

BOOK REVIEW: THE INTERACTIONAL ARCHITECTURE OF THE LANGUAGE CLASSROOM: A CONVERSATION ANALYSIS PERSPECTIVE

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Title:	The Interactional Architecture of the Language Classroom: A Conversation Analysis Perspective
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Contact information:	Blackwell Publishing 9600 Garsington Road Oxford OX4 2OQ United Kingdom
Type of product:	Textbook
Price:	£ 19.99
ISBN:	1-4051-2009-6

Key Words: *Conversation analysis, classroom research methodology, applied linguistics, second language classroom interaction, second language acquisition.*

Recently, there has been growing interest in employing Conversation Analysis (hereafter CA) as a methodology to study the second language classroom; nevertheless there are only a very small number of book length treatments in this field, and this publication is no doubt a remarkable one on the list. It gives a comprehensive as well as convincing account of CA methodology and also successfully demonstrates that this bottom-up, emic, data-driven approach is perfectly capable of portraying the interactional architecture of the language classroom by contrast to the traditional top-down, etic, theory –driven method. In comparison with other CA based classroom research, the approach adopted in this monograph is original and distinctive in three ways. Firstly, its focus on the ethnomethodological roots. This view allows it to be distinguished from the linguistic version of CA, avoiding becoming a coding scheme for identifying instances of turn taking, adjacency pair, preference, and repair. Secondly, it treats second language discourse as a form of institutional interaction. The notion of institutional interaction allows the author to relate not only individual interactional devices to different instances of second language classroom interaction

but also the overall organization of the interaction to the core goal- teaching and learning the second language. In fact, this book is probably the first one that incorporates this perspective into the area of the second language classroom research. Finally, the analysis in this monograph is based on seven large and diverse databases of classroom conversations and hence it is able to develop a framework for understanding communication in second language classrooms, whatever the setting is. This is a notable strength of this book since most CA based SLA (second language acquisition) studies tend to focus on a much smaller number of lessons.

In addition to the high level of originality in its approach to this topic, its insights on a number of issues in L2 (second language) pedagogy are also impressive. For example, it does a good job of providing a critical discussion on the feasibility of producing genuine or natural communication as part of a L2 lesson, suggesting there are theoretical problems with the communicative language teaching approach. Its discussion on the concepts of task-as-workplan (intended pedagogy) and task-in-process (actual pedagogy) is grounded in a critical perspective that highlights the importance of building a link between pedagogical theory and practice.

The book is organized into six main chapters. Each section starts with a brief introduction and ends with a summary, which helps the readers to gain the main idea of each chapter. There are notes provided at the end of each chapter. These notes are helpful in several ways, such as giving further explanation on difficult concepts or terminologies, providing further reference on some topics etc.

Chapter One is a short introduction to CA methodology. It examines the rationale underlying this research perspective with a focus on its roots in ethnomethodology. In order to highlight the close link between ethnomethodology and CA, the author attempts to explain the five fundamental principles of

ethnomethodology upon which CA is based. According to the author, these principles, namely indexicality, reciprocity of perspectives, normative accountability and reflexivity are fundamental in understanding CA methodology but are rarely referred to explicitly in published accounts of CA methodology. Having illustrated the ethnomethodological principles and the aims and principles of CA, the author then introduces the four types of interactional organization which were originally uncovered by Sacks and colleagues and are now employed in analysis by CA practitioners. These four components are adjacency pair, preference organization, turn taking, and repair. In addition to explaining what they are and how to employ them, the author also relates them to the ethnomethodological principles, which again demonstrates his strong intention to reveal the close relationship between language and social action. This chapter concludes with the comparison of a more “linguistic” version of CA and the original ethnomethodological CA and suggests that there is a need to distinguish these two versions. This chapter is important to the readers because it is the basis for the methodology this book adopts. However, readers who are new to CA may find it difficult to read.

Chapter Two introduces different perspectives on language classroom interaction. Three methodologies for analyzing L2 classroom interaction, namely DA’s (discourse analysis) IRF/IRE model, Ethnography, and Conversation Analysis approach, are critically reviewed. The author concludes that DA approach oversimplifies the interaction in L2 classroom and hence it is not able to portray the complexity, fluidity, and dynamism of L2 classroom unless it is to be integrated into a CA approach. His attitude towards ethnography, however, is very positive, in that he claims that an ethnographic approach is also aimed at developing an emic perspective, although by a different means, and therefore can be incorporated into CA approaches.

Apart from reviewing the above research methodologies, the author also critically examines two other perspectives on L2 classroom interaction with a focus on some of their problems and weaknesses. His critique of the communicative pedagogical approach can provide the readers with an alternative view to re-evaluate this popular teaching approach and his discussion on the pedagogical landing-ground perspective can raise the researchers' awareness of the gap between what is intended to happen and what actually happens in classrooms. Although the discussion on communicative teaching approach is significant, it is rather confusing to see the author discuss it immediately after the discussion of DA approach, which in my opinion may suggest that it is treated as an L2 classroom research methodology. This is quite a disputable viewpoint because after all it is a teaching approach rather than a research approach as DA, ethnography, or CA.

Chapter Three, Four, and Five are the main sections where the author applies the CA institutional-discourse approach to sketch the interactional architecture of the second language classroom. Based on this perspective, the author claims that L2 classroom interaction is an institutional variety of interaction. Like other varieties of institutional talk, it consists of multiple subvarieties and each of them has its own particular pedagogical goal or focus as well as its own typical organization of interaction. These subvarieties are termed "L2 classroom contexts" in this book. He argues that there is a reflexive relationship between pedagogy and interaction in L2 classroom and this point is clearly illustrated in Chapter Three and Four through his emic, step by step analysis of the organization of sequence, turn taking, and repair within four different contexts, namely form-and-accuracy contexts, meaning-and-fluency contexts, task-oriented contexts, and procedural contexts. For example, turn taking and sequence are tightly controlled in a form-and-accuracy

context but not in a meaning- and-fluency context or a task-oriented context; learners' production of incorrect linguistic forms is more likely to be seen as repairable in a form-and accuracy context than in other types of contexts.

Chapter 5 continues the discussion of L2 classroom interaction, but the focus is shifted to the overall organization of L2 classroom interaction. It outlines the basic sequence organization which is universal to all L2 classrooms and also identifies the properties which constitute the unique "fingerprint" of L2 classroom discourse. In other words, the emphasis is on the institutional sameness rather than uniqueness. One remarkable insight offered in this chapter is the three-way perspective on the concept of context. The author claims that any instance of L2 classroom interaction should be viewed or analysed at three levels. Every time participants produce a piece of interaction, they talk these three levels of contexts into being. As an analyst, we can not neglect any of the three levels. At the micro level, we view the interaction as a singular occurrence. The emphasis is on its differences from other instances. At the L2 classroom context level, we view the interaction as an example of communication within a particular context. At the institutional level, the particular instance produced has features in common with all other instances of L2 classroom interaction so the focus is on homogeneity.

One of the most frequent questions asked by people who first get involved in CA is "what can CA contribute to the studies of applied linguistics and second language acquisition"? The answer is provided within Chapter Six. In this chapter, the author demonstrates that there are no major incompatibilities between CA and applied linguistics and that there are many research possibilities for the field of applied linguistics in CA methodology through his review of the latest CA research in some of the applied linguistics areas. They include language teaching task design, language

teaching materials design, language proficiency assessment design, disordered talk and speech therapy, professional discourse, CA in languages other than English, native to non-native talk, bilingual and multilingual interaction, and grammar, pragmatics, and interaction. In discussing the relationship between CA and SLA, which is a more controversial issue compared to CA for AL (applied linguistics), the author claims that CA can make a contribution to the SLA research by providing access to socially distributed cognition. Two areas of strong recent interest in SLA research, recasts and Focus-on-Form interaction, are critically reviewed and the result suggests that it is only through the collaboration between CA and SLA that we can completely understand the interaction in classroom discourse. For postgraduates who are interested in the applications of Conversation Analysis in AL or SLA but still have no clear idea of which topic to focus on, this chapter is a rich resource that may inspire them to find their research focus.

Although this book is a collection of his previous publications, Seedhouse successfully integrates these previous ideas into a coherent and well-organized monograph. Besides, he has added some new ideas and information and therefore it is rather updating. It is a must reading for graduate students, teacher trainers, or professionals who are interested in gaining new insights in the field of classroom talk or CA for SLA; however, for the readers who are new to the CA method, or the debate on CA for SLA, or the issues of research methodologies in SLA, it is quite a challenge. From my experience of reading this book, my advice is that some basic reading on the overall issues of L2 classroom research is required prior to accessing this book. In addition, I would suggest that those who are not familiar with this topic should read it at least twice in order to catch the whole picture of this CA institutional-discourse approach. In my first reading, I did gain some ideas that were

new and inspiring but for me they appeared to be isolated and separated from each other. It was not until the second time that I was able to understand how these ideas throughout the different chapters were connected with each other and what these connections were.

Overall, this book is undoubtedly invaluable and worth reading. It does a respectable job of shifting the focus on L2 classroom interaction research from a deductive theory-driven view to an inductive data-driven perspective. Having worked as a language teacher for years, I am in particular pleased to see such a L2 classroom research monograph that is focused on what is actually happening in the classroom instead of what should happen according to the pedagogical theories.

About the Author

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