phrases carry particular significance which reflects the social, professional and family circles of which they are a

part and in which they operate (Bakhtin, 1981: 290). Indeed, it could be argued that the study of the ways in which non-natives mould the language to their own needs throws light on the ways in which language use develops in general, not only in terms of its function in culture-building (see below) but in terms of the meanings it accumulates for particular social groups.

In the second language classroom, the social functions that the TL fulfils within that context has remained an underexplored dimension (Block, 2003). Thus, in the study of such aspects as the negotiation of meaning (e.g. Doughty and Williams, 1998; Ellis, 2003; Samuda and Bygate, 2008), the accompanying negotiation of relationships is generally ignored. As my data reveals, this socialising work not only takes place in the more relaxed phases of the learning day but also within core learning activities such as comprehension exercises and role-play. Indeed, such occasions provide the learners with the opportunity to play with the different frameworks of interpretation that such occasions provide. The fact that they are simulated does not mean that they do not carry real social consequences beyond their own make-believe world. Play has real social ramifications in the establishing of relationships and hierarchies. Therefore, the idea that 'role-played interactions are without effective social consequences' (Aston, 1993: 229) can be dispelled. Indeed, the data reveals that this seemingly most 'on-task' of classroom activities can be the site of important social interactions and power struggles. Although it is true that BizLang provides a particularly role-play-rich environment, all second language classrooms are places where hypothetical scenarios, however fleeting, are conjured into life. Ostensibly, these scenarios exist to practise the TL for particular predetermined

communicative purposes but my findings suggest that they are also resources that learners use to their own social ends. Furthermore, the fact that language is not only the medium of instruction but also its object in second language classrooms, makes it a natural resource for learners to play with, as highlighted in the data where learners have fun with words and phrases, especially in revision and feedback sessions.

In the field of language play in particular, researchers need to look beyond the notion that such play is a barometer of learners' progress at acquiring the TL and of assimilating with the host culture. In fact, play in the classroom, especially among learners of various cultures and first languages, seems to be a means by which a group establishes its own distinct culture. Language is never 'out there' but can only be assimilated when it is owned by its speakers. In this process of acquiring it, language takes on particular characteristics and meanings amongst its community of users, however ephemeral that community might be. The data also seems to suggest that ELF, like any language, is never a neutral and culture-free medium of communication. The language is infused with the meanings and intentions of its speakers, as Bakthin's (1981) theoretical framework would predict. These meanings are often particular and humorous in intent. Such evidence suggests that communities, however small and transient , soon encode their own particular cultural and interactional norms through the language they use.

In terms of the individual learner, my research findings support the growing realisation that culture and identity are not fixed and immutable, but can change from context to context, being fluid and multifaceted (e.g. Block,

2007; Kramsch, 1998). This does not mean, however, that people's identities are merely given through the different roles designated to them. Rather, even in the seemingly constrained environment of the language classroom, they are forged by the speakers themselves and, for some of them, play is a vital tool in that process.

Although it seems commonsensical to argue that anxiety and stress are inimical to effective learning and that this is as true of the language classroom anywhere else (Krashen, 1982; Tarone, 2000), my data indicates that maybe some degree of stress is not necessarily a bad thing. The HLP used in order to cope with the undoubted stresses of learning a TL does seem to energise the groups and, it may be hypothesised, helps make the exchanges and the language within them more memorable. Holmes's (2000; 2007) research suggests that humour can correlate with creativity. Maybe it can also be a conduit for learning, although such a hypothesis would need to be systematically researched to make this idea anything other than conjecture (see next section).

9.5 Areas for further investigation

Although pedagogy is somewhat tangential to the concerns of the current research, it is an area that would be worth investigating in the light of my findings. This categorically does not mean that I am advocating incorporating play into the language syllabus. Indeed, the data indicates that such a move would be misguided or even counter-productive. After all, language play's subversive nature would probably militate against any such attempt as does the fact that learners must 'own' their play in order for it to have any

psychological and social purchase. However, my data shows how teachers can undoubtedly control and encourage play in the classroom. On the other hand, some might, like the SLA researchers that have gone before them, regard it as 'off task' and diversionary, especially in environments which are potentially more challenging of authority than the one I have investigated. There needs to be research into how (consciously or unconsciously) teachers allow or quash the impulse to play. In this regard, the different behaviours that the same group of learners might display with different teachers could provide a useful comparative study. Such research may facilitate the establishment of good pedagogical practice in this regard.

Beyond the role of the teacher in facilitating or discouraging play in the classroom, further research needs to be made into humorous language play's part in the acquiring of a TL. My findings show how the learners, through play, take ownership of particular words and phrases which they have been taught. In the SLA literature, there has been much discussion of the importance of concepts such as noticing (Tomlin and Villa, 1994), consciousness (Schmidt, 1990) and attention (Schmidt, 1998) in the acquisition process. As discussed in Section 2.6, it could be posited that the heightened affective sense that seems to accompany play may help make particular items of language memorable for learners. It is not unreasonable to imagine that phrases such as 'these things happen', 'you missed the target' or 'take one and pass them on' are now part of the active pool of language that some of the learners in this research have at their disposal. If so, it is not unreasonable to assume that these items have been remembered because of the circumstances in which they were first encountered. This does not

mean that the learners will not misapply them in future. However, this too is a natural phase in the process of acquiring a language, as seen in the over-extension and under-extension of meanings that children give to words and phrases in their first language. Furthermore, the recontextualisation of language items during play may also eventually help them to become part of learners' active repertoire through repeated exposure (e.g. Tarone, 2002). So, rather than being regarded as 'off task', further investigations may show how humorous language play is the opposite, an important strategic tool which many learners use to help them acquire their TL.

Although my findings have implications for research into pedagogy and the acquisition process, the main focus is on humorous language play as a social instrument. My data shows that, despite the barriers of a low proficiency in the target language and a lack of pre-existing socio-cultural reference points, speakers use humorous language play in order to forge bonds and cultivate a sense of collective identity. This is a process which is well worth looking into beyond the classroom environment. After all, the participants who come to BizLang often comment that it is not necessarily the make-or-break presentation in English that they find most daunting but the socialising that precedes and proceeds it. To understand how humorous language play is used to forge cultural identities, however transient these might be, there needs to be longitudinal research into communication in the types of contexts in which my research participants might typically interact in the language, be that the video conference, the symposium or the board room. In this way, the extent to which localised in-group meanings establish themselves as resources for play, despite intermittent contact between

members, can be investigated. Given that English's place as the world's lingua franca seems in little danger of being challenged for the foreseeable future (e.g. Seidlhofer, 2011: 2), such research can throw light in microcosm on the importance of humorous language play in helping the world to broker deals, forge new commercial and economic ties, and generally keep spinning.

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APPENDIX 1

Transcription conventions:

rising intonation	?
pause (shorter than a second)	(.)
pause (a second or longer, timed to the nearest second)	(2)
starting point of an overlap	[
ending point of an overlap	*
turn-continuation or latching (no discernible gap between turns)	=
speaker's incomplete utterance	te-
paralinguistic and non-verbal activities	((*activity*))
laughter (each '@' representing one 'syllable' of laughter)	@@@
spoken while laughing	<@ text>
unintelligible speech; x marking approximate syllable number	(xxx)
assumed utterance	(text)
heard through speakers (recorded or on phone)	((speaker's name)) *text*

NB Capitals are used for the first person subject, for proper nouns or to indicate the use of acronyms e.g. 'IT department'

APPENDIX 2

Present: David, Ruby, Rosie, Josh, Robert, Toby, Harriet

The attendees had been split into two groups: Ruby, Rosie and Robert had just watched given extracts from the recording of a lower intermediate group from the 11.09.08. At the same time, Josh and Toby had listened to a meeting in another lower intermediate group from the 15.02.08. They were now reporting back to the group as a whole. Ruby's group kicked off the feedback session....

Ruby: ...you can shut me up as you go.... As an overview we looked at sort of three and a half excerpts from our group. And some kind of common threads came out. And I think what struck us on watching the group dynamics and the laughter in the first situation, it was shared experience. The group was able to refer back to a shared experience. And shared experience is a fundamental source of humour.

Robert: Where someone failed to do what they said they were going to do.

Ruby: on a previous occasion. That's right and that became a joke. But what was very interesting was the very very subtle line between the shared moment but also tension within the group. And it was a very very fine line. The joke was quite sharp and you could sense that there's a very fine interplay between interpersonal tensions as well. And what was also interesting in that segment was just a group even at that level develop very quickly a mutual code. Often not comprehensible to those outside the group (?) you know

that's what groups are. But this group had obviously begun to develop these codes. They understand each other at a particular level.

Ruby: Finally the other extract we looked at. Again very interesting that the trainer is teasing the participant in this case where the inappropriate response is actually what the trainer wants because that is going to be the source of humour. 'Will you remember what I...'

Rosie: 'Will you forget...'

Ruby: 'Will you forget what I've just said?' 'Yes, I will forget... yes, I will.' But the group dynamic is such that the participant knew that that's what the trainer was looking for, getting the inappropriate response 'yes I will.' But we weren't sure if all the members of the group were

Rosie: I actually thought there that what Ray wanted to hear was 'no, I won't'. I think that Ray was trying to elicit the negative.

Robert: 'No I won't forget.'

Rosie: 'I won't forget' and the participant

Robert: said 'Yes I will'

Rosie: 'yes I will' but as a joke.

Robert: as a joke.

Ruby: Yes, but I think Thomas outsmarted Ray

Rosie: Yes he did.

David: His face said I know what I'm going to say.

Rosie: Exactly. Absolutely. I quite agree that was the point. Because the first cue the answer was 'yes I will'. 'Will you remember this?' 'Yes I will'. 'Will you forget it?' and obviously the answer has to be 'no I won't' but Thomas at once said 'Yes I will'. Well, wouldn't you? I mean..

Josh: I destroyed the teacher.

Rosie: Yeah, absolutely.

Ruby: So power is involved there as well to a certain extent. I think there was an element of something we discussed right at the end was how humour can be both inclusive and exclusive. Yes, it can include you but it can actually exclude you too.

Robert: There was a very cruel moment.

Ruby: Yes, a sort of mockery.

Robert: With the Japanese.

David: Ah yes.

Robert: And he completely... having been animated for a very long time... 'are you with me?' 'Oh yes, we're with you on the left side, we're behind you' and he just...

David: It's interesting there that Antoine is the best in the group and that's the only moment of wordplay. The only moment of wordplay. 'Are you with me?' 'Yes I'm to the left of you... Michele to the right'

Robert: Laughter is nervous laughter by the others I thought. Crushed.

David: Yes, yes.

Robert: He crossed the line.

Ruby: So I think to conclude yes I mean sort of the experience, the emotion, the teasing, the trickery, outsmarting. But I think what hit me particularly was just the very very subtle relationship between laughter and cruelty in some senses. It's such a group dynamic.

David: Very interesting and certainly some of those comments are ones that I will develop in a moment because I think they're quite important. OK but...

Toby: .... Ours was only audio so

Josh: We didn't have the body language... Sometimes it seemed to be breaking rules and breaking conventions and breaking the role-play. Sometimes you're in the role-play and sometimes you come out of it.

Toby: Almost a realisation that they're in the role-play and they're saying something completely ridiculous, taking half a step back and having a laugh about it. You know, they were negotiating a price they were getting quite swept up in the whole thing and kind of having a go and he was apparently pointing a gun.

Robert: You could see that could you?

Josh: No no we had a little note.

Toby: At one point he's doing this (points a finger) and then he sort of self-deprecatingly says 'hands up' and everybody laughed.

David: It was a very tense meeting wasn't it? And Dieter was going like that (jabs finger).

Josh: 'If you say once more that we're not flexible then you can go'.

David: Yeah and it was quite tense it was really tense.

Josh: 'Hands up' and he broke the ... defused the situation.

Robert: Did *he* defuse it or...?

Josh: We think he did.

David: *He* defused it.

Robert: Ah, so he spotted that he'd crossed the line.

Josh: He took a step back

Robert: and defused it with laughter.

Josh: And there was something about timing too. Timing seemed to (....) how long (.....) before he delivered the punchline. (...) it was that pause that was also funny that produced the comedy.

Toby: There was embarrassment wasn't there when the German tried to make a joke that had no cultural reference for anybody else at all and there was a long...pause

David: Do you know the story, the old the same procedure as last year one. He said it. He just waited triumphantly for somebody to respond and of course nobody did.

Ruby: Aahh.

(.....)

Harriet:... tumbleweed.

Ruby: that strikes me listening to you describing that. Again it's that moment of 'is he serious? Is he serious or not?'

Toby: It's mystification isn't it.

Ruby: no but for the first time when somebody says (...) there is that tension 'is this serious?'

Josh: yes it's on the knife edge.

Ruby: (...) and the timing as you say so for somebody working in another language it's very interesting.

Robert: How was that resolved? Did he try to explain it or just?

David: No it just went. It drifted after that didn't it. It just...

Toby: There was embarrassed laughter. After the pause there was embarrassed laughter and then just moved on. He wasn't in a particularly deep hole....

Harriet: He used it quite cleverly actually because what he was saying was 'you always come, you always ask for a discount' so it could almost be within... but the way he delivered it he was almost like waiting.

(...)

Robert: It's so long since I've taught English but I remember that a lot of humour comes from mispronunciation. Sometimes (....) A lot of laughter.

David: Yes, there wasn't any of that in this particular data.

Robert: Do trainers ever do funny voices anything like that?

David: Voicing is an interesting one as well because it's something that's very difficult in another language, to voice. And of course when we tell stories and people... there are natural voicers and people who are not voicers you know. When I'm at home I do my teenage voice with my kids and all that sort of stuff. And of course they don't have that ability in another language to voice unless they voice themselves. You had an interesting one, didn't you.

Harriet: We had a lovely example of a telephone call at a higher level B group between a Russian and a Frenchman. And the Russian's playing the part of a dodgy Russian travel agent. And he is thickening his accent and making typical Russian mistakes which he's (...)

David: Yes, that's a nice piece of data which I have which you gave me which is great. But that's an avenue that most non-native speakers don't have. I remember – I can't remember his name – some guy from the Bank of Moscow who was in a group of mine some time earlier this year. He was talking about being in Edinburgh and he tried to voice a Scottish accent which was ridiculous of course but he tried it. And it didn't work and he was telling a story to a number of us upstairs and he couldn't because he didn't have that ability to do the Scottish accent. And the story in itself was quite funny anyway but again another avenue which was closed off to him.

Rosie: Also some people I don't know you can see that they have a very ready sense of humour and it comes through whatever language they are using. Genuinely funny I mean and others are just not. I can't quite explain it. And you know they are E level. I worked with a wonderful E-level lady from Gabon in a group.

David: Oh yes. I remember her.

Rosie: Do you remember? And she arrived and she was wearing the most fantastic outfit 'This is my work (...)!'That's what she said. Exactly. And she was E minus but it was

Josh: The drama

Rosie: something about the drama the personality

David: We only have to think about Koji and in fact he was in your meeting. And was great at using his very limited repertoire in a telling way.

Rosie: Absolutely.

Robert: That's why I suspect he excelled.

David: Absolutely. Maybe because time is short and people are looking at their watches maybe I should give you some ideas of what I've found. Is that alright?

Ruby: Yes.

(David gases on about various aspects of his research including the notion of the play frame)

Rosie: It's like the lord of misrule.

David: Explain that.

Rosie: In the courts, the medieval courts, the jester became the king after.... you know everything was changed. Everything reversed.

David: That's Bakhtin's idea of carnival.

Rosie: Yes it's that kind of thing.

David: Yes, of course we cue playing by intonation by..... (David continues gurning on about the way in which students trigger laughter, one of the means being the ability to evoke two frames simultaneously).

Harriet: The example that you had with the Mercedes and the Volvo and .... was saying 'this is a special product and that's why it's a high price' and the other guy was saying 'you're trying to compare a Volvo with a Mercedes' which came from a drill I'd done the day before on comparatives. 'the Volvo's less expensive than the Mercedes' which is again switching frame and recognising or subverting the teaching process within the role-play.

David: But there are lots of things going on within that. What you find with lower level people is that if they reproduce piece of language that's difficult or that they have been practising, the others will laugh as if it is wit.

Toby: Is there an element of recognition there?

David: (Talks of recognition and shared experience)

Robert: Both sides seem to be seeking that. I have an example of that from last night. Martina discovered she's going to be shifted next week to a new group and wants to know why. Within seconds of being together decided that this was the hopeless banking group and then we're into is the banking hopeless or is it the English language – all of this was over dinner – but this morning I got in and they'd turned into the hopeless banking group and will be next week and I know that's going to be the running (...) and there's still someone going to join that group. The poor Polish woman is going to be told they're expecting her. But why is it that both sides, trainer and participant, want that signalled (?) so early. Secondly, different question, does this help language acquisition?

David: It's a very good question and I want to come to language acquisition in a moment. That idea of shared experience and the fact it grows up incrementally is really important and I think it's universal. If you think of going to the pub, you arrive late and your friends are sitting down and you go and join them. And someone says something and everybody laughs except you. And something has happened beforehand which makes it a sort of mini ephemeral culture of which you are not a part before they explain it to you. I think we've all had that moment . And that seems to be almost something to do with the nature of humour. And you said within seconds and that's what really interests me actually. It's something that happens within moments that sort of building up of a group identity. It fulfils a need I suppose.

Harriet: It's also something that's not (...) if it's explained to you. It'll never sound funny to you. If you say 'what's the joke?' and if it carries on later it's actually a form by which you are excluded even though it's been explained to you. So it's sort of evoking this happy feeling of experience rather than an intellectual understanding.

David: Yes, that's right. Absolutely.

Robert: And in fact you as a newcomer to that group need not (....) because part of the test if you join that group is that you listen and that you pick up on whatever and improve it and people sort of unconsciously welcoming you to do that.

Toby: You actually know as the outsider that you're not going to (....) the first two jokes are out of bounds for you till they welcome you in.

David: Absolutely, absolutely.

Ruby: Also thinking about training. We challenge people quite early on in the experience. I think often groups to call it a defence mechanism is too simplistic. They do, the group unites against this common enemy which is this language which the trainer is asking me to handle and that I think promotes – ephemeral though it is – an intergroup culture very very quickly.

David: That's a very good point and that intergroup culture against the outside world is almost ritual. I'll tell you there was an interesting moment. Michele, the Italian guy, they were doing 'what do you find impressive in London and what don't you?' And he said 'I don't know' and Viktor slapped him on the back and I don't know if you saw this.

Ruby: No I didn't.

David: and said, Ukrainian accent 'But the English women?' and he said 'The English women they are not impressive.' And everyone laughed and Antoine said 'it's on the tape' and

anyway at the break I spoke to Michele about his stay in London. And he said 'Oh I really like London. I've really enjoyed my time here. Beautiful place, terrible weather, beautiful women'. And I said 'but you said' and he said' Ah it was a joke'. But it's part of that ritual against in that sense the British culture, the outside culture. And it's a ritual thing. In fact my supervisor said 'you've got to read up on ritual' because ritual is part of what this is. It's to do with ritual. We're going to have to finish soon. (David then goes on to hypothesize how language play might help in the language acquisition process)..the other thing is I think that actually the incremental nature of it means that there is exposure to particular words or phrases maybe over a week or two weeks which might help them might help them to learn.

Harriet: I think also by the nature of being humour, it's training them beyond the explicit which is stretching them in terms of their relationship to the language.

David: And reading between the lines even in the most primitive sort of way (goes on to talk about Janet Holmes' work)

Robert: I'm convinced that in Britain humour is absolutely crucial doing business. (....) To make progress in a meeting, the crucial moment is often resolved by the (....) it pushes it forward.

Toby: I'm not being very scientific but I would say I mean for example between English and American I would say that it might be different but I would say that there's a lot more in common....

Ruby: Cos I see it slightly differently. When you described her observations in meetings I also find that laughter is also an expression of relief and at moments when critical moments have just been passed or there is sense of agreement or consensus or a decision

perhaps has been taken, what follows sometimes a second later is laughter and it's expressing relief. It's a recognition amongst a group that something has passed.

Robert: It's gladiatorial. Making a decision almost always results from somebody having to move from a previous position so what we have there is setting up for a fight. Perhaps that's the relief that we've resolved it without coming

Ruby: to blows. And I think that's a very primitive reflex that remains in us that we then signal to each other that you know everything's fine.

David: Everything's fine. That goes back to face work. A lot of it relates to face and how we save our own faces and we also work to save other people's faces as well. So I think the research in terms of our classroom practice will have if anything it'll be a by-product, anything that comes out. Because I think the worst thing is to try and set up play because play by it's very nature is off-task or seemingly off-task. Although... I don't know. I think there might also be implications for cross-cultural communication in terms of how we negotiate relationships where humour is such a difficult thing to evoke. I think there might well be things that come out of the research in those terms. It's going to be as I say I'm at a preliminary stage. I'm interested in what I'm doing and the guys I've talked to at the university are particularly interested and say that there might be a lot that will come out of this but as yet I don't know where it's going. But that's where I've got so far.

Robert: Is it perhaps in our favour for years we've said that hearing laughter coming out of a room is always a good sign.

David: Absolutely.

Robert: It's not just that there are happy people. Sometimes as we saw, laughter is not happy

David: No no it's double-edged.

Robert: but that it does facilitate learning, does (....) we do say we want laughter. If there's not laughter there's something wrong.

David: I mean the literature says fun, doesn't it. You've got to have fun and the course directors push that point and I think this rather modest research suggests we're doing the right thing.

Robert: The fascinating thing which I hope we'll get out of this is there certain kinds of humour in wordplay or whatever which does help language acquisition and are there others which blocks it which stops it. The other question is does one consciously promote humour.

David: Well, there are ways... I mean Ray in that moment where he said 'Will you remember this? Will you forget this?' Now he knew that he might get

Ruby: Yes

David: he knew that he might get the opposite. He gave him an open goal which of course Thomas took. I'm sure there are ways that we subconsciously as well as consciously allow play and, as I said, the thing about research is that you have the luxury to reflect on it and look at it and see if there's anything that might come out of it. That's it.

Ruby: Can I just ask a tiny PS. It's not I think within your current remit but one thing that's always struck me is the humour that can be derived from our listening dialogues and what I've always found interesting is that a phrase will become the group's phrase and they will remember it from day two when they heard it till when they leave. And it becomes a joke it becomes a source of. And that I find fascinating as well. When somebody hears language which they immediately latch onto and that becomes a source and that's very interesting.

Harriet: I remember when you were speaking and you said 'I wouldn't say no to a cup of coffee'.

David: Oh God oh yes.

Harriet: And they adored this and they kept coming out with it in the last two weeks and that they thought it was the most marvellous thing.

David: Well that shared experience shared culture thing includes shared phrases and shared language items. So that's where we are.

APPENDIX 3

Research Project Meeting at BizLang – 5th January 2013

Present: David, Ray, Harriet, Rosie, Kate, Geraint, Camilla, Mick, Mark, Anthony and other BizLang colleagues

David: OK. UM. I deliberately didn't give you much of a framework for that exercise in order not to influence what you said and what you discussed. What I'd like you to do is to feed back briefly on anything of interest, OK? And then I'll talk to you about my findings so far and then, perhaps the most important thing, send you away to discuss any pedagogical implications of my research findings and then we'll get back together and xxx OK? I don't know who'd like to start.

Ray: You got the clip there ready? Do you want me to say what I found?

David: Which one? Have you got the... have you got the...?

Ray: Have you got the audio?

Anthony: It's um do you want a glass of champagne... recording four.

David: Do you want to talk about any general comments first?

Ray: Yes, it's a four-person group. The guy who is the German speaker is Dieter. There's three other guys in the group who are let's say more... finding a joke in life more than he does. He's a serious-minded guy. The clip you're going to hear is just before 5.30 on a Friday afternoon. It's a one-week course. It's intensive. There have been tensions below the surface and humour may well be a form of release which we'll hear in a moment. It's the ABS. It's the end of a negotiation. Is there anything else I should say?

Anthony: I was going to say release or failed attack. Failed attack on a character who we've talked about.

David: OK. So, it's this one - you want a glass of champagne. This is audio only I'm afraid. And it's the end of the negotiation. (*plays recording*)

Ray: Would you like to hear it again? It's very short. (*plays recording again*)... So, basically what you heard there is really somebody taking the situation very seriously, starting with the price, very ponderously arriving it's OK and clapping his hands at which his wording 'you want a glass of champagne' is exactly what they want because it's five thirty and they probably heard from Harriet or someone at the beginning of the day that there's drinks at the end of the day and thank god that's over. Basically that's the way we saw it. The code we feel of the other three people is let's end this, let's finish this exercise. And we feel that because there's been humour throughout the week um it's really been a form of releasing a bit of tension in the group. Um and it may have been even some of the characters in that group who are not as able to speak fluently as Dieter is using a bit of humour to actually establish themselves as characters. Either their character to be funny they're not that adept at using the language but they have this skilful quick facility to jump in and make comments which what they do. It seemed to be very uh...

David: That's interesting. Do you think that Dieter was being witty?

Anthony: Hard to tell from the intonation.

David: You said something actually Mark which was I thought was very interesting. What did you say about stepping in stepping out?

Mark: OK. I said it reminded me of being in secondary school. They come to BizLang and they're put under these kind of alien authorities. And like when you're in secondary school, the most fun thing you can dos is kind of subvert that authority and it gives you a kind of

cohesiveness of a group within that structure and it doesn't really matter what you say, the humour comes from subverting the structure. And what they're doing is just kind of stepping in and out of character, stepping in and out of the enactment. And at one point it's like a real enactment and at the next point they're just playing with it.

Geraint: It's the irony of being forced into this ridiculous role-play which they'll play the game and take seriously for a long time but they have to be in control of when they remove themselves from it and if they can do that with a laugh, all the better. I think on ours there were two or three of those where the kind of ridiculousness of the material which they're happy to invent themselves within for a certain period of time but there is a kind of subversion thing where they step that bit beyond it just to demonstrate that there's a kind of knowing ironic thing going on.

David: Absolutely. And I'm sure we all agree at low level there's that feeling of frustration about no longer being in charge. You're not in charge at BizLang because of your language limitations and you have to find a way of asserting some sort of power within those constraints. But I'll come back to that later. Thank you very much for that.

Mick: I just thought one last point about this. I think it's also very relevant that in this particular, the ABS in they're doing it on the last day of the course. I do think their whole attitude to what they do on the last day is very different. I think most of them are thinking about other things. Am I going to get to the airport on time? What's on my desk next week? And maybe this is moving onto the pedagogical implications so maybe enough on that but I think it's very important that it was the last day of the course.

David: I absolutely agree with you.

Mick: Actually, the ABS is not such a ridiculous piece of material, in fact so...

Harriet: I don't think this example has subversion in it particularly but I think it's a common thing in a lot of the clips. This one I think what creates the humour is the blending of realities because in fact they managed to find a phrase that makes sense because they've just reached a resolution in the ABS but makes sense because they're going upstairs to have some bubbly. And it's that they've managed to find that bridge.

David: Absolutely. And that blending of those frameworks is the first thing I noticed when I started doing this. There are other findings I have but that blending of particular frameworks is a common source of humour because we set up particular frameworks in the classroom inevitably in a learning situation. Not only the extended role-play but also the brief scenario of you know getting them to elicit, eliciting a request from them you set up a situation like it's hot in here or whatever it might be. And then they have two frameworks to play with, one is the learner and trainer situation, the other is that hypothetical relationship you have and a lot of my data shows how adept they are at blending those two and actually I think that Dieter, despite his Germanic ways, is being witty in his own way.

Kate: It's a very Germanic think to do. he says OK this is the money and then this is the way he's going to do the humour. Serious first about the serious part and then serve the champagne.

David: Thanks very much for that guys. Can we move on to another group?

Kate: Do you want to do it? I can do it. This is... yeah, this is a video of Family Reunion and it's Thursday of the second week. There are five people in the group. There's an Italian, a Russian, a German, a Japanese who's quite quiet and a Ukrainian. One of the guys is quite dominant in the group. And which one are we going for?

Camilla: The really impressive.

Kate: The impressive one. What I'd like to do first is some general comments what we picked up generally from all the videos that we watched. One of the things was they tended to laugh at some sort of common recognition of stereotypical ideas about houses, women, the weather, the pub. And it was very often only one word that really made them laugh. But it was often a common association of an image that they have of the way things are over here. And sometimes the trainer prompted that and sometimes it came from themselves.

David: And which one are you going for? The typical old English?

Camilla: The not impressive and the typical old English kind of link.

Harriet: Not impressive first probably.

David: Not impressive. OK. Sorry. The one means nothing... (*plays video clip*)

Kate: They're not very sure about the English women bit.

Ray: I'm leading them xxx

Kate: Yes I know.

Ray: Thanks very much. So it was highly impressive.

Kate: They seem to they're not sure if they should laugh at that or not. We could discuss this later on, the pedagogical impact. You know if there were a woman in the group would it be the same? They were not daring, they weren't sure if they were allowed to take that further but somehow the trainer sort of made it OK and so they laughed, they laughed at that. And they were hooked on this one word which they kept repeating, not impressive, and also we noticed that it often seems the opposite which helps them, which sort of sets them off as well. So, impressive... not impressive.

Harriet: Something which is impressive something, so the opposite.

Kate: The opposites are funny. There were other situations as well - you're a good student, you're a bad student.

Camilla: Sorry. It comes back to this subversion thing coz the way that they're laughing at typical stereotypical English things - the rain and there's another one where they laugh at old English houses. And so they're grouped together so they're saying look, we can laugh at you.

David: Does that gel with your own experiences to any degree?

Several: Yeah.

David: This let's call it anti-British. It isn't actually is quite a common thing that I've come across is to... this thing about the prevailing culture and to set themselves against that prevailing culture in some way. It could be the BizLang culture by the way which they will subvert but they will often talk of well you know, the British food thing doesn't come up so much now.

Kate: The weather does though.

David: The weather does.

Kate: The weather comes up all the time. But we certainly recognised that it was the British thing here like this negative stereotype. But also what's interesting is you say the Bizlang culture because later on they really hook on this and it goes back to what Ray said and what you said earlier. They hook on the phrase 'take one and pass them on' which they find incredibly funny because they've been practising it for two week. It's also the subversion thing again - we'll give the trainer what he wants type of thing um so it's...

David: But with 'take one and pass them on' do we get them to repeat that?

Camilla: No they just hear it twice a day. No, but they've heard it but they don't use it.

David: They hear it don't they?

Kate: I get them to repeat it.

David: One of the things with subversion here is that they will often voice the trainer. Repeat. I don't know if you looked at repeat.

Camilla: Yeah.

David: Repeat was one. And in some of the other stuff I've got as well there's a lot of the voicing of the trainer. And there's an interesting one in the audio one where they refer back to a drill which they had in the lab and it wasn't the drill which they were asked to repeat, it was the voice of the trainer cueing which they used. And again that subversion thing, that voicing is something which comes up.

Geraint: I think it is to do with the discomfort of being here because we don't see that so much on the tailored courses where you could so easily subvert the British thing. It doesn't happen so much. Because they're here.

David: Exactly. But I also think and this is pure hypothesis, that they set themselves as a group against the outside world. And I think that's especially true at a lower level. That's the hypothesis.

Kate: And hiding their insecurities as well.

David: And hiding their insecurities. Yeah OK. Thanks thanks very much for that.

Kate: We just noticed one other thing. I don't know if someone else will notice this so I might not say it now.

David: No, no, say it.

Kate: We just noticed that the body language seemed, there seemed to be a lot of whenever they touched somebody, they picked up a glass, they're laughing. You know, the guy pretends that he's asleep later on because they say 'if you had died, if you'd been the person that had died'. So somehow the body language sets them off as well.

David: It's a resource that they have, isn't it? One of their few resources as sort of D level or E level guys is the body. And there's one in the audio one actually which is a guy pointing the finger.

Mark: Yeah, pointing the finger.

David: Last but not least.

Geraint: Well, I've lost the disc.

David: Any general comments?

Geraint: Yeah, we could see that there were kind of universally funny things that happened in each of them except one which, if it's alright, we wouldn't mind showing too. One where there was something really interesting and another one where we were completely stumped. None of us could work out why they were laughing. But apart from that they find sort of universally funny things like contrasts. So, over the top introduction of a really crap present is just funny. And it's funny wherever you are. The collective consciousness of using language that they've been drilled on. That moment in the first two syllables of it where people recognise and go 'aah' and it's funny because they know it's not natural to them and they're using drilled language. Um yeah and I think those are the two we saw most of and a little bit of subverting the British thing. But the one where we saw something that was kind of maybe a little more sophisticated was 'without'. And there's two bits of what we thought were quite sophisticated right at the very end. One which the group picks up on

really clearly and one which the group doesn't pick upon at all which is possibly linguistically the most sophisticated. (*plays the video*)

David: They're discussing 'who goes where' by the way... you probably didn't catch that actually.

Geraint: Yeah, we had to watch it several times before we really got what was going on but it's 'who goes where'. there are twelve people involved. Somehow or other the idea that there were twenty-three people involved has been introduced in this. Halfway through, someone goes 'Hang on, twenty three?' to which the other guy does the counting and goes 'twelve' and he says 'I check only if you're with me or not' which is quite an intelligent way of trying to say 'just testing'. And that works universally as a piece of humour. but the interesting bit of wordplay comes immediately afterwards which no-one in the group notices. One of them immediately replies 'without'. So, 'I check if you're with me or not' , response 'without'.

Several: Oh right.

Geraint: And what we're saying is if a very linguistically adept and deft native speaker did that, if a kind of Mick Smith said that, we'd all kind of arch our eyebrows and go 'clever bid of wordplay.. clever bit of wordplay, Mick. But from a D level non-native speaker, it looks kind of just OK, as a bit resourceful. But maybe it was more than that. Maybe it was a clever bit of linguistic work. But no-one picks up on that do they, in the group.

Kate: Who was the one who said 'without'?

David: Him

Geraint: It was the Senegalese one.

David: He's Senegalese French speaking. That idea of wordplay. There is very little wordplay in my data but there is some and that's one example. There is another example on one of the things that I gave... the Ray group which was 'Are you with me?' 'Yes, I'm on the left of you, do-das on the right'.

Kate: Oh, I've got that yeah. 'I'm on the left of you, you're on the right. Don't worry'.

David: And again the same 'are you with me?' and he plays with that which actually insults the Japanese guy who's there. But there is wordplay even at this level. There is wordplay. Face - of course you're absolutely right, face-saving strategy there and inevitably humour is used to save face. But yeah I mean the fact that there is some wordplay I think is impressive anyway despite the fact that they are D level. is there anything to add there?

Geraint: No. Only that in another one of the clips, there was another bit of humour which we spotted which again isn't very unusual which is accidental complete misuse of something you've been taught which then becomes funny and then you learn from. Um so I think Harriet had drilled them something like 'I'm tired' and instant response 'you should go to bed'. And so she goes 'I'm tired' and one of them says 'well, you shouldn't be tired'.

Others: (laugh)

Geraint: You know and then a recognition from the group that it was an attempt to use it and whether or not it was wordplay or a mistake, there's a face-saving moment where it's set up as a joke and that's again something that I think we see a lot.

David: OK.

Geraint: The only other thing is it would just be really interesting for us if we could watch 'the quality is evident' because we Harriet may... Harriet thinks she may have the answer which is something off camera but we don't know what's funny here.

Harriet: The sound is very bad.

David: Yes, sorry. The sound is very bad here. Um and you are feeding back here yeah, aren't you on the 'who goes where' (*plays video*).. yeah, what the hell are they laughing at?

Kate: They're relating it to the quality of the training or something. It's just..

Geraint: That's what Harriet said.

Kate: Yeah and I think it is.

David: They're talking about their presentation which they've just made and you were discussing with them how you win over clients in fact. And they were discussing the presentation they'd made to me. And he was commenting on the quality of their work and I think I suppose the laughter comes from the fact, it's a bit like the biro, saying we have a present for you, this cheap thing.

Geraint: So, it's a contrast.

David: They prepared and ran, as we do, you know, they prepared a proposal in half an hour or whatever and I think it's a contrast between this rushed flipchart job and this notion of the quality of their work.

Camilla: So, there's been a wave of the arm or something?

Kate: It's ironic, is it?

David: It's ironic. OK, great. Well thank you very much for that. That was great.

Harriet: So, it was nothing to do with my quality?

Mark: So, what you're saying is all they're doing is just taking the piss out of all our stuff?

David: Yeah, they take the piss.

Geraint: It all comes under this subversion thing. The subversion thing is at the heart of absolutely all of it?

David: Absolutely. Subversion is at the heart of it. Can I just tell you some extra things which I found and then ask you to go away and discuss how this might affect your behaviour as trainers, OK? (*I then go on to talk about frames, about the way play is used to take ownership of language etc*)... the process of overextending seems to be a common one, especially at the low level. OK.

Kate: I think I would imagine, sorry to interrupt you, if I had just learnt a phrase in Chinese and I was pleased I got that, I would be using it wherever I wanted, on every occasion. Isn't that what they're doing? they find that funny whether it's the right situation or not.

David: Exactly right.

Kate: It's the joy of the sentence.

David: it's the joy, yes. And they laugh at each other for producing phrases which frankly we wouldn't laugh at half the stuff which we looked at would we.. as native speakers?

Geraint: Half of it not but the other half yes. Some stuff which isn't based on them being learners.

David: Absolutely right.

Mick: you were the lucky group then.

Others: (laugh)

David: (*talks about how we, as native speakers, also blend frames and build up reference points*) Think of our catchphrases within the family or references within the family that we have that nobody else understands.

Harriet: That's something as second trainers when we come into a group.

David: Exactly. That Monday morning - what's happening here?

Rosie: Or blending groups.

Kate: Or blending groups.

Rosie: That's very interesting. Because we have to do it but that is...

David: Absolutely right. They have to rebuild a culture within the group.

Mick: I was with these temporarily.

Geraint: But before that, without?

MIck: xxx without.

Others: (laugh)

APPENDIX 4

Statement of Informed Consent

David Hann (Principal investigator)
BizLang Academic Management Team
█████████████ Road
London ███████
Tel: +███████████
Email: d.e.hann@open.ac.uk

Re: A research project investigating aspects of language communication between non-native speakers of English

If you are willing to take part in this project, please sign and complete the details below. Note that at any time during the research you will be free to withdraw, and your participation or
non-participation will not affect your ██████ course in any way.

The results of any research project involving ██████ participants constitute personal data under the Data Protection Act. They will be kept secure and not released to any third party.

I am willing to take part in this research, and by signing below I give my permission for the data collected to be used anonymously in any written reports, presentations and published papers relating to this study.

Name: (please print)   ....

Address: ....

                ....

Signed: ....

Date: ....

Re: A research project investigating aspects of language communication between non-native speakers of English

We would like to ask you to take part in a research project which is investigating aspects of communication between participants on our open English-for-Business courses. Participation in the project is, of course, entirely voluntary.

██████ is not only expert at training people to improve their communication skills in the language but also takes an active interest in research in the field. There are always things to learn about the complexities of how the language is acquired and used. Because of this, ██████ has encouraged me in this research which forms part of a part-time higher degree that I am undertaking at the Open University. We hope that my findings will inform our own training room practices and so help us to improve our courses still further in the future.

I cannot be more specific about the areas I am investigating as this may influence your own behaviour during the research process. However, if you take part, I will be happy to inform you subsequently of the exact details of the investigation.

In my role as researcher, I would:

- Sit in on some of your training
- Retain and analyse some of the recordings that are made in the training room during your stay with us (as you know, simulated meetings and telephone calls are an important part of the course)
- Make recordings of other activities in the training room

I want to assure you that the data collected from this project will be used anonymously. Moreover, at any time during the project, you will be free to withdraw. Your participation or non-participation will not affect in any way what you do on the course. If you do not wish to participate, this will have no implications at all for your continuing study at ██████. You are welcome to ask any questions about the project at any time, either when you are here or by emailing me at the address on the consent form. If you would prefer to ask a third party about the research, you are free to contact Professor Guy Cook at the Centre for Research in Education and Educational Technology, the Open University (email: g.cook@open.ac.uk, tel. 01908 653383).

If you are happy to participate in this project, please indicate your willingness to do so by completing and signing the form on the other side of this document.

Thank you.

David Hann

APPENDIX 5

Statement of Informed Consent (Staff)

David Hann (Principal investigator)
██████ Academic Management Team
█████████████ Road
London ████████
Tel: █████████████
Email: d.e.hann@open.ac.uk

Re: A research project investigating aspects of language communication between non-native speakers of English

If you are willing to take part in this project, please sign and complete the details below. Note that at any time during the research you will be free to withdraw.
.

The results of any research project involving ██████ staff constitute personal data under the Data Protection Act. They will be kept secure and not released to any third party.

I am willing to take part in this research, and by signing below I give my permission for the data collected to be used anonymously in any written reports, presentations and published papers relating to this study.

Name: (please print)   ....

Address: ██████████████████████████████████, **London** ████
██

                         ....

Signed: ....

Date: ....

Re: A research project investigating aspects of language communication between non-native speakers of English

We would like to ask you to take part in a research project which is investigating aspects of communication between participants on our open English-for-Business courses. Participation in the project is, of course, entirely voluntary.

As an organisation, we at ▇▇▇▇▇ are not only expert at training people to improve their communication skills in the language but also take an active interest in research in the field. There are always things to learn about the complexities of how the language is acquired and used. Because of this, ▇▇▇▇▇ has encouraged me in this research which forms part of a part-time higher degree that I am undertaking at the Open University. We hope that my findings will inform our own training room practices and so help us to improve our courses in the future.

I am looking into how language learners, especially those at the lower end of the proficiency scale, play and have fun in their Target Language. As part of my analysis, I would like to draw on your pedagogical expertise and experience by asking you to look at and comment on some recorded interactions from the training room. Your group discussions of the selected clips will themselves form part of my analysis. Some of you have already kindly allowed me to sit in and record some of your training as part of my data gathering. This form is an official means of verifying your permission to use the recordings made during these sessions.

I want to assure you that the data collected from this project will be used anonymously. Moreover, at any time during the project, you will be free to withdraw. You are welcome to ask any questions about the project at any time, either here at work or by emailing me at the address on the consent form. If you would prefer to ask a third party about the research, you are free to contact Professor Guy Cook at the Centre for Research in Education and Educational Technology, the Open University (email: g.cook@open.ac.uk, tel. 01908 653383).

If you are happy to participate in this project, please indicate your willingness to do so by completing and signing the form on the other side of this document.

Thank you.

David Hann

Memorandum

From	John Oates
	Chair, The Open University Human Participants and
	Materials Research Ethics Committee
	Research School
Email	j.m.oates@open.ac.uk
Extension	52395

| To | David Hann RC1 |

| Subject | A study of the functions and forms that the playful use of English takes among a group of language learners on an intensive Business English course |

| Ref | HPMEC/2008/#463/1 |
| Date | 23 July 2008 |

This memorandum is to confirm that the research protocol for the above-named research project, as submitted on 17th July 2008, is <u>approved</u> by the Open University Human Participants and Materials Ethics Committee, subject to satisfactory responses to the following:

You are asked to:

1. revise the information to participants to make it clear that participation is entirely voluntary

2. delete the 'I do not wish to participate' option in the consent form. It appears there is no reason for you to ask for a return from people who do not wish to participate

Please send revised documents for final approval.

At the conclusion of your project, by the date that you stated in your application, the Committee would like to receive a summary report on the progress of this project, any ethical issues that have arisen and how they have been dealt with.

John Oates

Chair, OU HPMEC

APPENDIX 6

APPENDIX 7

Emailed observations from Harriet - 5th February 2013

Juan is going with Harry –

Lovely example of mixing different levels of reality (frames) – no doubt it's the shift that causes the laughter. (I wondered if it was the afternoon off he had meant… was there not also discussion of Harry being dead/ sick at some point?)

Who's that?

Interesting thing is they are laughing before the 'harry' joke (which I guess is the shifting of frames). Is this nervous laughter that they are about to hear themselves, and already amused at the mistakes (who is it/ who am I?) that they are about to listen to. Bit confused where the knocking is coming from. On the recording? Wasn't it a tel call– in which case it's strange to have knocking? Or was it something from another room. If the latter, then in some ways you've got a richer switching of frames, as noise from another classroom/ another student knocking is an explicit blending of the study environment with the 'Harry' reality layer.

What the barman wanted

So they are listening to a roleplay? And one of them referenced a true story – with tweaked details – for the roleplay? So you clearly have shifting frames. Above that could there be anything else? – 1. Shared experience and running jokes (the barman is obviously one).. and these shared evening stories are perhaps something that not only unite the participants, but something that slightly excludes the trainer, as the trainer wasn't there. This isn't used in a nasty way – but are there intersections with 'we hate the English jokes' – something that brings together the punters. Interesting that it's Marek who sites the Juan

story (if I understand correctly)… since the story is about English incompetence, there might be a certain pleasure on Marek's part happening too. They are a very gentle pair, but this would connect with the 'humour as competitive/ pushing our own or others' incompetence' theme that I remember from that B group I wrote about in an email once.

I would like to speak to Jens

Interesting – are they laughing at the learning process? Laughing at their own mistake and confusion, certainly. What I find interesting here is that their attitude is close to perfect (in terms of what you would want in a punter in this situation). The situation is one I've seen met with significant anxiety, frustration or defensiveness more often. I think punters can really find it tough being someone else. They either get very anxious about getting all the details right, and neglect the basic communication/ human issues that they are dealing with. Or they think it adds a stupid unnecessary, distracting layer to their language challenge. Both ways – particularly when they become confused during the actual roleplay can result in them giving up, or dismissing the feedback afterwards, 'because they weren't in a real situation, so didn't say what they would in real life'. These guys, anyway are certainly having a good laugh about it – but I'd be tentative in genaralising this out – certainly as identity crisis causing humour… it could, though, be seen as another shifting frames example. (interesting the laugh is on Marek this time.. would be nice to know the order of these… was one a retaliation for the other? If there hadn't been balance about who was being joked at, would the dynamic have been tenser?).

I'm Helmut

I wonder how genuine Marek's laughter is at the beginning here. He certainly looks serious until he hangs up the call (interesting also his 'power arms'. Juan makes it a collaborative laugh by saying "bloody Harry" – it's then confirmed as a 'we're in this together' – the

'bloody Harry' for me is the key here. As well as showing sympathy for Marek, that's a subversion of the exercise – and, in being possibly more disrespectful than they would be with the trainer in the room – it's a very uniting moment. I was surprised to hear him say 'Bloody' – is that a word they learned in class? I remember that being another marked source of humour from my training days – the reinvention, and light subversion of the words they have learned from the trainer. Is that happening here?

I can't change my identity

Again for me, I don't think the key is the shift of identity. I think Marek is feeling a little embarrassed still (crossed arms – another defense stance, as soon as he says he can't change). They are both laughing together – students united. Juan again pushes the subversion harder – suggesting to Jens he should forget his figures – goodbye. You take it in great spirit. It's not personal to you. But here, they are literally shutting down the characters in the roleplay – Juan roleplays hanging up on Jens. (voicing there too). (Don't they actually kill Harry later?) – same thing.

My name is..

There's an instant sense of humour as the frames are confused. Juan remains pretty focussed on the English, but since it was his confusion this time, Marek is relaxed and is the one who makes the slightly subverting 'my name is..' revival of the roleplay identity confusion.

New Identity

'Second Victim' gets a real laugh here. I think they are laughing at their ineptitude/ their learning situation/ their disempowerment here. The 'New Identity' I think is almost a serious response to this… not the new 'Helmut' identity – but the sense of being the 'victim disempowered student'. Then the laughter really takes over – concentrated on the

confusion. I think the tension is all gone here. They know you are ok with it. They are not struggling in the moment. This is all about 'reliving'. Juan even gestures with his paper, to show what he was doing during the call to try to help. This is going to become a running joke for the rest of the week I think – it's the building of the story – its ossification/ magnification – I think Juan's support, and mutual subversions (Bloody Harry – hang up on Jens) make it possible for this to become a 'glowing moment' – free of one-up-manship (other than a playful hint towards the trainer)

No Jens No Harry

I think they are just at the point of any mention of Harry bringing back the giggles! Juan makes the link explicit by adding 'No Jens'. A random question – to what extent does humour help learning? Or undermine it? I see clearly that it helps one survive/ feel better about the learning experience, but beyond that, does it help people learn?

What Happened?

Interestingly, you laugh more in this one than they do. The point at which they laugh is towards the beginning – when the 'my wife… all night… let me tell you…' kind of feel… Here I think the amusement in the story telling is the suspense… what on earth is he going to say? Juan plays this up a little bit. So – there's the very slight sexual innuendo (perhaps deepened for a native speaker because he says 'all night connect'.. rather than 'contact every night'. I am not sure if they are aware of the leading nature of the words used. Actually this one – though not that comical – could be seen as a shifting of identity – he expresses a real confusion about the experience of lacking words in Spanish – a real 'who am I moment'/ a change of voice – which runs deeper than the 'Harry/ who am I' thing.

Head

Juan really wants to tell this story. You are moving on without investigating, and he pulls you back in. Marek is looking patient through the first half (indeed he is a relatively passive participant in quite a lot of these clips… I wonder how you are handling the question of how much you can generalise based on these two (and principally one) student/s?) Juan is a real 'man's man' -almost all his stories in some way reinforce this – football (forget family – must remember football) – 'all night connecting with wife' – hanging up on Jens – beer…his clear assertion that he negotiates….As the slightly younger man, is this his power anchor, when Marek is actually a better speaker? There isn't actually much laughter here – most of it comes with what I'd call a switching (or extension) of frames – from negotiating with business people… first to family… then to the barman. It's the unexpectedness, with each layer having an implied story – and also one playing with disempowerment. When a man says he negotiates with his family – he is subverting his own authority. The other laugh is when he says he didn't know the word… again a laugh at his incompetence/ powerlessness I think.

She buy nothing

This is fun. First they are laughing at themselves – they are 'research subjects' – which immediately implies that they are strange in someway – and puts them in a disempowered position. Then they start reliving the story again, and actually it's much more vivid this time – mainly because he voices it, gesturing etc – he verges on physical comedy when he measures out the head and grimaces… He tells a classic comic story, in that he reaches an impasse – a possibility to explain or get what he wants – which is of course based in his linguistic incompetence (laughing at their own incompetence is a big theme). Are you sure of the transcription 'she buy nothing'? I think he says 'zero by nothing – by nothing'. I think what he is saying is 'with no head (zero) to demonstrate – I can't say anything or get

anything (nothing). His prepositions are wrong too – but I think he is basically saying 'zero multiplied by zero is nothing.' Might be totally wrong. 'She buy nothing' doesn't make much sense to me in the context and isn't how I hear it.

Or you present a quiz

Don't really get that one.. a mildly humorous reference to the training process? You are making them feel a little awkward, so Juan takes a little power back?

Are you married?

At the beginning – they really laugh when you repeat the question - I guess you do something gesturally to show the aggression of the question? –exaggerating/ hamming it up? Then of course there is Juan's joke with the ring… another matcho reference to assert his manliness! Again, Marek is looking no more than patient/ polite… I get the feeling he is a little bit tired of Juan's posturing, and would like to get on with studying?

Square

This one is about shared experience and stretching the sensible (square, then round posts to plastic and stretchy) – it looks like they both went to the game? And there were problems scoring? There's a nice collaborative, accelerating aspect to the humour that isn't in most of these examples. I was wondering if native speakers would make this joke? Or find it amusing? Is this something specific to language learning? I'm not sure. It seems a pretty classic form of humour not reliant on language.. but it's a pretty basic joke.. there may be the bar gets lowered for what is funny… the pleasure of being able to joke atall makes all jokes worth laughing at!

Barca Supporters

"I can't remember what is what" is actually a very nice humorous expression – it's got an unusual balance to it… and it has that slightly double meaning. A native speaker would say 'I don't know what is what'… whereas I assume he is using it literally to say 'I can't remember which symbol is which meaning.'. So it's a happy coincidence that would get an instinctive laugh from a native speaker too I think – because of its comic rhythm. For them, I think the humour is more about incompetence again. The separate sign for Barcelone supporters I don't really get – don't quite understand why that's funny and what he's saying with that. Is this a running joke of some kind? Or was there something about the symbol he drew?

OK

I will comment on these as a bunch. Lovely extracts. Quite a few things going on here, I think. First, there's laughing at incompetence – mutual amusement because in this area they have equal (lack of) prowess. But there's more. The 'OK' response compared to the very English 'ohhh I'm so sorry' touches on culture – and Juan particularly definitely mocks that English insincerity – and plays rebel with it. There is also a matcho element – (don't care that Harry is dead – 'not my problem')… this isn't just asserting that he's a tough guy in business, but again –gently – rejecting the exercise itself, and the English politeness culture. The final step is when they catch you saying 'OK' and suggest you need to be careful. Subverting the language, culture, and training process has gone a step further to subverting the trainer. Finally, there is that 'running joke' feel to this… there is a voicing, reliving of the earlier conversation, a reinvention.. and it has become a 'humour touchpoint'… all they will need to say is 'OK' for the rest of the week, and they will have this release of laughter. There's a joy in discovering those touch points, and playing on them.