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# The Interactional Architecture of the Language Classroom

*Questo articolo propone una sintesi delle tesi principali di Seedhouse (2004). Nel suo studio, l'autore applica il metodo dell'analisi conversazionale ad una banca dati comprendente un ampio ventaglio di lezioni di corsi di lingue tenute in tutto il mondo. L'obiettivo era di indagare in che modo si organizza l'interazione nella classe di lingue. La tesi centrale attorno a cui lo studio si sviluppa è che esiste una relazione riflessa tra l'intenzione pedagogica e l'interazione in L2 nella classe, vale a dire una relazione di interdipendenza reciproca. Una relazione di reciproca influenza che costituisce la base stessa dell'organizzarsi dell'interazione in L2 nella classe. Indipendentemente da chi intervenga nell'interazione in L2, o da quale sia l'attività durante la quale si esprimono gli "interattanti", essi analizzano in permanenza il rapporto tra l'intenzione pedagogica e l'interazione linguistica. Conseguentemente, essi interagiscono tenendo conto delle proprie analisi, informandosi reciprocamente a ogni istante di questa evoluzione.*

## Introduction

This article provides a summary of some of the key ideas of Seedhouse (2004). The study applies Conversation Analysis (CA) methodology to an extensive and varied database of language lessons from around the world and attempts to answer the question 'How is L2 classroom interaction organised?' The main thesis developed is that there is a reflexive relationship between pedagogy and interaction in the L2 classroom. This means that there is a two-way, mutually dependent relationship. Furthermore, this relationship is the foundation of the organisation of interaction in L2 classrooms. The omnipresent and unique feature of the L2 classroom is this reflexive relationship between pedagogy and interaction. So whoever is taking part in L2 classroom interaction and whatever the particular activity during which the interactants are speaking the L2, they are always displaying to one another their analyses of the current state of the evolving relationship between pedagogy and interaction and acting on the basis of these analyses. So interaction in the L2 classroom is based on the relationship between pedagogy and interaction. Interactants are constantly analysing this relationship and displaying their analyses in their talk.

## The Core Institutional Goal

CA attempts to understand the organisation of institutional interaction as being *rationally* derived from the core institutional goal, rather than being accidental or unmotivated. Therefore, the first step towards describing the interactional architecture of L2 classroom interaction is to identify the institutional core goal, which is that *the teacher will teach the learners the L2*. This core institutional goal remains the same wherever the L2 lesson takes place and whatever pedagogical framework the teacher is working in. This is a most important point. In many kinds of institutions, e.g. businesses, the institutional goal may vary considerably even between businesses in the same town. However, in L2 teaching the institutional goal of the teacher teaching the L2 to the learners remains constant whatever the teaching methods, whatever the L1 and L2 and wherever in the world the L2 is taught. It remains the same if the teacher delegates some responsibility to learners in a learner-centred or learner autonomy approach. From this core goal a number of consequences issue both logically and inevitably which affect the way in which L2 classroom interaction is accomplished. Drew and Heritage (1992: 26) suggest that each institutional form of interaction may have its own unique *fingerprint*, "comprised of a set of interactional practices differentiating (it) both from other institutional forms and from the baseline of mundane conversational interaction itself."

## Three Interactional Properties

There are three interactional properties which derive directly from the core goal, and these properties in turn necessarily shape the interaction. The three properties follow in consecutive sequence from each other and constitute part of the unique fingerprint of L2 classroom interaction and part of its context-free machinery.

1. Language is both the vehicle and object of instruction.
2. There is a reflexive relationship between pedagogy and interaction and interactants constantly display their analyses of the evolving relationship between them.
3. The linguistic forms and patterns of interaction which the learners produce in the L2 are potentially subject to evaluation by the teacher in some way.

### Property One

Language is "Both the vehicle and object of instruction." (Long 1983: 9). This property springs inevitably from the core goal. The core goal dictates that the L2 is the object, goal and focus of instruction. It must be taught, and it can only be taught through the medium or vehicle of language. Therefore language has a unique dual role in the L2 classroom in that it is both the vehicle and object, both the process and product of the instruction; see Seedhouse (2004) for exemplification of this point. In other forms of classroom education (history, engineering) language is only the vehicle of the teaching. This property creates an extra layer of complexity in the interaction which needs to be portrayed in our analyses.

### Property Two

There is therefore a reflexive relationship between pedagogy and interaction. This means that as the pedagogical focus varies, so the organisation of the interaction varies. This point is illustrated through analyses in the monograph. However, this relationship also means that the L2 classroom has its own interactional organisation which transforms the pedagogical focus (task-as-workplan) into interaction (task-in-process). The omnipresent and unique feature of the L2 classroom is this reflexive relationship between pedagogy and interaction. So whoever is taking part in L2 classroom interaction and whatever the particular

activity during which the interactants are speaking the L2, they are always displaying to one another their analyses of the current state of the evolving relationship between pedagogy and interaction and acting on the basis of these analyses. We can see how this works even in the first exchange a Chinese L1 beginner makes in his first English class in the extract below. T = teacher. L1 = identified learner. LL = unidentified learners.

### Extract 1

1  T:   OK my name's,
2  LL:  my name's,
3  T:   OK, (.) er, hello, (addresses L1) my name's John Fry.
4  L1:  (.) my name's John Fry,
5  T:   oh!
6  LL:  (laugh)
7  L1:  my name's Ping. Ping.
8  T:   Ping? yes hello, °you say° (whispers) hello.
9  L1:  hello my name is my name's Ping.

(British Council, 1985 volume 1: 15)

We can see in line 4 that L1 displays an analysis of the current relationship between pedagogy and interaction as being that he must repeat whatever

the teacher says. It is easy to see how this occurs, since in lines 1 and 2 the required relationship between pedagogy and interaction was just that. T, however, displays in lines 5 and 8 that his analysis is that this is not the required relationship and that L1 should instead produce a specific string of forms including L1's own name. L1 then changes his analysis of the relationship between pedagogy and interaction so that in line 9 it finally conforms to that required by T.

### Property Three

The linguistic forms and patterns of interaction which the learners produce in the L2 are potentially subject to evaluation by the teacher in some way. As van Lier (1988: 32) puts it, "Everyone involved in language teaching and learning will readily agree that evaluation and feedback are central to the process and progress of language learning." This property does *not* imply that all learner utterances in the L2 are followed by a direct and overt verbalised evaluation by the teacher, as the data show this clearly not to be the case. It means that all learner utterances are *potentially* subject to evaluation by the teacher. This third
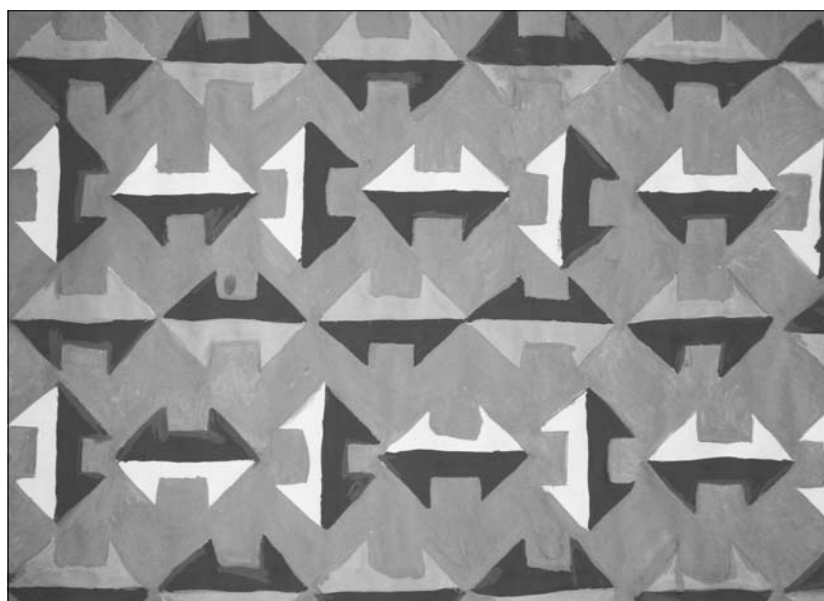
property derives logically from the second property; since the linguistic forms and patterns of interaction which the learners produce in the L2 are normatively linked in some way to the pedagogical focus which is introduced, it follows that the teacher will need to be able to evaluate the learners' utterances in the L2 in order to match the reality to the expectation. This study proposes that these three properties are universal, i.e., they apply to all L2 classroom interaction and they are inescapable in that they are a consequence of the core institutional goal and the nature of the activity. Furthermore, the data from many different countries, types of institutions and types of lesson which are analysed in Seedhouse (2004) demonstrate the universality of these properties. These properties, then, form the foundation of the architecture and of the unique institutional 'fingerprint' of the L2 classroom.

## A Basic Sequence Organisation

Although L2 classroom interaction is extremely diverse and fluid, it is nonetheless possible to state a basic sequence organisation which applies to all L2 classroom interaction, as follows.

1. A pedagogical focus is introduced. Overwhelmingly in the data this is introduced by the teacher but it may be nominated by learners.
2. At least two persons speak in the L2 in normative orientation to the pedagogical focus.
3. In all instances, the interaction involves participants analysing this pedagogical focus and performing turns in the L2 which display their analysis of and normative orientation to this focus in relation to the interaction. Other participants analyse these turns in relation to the pedagogical focus and produce further turns in the L2 which display this analysis. Therefore, par-

ticipants constantly display to each other their analyses of the evolving relationship between pedagogy and interaction.

Through this sequence the institution of the L2 classroom is talked into being. This is the case because introducing the pedagogical focus is directly implicative of the institutional goal, i.e. to teach the learners the L2.

## An Analytical Methodology

The idea that an analytical procedure or methodology can emerge from the structure of interaction is a familiar one in CA. Our task as analysts is to explicate how L2 classroom interactants analyse each others' turns and make responsive moves in relation to the pedagogical focus. The description of the interactional architecture of the L2 classroom above, specifically the properties and basic sequence organisation, provides the analyst with a ready-made emic analytical procedure. The participants display in their turns their analyses of the evolving relationship between pedagogy and interaction, i.e. how the pedagogical focus relates to the turns produced in L2. Therefore, the methodology can be stated in this way: The analyst follows exactly the same procedure as the participants and traces the evolving relationship between pedagogy and interaction, using as evidence the analyses of this relationship which the participants display to each other in their own turns.

So the methodology which is used for the analysis of L2 classroom interaction is the next-turn proof procedure in relation to the pedagogical focus. In the vast majority of cases in the database we can state the procedure more specifically as follows. The classroom teacher compares the linguistic forms and patterns of interaction which the learner produces with the pedagogical focus which s/he originally introduced and performs an analysis and evalua-

tion on that basis. The analyst can do exactly the same thing, comparing the teacher's intended pedagogical focus with the linguistic forms and patterns of interaction which the learner produces, and then analysing the interaction on the basis of the match or mismatch. This methodology is exemplified in numerous analyses in Seedhouse (2004).

## References

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