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Situated identities and interaction learning

Introduction

Conversation analysis (CA) deals with dialogue understood as a social practice of a natural, everyday conversation or a face-to-face interaction. The latest developments in CA extend its scope of analysis to institutional interactions such as: school interactions or interviews as well as conversations in a foreign language used as lingua franca for interaction participants.

In the paper, I address the problem of how interaction participants construe their situated identities in dialogues in English as a lingua franca and how those identities influence the course of an interaction and the possibilities of evaluating learners' interactional competence. The dialogue analyzed in the paper is an interview performed by advanced learners of English as a foreign language with an American native speaker who is also their teacher. The analysis shows that role construction in a dialogue is a mutual process of interaction participants and it is not always the teacher that determines the role construction and that controls topics and turns in an interaction. The results also indicate that the roles learners construe in a dialogue influence their performance, thus they need to be taken into account while assessing their competence in a foreign language.

The paper discusses the possibilities of assessing the development of the interactional competence of advanced learners of English as a foreign language. Using an exemplary case study of a student participating in a two year research, I aim to present the potential of using both conversational analysis and language socialization framework for developing interactional competence as a situated practice. The focus on microactions and identities situated in an interactional context enables a researcher to observe the process of learning in different types of interactions as they are construed by interaction participants themselves. The tentative results point to the significance of individual factors in developing the interactional competence, as respective learners shape their participation, that is their situated identities in a given interactive event, in different ways, thus co-construing distinctive contexts of learning in the interaction. Analyzing the above mentioned case, I aim to show how such constructions of interactive events influence individual possibilities of learning, and to what type of interactional competence they point.

Conversation analysis and language socialization used to evaluate FL learners' communicative competence

In this part of the article Kasper's and Rose's (2002) proposition of combining CA and language socialization (LS) theory is discussed. The main claim is that such a combination might allow researchers to evaluate learners' communicative competence in the way that other methods and approaches cannot because of their lack of good research techniques to focus on an interactional aspect of the competence and on the interactional construction of roles. Since the proposition is far from developed, the conclusions cannot be very determining at this point.

Before introducing the possibilities of such a combination, let me briefly introduce the basic assumptions of both methodologies. The main research focus of LS approach is social interaction, especially the one based on collaboration, as the locus and stimulator of learning (Kasper and Rose, 2002: 34–35). LS focuses on first and second language learning and perceives it as an interactive event, taking place in dialogues between parents and children, experts or teachers or more competent partners and learners or less skilled trainees or simply between interaction participants whose skills differ. It adopts to a large extent a Vygotskian socialization theory, but transforms it and applies to language learning. As one can see, roles and relations significantly influence interaction for learning and thus not only language practice but also language learning. LS focuses on learning discourse so while it also observes learning linguistic or structural elements in the context of face-to-face or paraverbal interactions, it mainly aims to show how interactive context and dialogic roles influence learning discourse. The whole language learning process is perceived as the socialization of learners into communities of discourse practice and specific discourse genres used in such communities. Thus LS provides as well new objects of learning, namely discourse. However, since its primary object of study is learning through socialization, it lacks efficient research techniques to observe discourse. Thus LS could benefit from adopting either CA or other discourse studies. Conversation analysis developed in the United States primarily as a branch of sociology and it focused on observing how the social order gets constituted and reconstituted (Wilson, 1991) in social interactions and what is the shared social order between members of the same society and in an endolingual context. As a result, initially, only conversations in American English as a first language were analyzed. Currently, also interactions in other languages used both as native ones and as a lingua franca are analyzed. Also institutional interaction research of such interaction types as interviews, classroom interactions and psychological sessions starts gaining significance in CA studies. An important and still evolving branch of CA is membership categorization analysis (MCA) dealing with the construction of such roles in interactions as interviewers, interviewees, ethnic others and insiders, doctors and patients, teachers and learners, experts and novices, native and nonnative speakers, etc.

CA seems to be especially useful for observing the learning of interactional competence in a foreign language as it has developed techniques to observe how the social world is constructed by means of the interaction and how membership in second language communities is established (Brouwe and Wagner, 2004: 30, 40). CA based researchers (Brouwe and Wagner, 2004: 30, 40; Kasper, 2006: 83–99) postulate extending an object of learning from acquiring merely linguistic resources such as vocabulary and grammar to developing interactional resources in a foreign language. So CA can contribute to defining objects of learning and evaluating interactional competence, including such interactional skills as: turn taking, repairs and turn shapes or discourse specific actions, as well as interactional co-construction of social and discursive identities.

However, the challenge for CA to be used in second language learning studies is determining whether any learning takes place at all, because CA is anti-mentalist and behavioral and it still, as Kasper points out (Kasper, 2006: 83–99), lacks any theory of learning, meaning the explanation how interactional competence is acquired and how it develops over time. As a result, it can be criticized that it only registers the usage of certain communicative actions and does not prove that actual learning takes place. Learning theory is necessary to determine both the conditions and aims of language learning. In other words, CA needs to define a more specific reference to or invent a learner oriented model of communicative competence in a foreign language and its development, otherwise it will limit itself to observing usages of language.

As for developing a model of communicative competence or at least some model of developing this competence, a concept of distributed cognition may prove a significant starting point. CA's assumptions concerning distributed social cognition and treating interaction as the locus of distributed thinking somehow overlap with LS. Hence, the tentative proposition is either to combine CA with LS or let CA develop its own theory of learning a foreign language based on the concept of distributed cognition. Distributed thinking is based on the minimal unit of analysis in CA, the notion of an adjacency pair, which consists of two parts, action and reaction. The second pair part shows how the first pair part is understood by an interaction participant; this is the way intersubjectivity or mutual understanding is negotiated and this is how thinking in an interaction, distributed over respective and adjacent pair parts, can be observed. The so called "next turn proof procedure" to check how the first turn is understood in the second turn of a pair is the basis to formulate conclusions about understanding and thinking of interaction participants. The analysis either focuses on case studies (meaning single interactions used to explain certain theoretical points) or on a collection of interaction fragments dealing with similar examples which allow to produce claims about the patterns of interaction or patterns of social practice.

LS also observes processes of learning as behavior in social interaction; it claims that learning takes place when children or learners interact with their peers, carers or teachers in specific types of interaction such as for example: "scaffolded interaction" in which a more skilled interaction participant (teacher, peer, mother) helps the less skilled one (by co-producing a part of an utterance along with their partner) to produce discourse just above their average level. While developing a description of communication practices is not the main objective of LS studies, it is on the basis of the observation of those actions, patterns and discourse roles that LS formulates further conclusions concerning learning in interaction. As was already mentioned LS, however, lacks sufficiently efficient discourse observation tools to produce convincing proofs concerning the usage of discourse or interaction patterns and roles in the interaction. It can thus benefit from adopting CA methods.

Situated identities and foreign language learning

Language socialization research frequently focuses on the influence of roles and relations on foreign language learning. Especially, on how institutional roles and relations shape second and first language users' performance in a foreign language. Shea (1994 after Kasper and Rose, 2002: 35) analyzed conversations between advanced nonnative speakers and their North American, native English speakers. The findings indicate that foreign students perform differently in different interactions. The observed student's interactional control over the floor and solicitation patterns, the opportunity to express opinions with authority and hold the floor were significantly reduced to passive confirmations when he interacted with a professor during advisement sessions. As can be observed in the above quoted example, researchers such as Shea (1994) and Hall (1998 after Kasper and Rose, 2002: 37, 40, 45–46) emphasize the critical significance of native speaker's response in construing nonnative discourse even in interactions with advanced nonnative speakers. They emphasize how teachers can shape their students' social status through participation structures and the choice of deictic expressions and interactional routines. An interesting point is that students' performance is strongly influenced by roles and relations in different interactions. An arguable point in such a research seems to be an assumption of putting an advanced nonnative speaker, already in the position of a passive recipient of discourse, while from constructivist (also CA) position such a categorization cannot be assumed *a priori* since categorization is an interactive process in which both students and teachers take part and in which they construe their situated identities.

In what sense are social identities situated? CA perceives social categorization as an interactive process, co-construed in a dialogue and realized in a series of turns. Social categories consist of the collections of descriptions and evaluations, ascribing certain traits and actions to the members of a given group (Mazeland and Berenst, in press; Sacks, 1992). Interpreting a description or an evaluation as a categorization depends on an interactive context, that is how a given description is perceived by interaction participants.

Interaction participants have various linguistic resources, such as most typically adjectives, to describe a person (for example: "friendly," "conceited") (Schegloff, 1972: 88–96). They can ascribe a person to a given type, (also a professional one, for example: "an English teacher", "foreigner"), describe a person's feature or characterize their state of mind (for example: "she's here only temporarily"), place a person on a scale (for example: "speaking English/Polish very well," "extraordinarily sensible"), describe and/or compare their behavior (Mazeland and Berenst, 2006: 4).

In institutional discourse, institutional, professional categories such as teachers and learners, experts and laymen become especially prominent. Such categories consist of certain social actions ascribed to them. Foreign language teachers in classroom interaction have certain interactive rights (Mehan, 1998: 245–269), especially the right to the third evaluative turn in a sequence interaction with the learner and they perfom specific actions such as repairs or understanding check depending on the interactive context of learning (Seedhouse, 1997). For example, the role of a teacher might be realized as the one of an epistemic (knowledge) expert and evaluator at the same time in a pair with a layman/knowledge recipient. This is far from the role of a co-discussant or an argumentative partner engaging in a discussion on equal or semi-equal turn rights.

Research and data analysis

The students' task was to conduct an argumentative interview with a foreigner. The role of the interviewer allegedly allows one to take over and practice the communicative/thematic control and argumentation in an interaction with a foreigner in a foreign language. Yet, a task is never a set up fact but a process realized by interaction participants' interpretation of interaction aims and their roles in it. In other words, despite its assigned name and an academic aim, the interaction format of a task changes interactively from, for instance conversational through scripted formats to a consultation like exchange.

The interview project was accompanied by two types of tasks performed for two academic years of classes :

a. discourse observation tasks (explicit instruction, inductive tasks), in which students' aim was to observe conversational actions and discourse and argumentative discourses (actions and roles) and choose the actions which they considered most suitable for themselves;
b. classroom role plays, presentations and discussions in which students were supposed to use the observed strategies and create observed discourses (roles and relations).

The aim was to develop students' communicative awareness allowing students to find suitable strategies in discourse and finally, develop their personal communicative competence. Kasper and Rose (2002: 49–50) emphasize the importance of explicit pragmatic socialization to develop metapragmatic awareness of pragmatic practices. To be learned or understood, the pragmatic action needs to become salient for the learner whether by means of explicit instruction or during the interaction with the other speaker, usually the native speaker.

The following research questions were posed:

1. How are the situated roles of a learner and a teacher as an epistemic expert construed in an interaction? How do those situated identities influence the language practice, the interaction and thus the possibilities of language learning in an interaction?
2. What are the consequences for interactional competence evaluation? How can learners' communicative competence be evaluated based on their ways of negotiating the situated identities? What are the limitations of assessing learner competence?

The data chosen for the present study consists of a half an hour interview conducted in 2006 by a pair of students, J and Z, with their American teacher W. The focus of current analysis is on J's actions. J involves only in a limited argumentation with W and categorizes W as a teacher and as an epistemic expert, which is visible in refraining

from certain argumentative actions such as formulating counterarguments. Such a role construction may be limiting to J's performance and consequently also her language practice. Typical actions J performs in an interaction with W are: active and passive listening, reformulations, repetitions, questions, quotations and topic closing sum ups. She avoids taking up a stance and uses only short metacomments, closing subtopics such as: "that's very interesting ... and what's your opinion." J also refrains from formulating any counterarguments. Certain counterarguments appear on J's part but they are very indirect. She rather supports W, as if siding with a more knowledgeable person by using reformulations that extend and support her interviewee's point against other interviewee Z. On the other hand, W does not contribute to J's categorization of her as an expert. She tries to act as an interviewee and a discussant.

A contrast in J's categorization of her colleague Z can be observed. J categorizes Z as a discussant. She uses more diversified argumentative actions and actually produces counterarguments, taking up a stance as a moderator. J also seems to be more conversational and more confrontational with Z. There is a greater conversational cooperation with Z, especially when she helps him formulate utterances and finishes his formulations for him.

A predominant identity ascribed to W is that of an American English native speaker and teacher as an epistemic expert (might overlap with teacher's role as a teacher usually functions as an expert). I would argue that by performing the above actions J sets up W in the role of an epistemic expert or a more knowledgeable person, since, especially when compared to her interaction with Z, she gives up lots of interactive rights as a discussion moderator.

Fragment 1

1 .hh and then: eh: : when you are trying to to (.) to: : [go]
2 J: [mhm
3 Z: to to the United States (.) .hh n: : : you should: : : (1.0) nh: : : : : : :
4 (1.0)
5 J: apply for this visa yeah↑
6 (1.0)
7 Z: no but: : °eh° I mean .hhh eh: : : : : you should get in- (.) for example
8 (1.0) uh: : : : : : : : m a signature

In the above fragment Z shows troubles formulating an argument, which is visible in his hesitations, prolonging words and pauses. In line 5, J cooperates conversationally with Z finishing his formulations and inserting interactive discourse marker: "yeah" with a rising intonation as a comprehension check. This allows Z, line 7 and 8, to reformulate his utterance and make it more comprehensible and listener oriented. In this fragment we can see a greater intersubjectivity, that is negotiated mutual comprehension.

Fragment 2

1 J: [mhm]
2 Z: [if you] found eh: : (..) if you found a job (..) than you can go >to
3 to to< this you know (.) this institution an: d (.) say (..) yes I found (.)

4 the job so you can: : : eh: : : my: :
5 J: mhm
6 Z: eh my visa longer
7 (.)
8 J: but many i- many America: n: : s clai: : m that Mexicans are st<u>eal</u>ing their
9 vis- eh they are: : eh: : : their jobs
10 Z: you know °uh: : ° I wouldn't say that (.) many Americans (.) are

In line 8 (fragment 2), J produces listening signals and an actual counterargument to Z. The argument is direct, extreme and unhedged. The only modification is that J formulates her utterance as a discussion moderator, voicing somebody else's ("many Americans") opinion. She uses such argumentative actions only when addressing Z. Thus she situates herself as a discussant partner to Z. So does Z in line 10, when he produces a hedged counterargument preceded by a reformulation, using discourse markers "you know" common knowledge reference, hesitation and modality.

Fragment 3

1 J: eh: : : [could you]
2 Z: [and you know] the the (.) the both s<u>id</u>es (.) can benefit
3 J: could you be mor: e precise yh: : : =
4 Z: =eh: : (..) for example (.) when the: (..) when a Mexican work (.) legally (.) in the
5 United States
6 J: yeah=
7 Z: =the- (.) n: : they s- eh: (..) he's supposed to: to pay taxes
8 J: oh I see (1.0) Mexicans are: : working for Americans□
9 Z: yeah=
10 J: =and they (.) ha: ve to pay
11 Z: exactly=
12 J: =taxes (..) (where do you work) (1.5) <u>le[gally]</u>
13 Z: [legally] (.) yeah
14 J: .hhh b<u>u</u>t: : eh: : : m- Mexica- eh (..) America (.) can earn (...) benefit fro: : m: : : (..)
15 .hh eh: : from eh Mexicans (.) but also: : have to pay: : (.) a lot of mo: ney: : (..) on the:
16 m .hh eh: : (.) a: : nd because of: (..) special: : uh: : bilingual' (1.0) project could you s: :
17 : - eh tell us=
18 W: °mhm°
19 J: something more abou: t them

J also uses meta-evaluations or action frames to Z, such as the one in line 3: "could you be more precise." This is a type of an action that assesses the way other interaction participant formulates an utterance or an idea; the way he or she treats a topic. This action, usually argumentative and typical of discussion moderators, directs the topic so in other words, it is a means of exercising topic and interactive control over a dialogue.

She also uses reception, change of mind tokens such as "oh" showing how her mind or state of knowledge actually changed. She does not use such actions when addressing or responding to W, probably because she orients to W's possible evaluator role. In

Polish school interaction it is not advisable to show the changes of the state of mind to an evaluator or an examiner so as not to be charged with the lack of understandings and consequently receiving a negative evaluation. Whatever the reason, the absence of such signals when interacting with W is noticeable. It might be that the teacher in her role is responsible for assuring comprehension in a foreign language. The level of intersubjectivity thus seems to be lower when interacting with W.

In lines 7–13 in fragment 3, J and Z in several speech turns use cooperative formulations and reformulation. Additionally, J somehow "speaks for Z" in lines 15, 17 showing the knowledge of his possible argument and making interactive pauses and looking for Z's compatibility with her formulation.

Such deep level of cooperation does not happen when interacting with W. J only quotes, and reformulates W's words but not in an argumentative or evaluative way. Thus I would argue she construes herself as a potential examiner and an expert whose expertise is to be explored but not argued with or undermined in any way.

Fragment 4

1 W: the border is a huge area: : : and (..) as Jose mentioned (.) it covers
2 four states
3 (.)
4 J: [yeah]
5 W: [and] we don't have enough people patrolling this area (.) there's
6 the[re's]
7 J: [°mhm°]
8 W: not enough contro: : l (.) to stop people (.) from crossing the borders illegaly (..)
9 once they do cross illegally there need to be: : (...) more severe punishments for people
10 who are caught
11 (.)
12 J: mhm: : : so it's like incentive for them (..) to: : t- becaus: : e eh: (.) bo: rder without (.)
13 guards it is like
14 W: mhm
15 J: you kno: : w
16 W: it it it might as well not be there
17 (..)
18 J: yeah (..) that's true and yh: : prison' (.) what do you think abou: : t (.) this' (.) kind of
19 (.) penalty' (.)
20 W: .hhhh
21 J: for them'
22 W: I think it's a via: : ble option (.) although: : : : : (.) there: : i: : : s: : :
23 of course the threat that ou: : r prisons

In fragment 4, J mainly agrees with W, thus construing W as an expert and herself as a recipient of knowledge. J does not use as many conversational actions, such as finishing formulations or cooperative overlaps with W's turns. This points to construing an interaction partner as an expert. Such actions directed at W appear only in the context of agreeing with her formulations, siding with W. The cooperation and negotiation level

is deeper between disputants in a discussion than between the interaction participant oriented to as a teacher. In teacher's role argumentation is one sided. A person in teacher's role produces arguments and a learner only checks whether she understood them appropriately. This type of an interaction seems to be quite asymmetrical and one sided. Although, as can be observed there is a deeper cooperation when J sides with the teacher or agrees with her. On the other hand, W does not do anything to take over interactive and thematic control. W also cooperatively finishes J's supportive formulations (line 16 in fragment 4). She produces mainly argumentative actions, lines 9–10, which are sometimes very radical and exaggerated in content to provoke J to an argumentative response but to no avail. So the categorization of W in the role of a teacher/expert and examiner and J of a student is achieved predominantly by J, a student. This observation might prove that the critical role of a native speaker in shaping the interaction seems to be quite overestimated in the current research and should be reconsidered.

Conclusion

Teacher and student roles are construed as asymmetrical roles of a knowledge expert and a knowledge recipient. This limits J's repertoire of possible argumentative actions and thus her practice. The teacher role somehow seems to overlap with the native speaker role, since both tend to be treated as experts. The possible reasons for such categorizations on J's part might be emotional, or might as well be a result of her orientation to Polish school traditions which preset and perpetuate such asymmetrical institutional roles for teachers and learners. If the former is the case, this would put Polish learners at a serious disadvantage in interactions with native speakers of English coming from different traditions. Learners' awareness of such orientation could be a starting point of a change. The ability to renegotiate one's identity thus would be a crucial skill in developing interactional competence in a foreign language.

If to evaluate J's interactional competence in discussions only on the basis of her interaction with the person oriented to as a teacher, one could gain a rather biased picture of J's skills. As far as evaluation of competence is concerned, interactional competence (its existence and development) indeed seems to be an interactive and sociocultural process. Therefore one can conclude that the evaluation and development of competence should include a variety of interactive and sociocultural factors, such as culturally shaped participation frameworks (institutional roles and relations). On the other hand, communicative practice should take place in possibly diversified interactive contexts. Developing both students' awareness and interactive resources of the above influences should be the part of interactional competence development.

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DISCUSSION

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Are we ourselves in L2 conversations?

Twenty years of my own keen interest in situated identities and interaction learning makes me naturally interested in A. Nowicka's paper. I find in it my own old fascinations filtered through slightly different perspectives: of the author and of her readings. I also find in it the same research problems I had to face when I tried to apply Conversation Analysis to teacher/student (native speaker/non-native speaker) discourse: its inconclusiveness and elusiveness.

The questions that arise refer to the students' ability (and indeed feasibility) to renegotiate their identities in conversations with teachers and/or native speakers. Should they identify with more open and outspoken English native speaker students, while running the risk of sounding artificial? Or should they identify with their peer non-native group and stay in asymmetrical roles of inhibited learners, while retaining their original identities?

It seems that a gradual change of verbal and non-verbal patterns of behavior in second language conversations as a genuine change of one's identity (e.g. self-presentation as a more assertive person) is possible if students grow aware of the value of particular personality traits, and indeed become more mature and self-directed. On the other hand, superficial repetition of native-like interactional patterns in the English class does not seem to change one's identity. The difference between the two behaviors is like the difference between language acquisition and language memorization.

DIALOGUE
in foreign language education

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