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Learning Grammar for Social Action. Implications for Research and Language Teaching

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ABSTRACT

The contributions to this special issue contribute to understanding the interactional grounding of language learning by scrutinizing how patterns of language use emerge and get routinized as dynamic resources for accomplishing actions in co-constructed interaction. Their findings problematize how grammar is represented in L2 teaching materials and have important implications for future research and language pedagogy. In this commentary we address some of these implications focusing on two questions: (i) how the studies change the conceptualization of grammar as an object of L2 learning and teaching and (ii) how the insights of this research can inform language teaching.

THE ARTICLES IN THIS SPECIAL ISSUE CHALLENGE US TO RETHINK the acquisition of L2 grammar by investigating how linguistic resources are contingently used in interactional activities and how they emerge and routinize as resources for organizing such activities through repeated experiences of social encounters. The ambitious goal is to expand current knowledge of *emergent L2 grammars for social action* (see also Pekarek Doehler 2018) and thereby provide evidence for a fundamentally usage-based, interaction-driven and experiential nature of L2 learning. To this end, the articles combine insights from usage-based theory of language learning, interactional linguistics and conversation analysis to understand what and how L2 speakers learn by engaging in interactions in their social world.

THEORETICAL AND METHODOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS

The theoretical framework proposed in the special issue is novel in its clear aim to combine the conversation analytical viewpoints with usage-based SLA. It resonates with the debate on the premises of SLA research that have been active since the social turn in humanities in the mid-1990s (see e.g., Firth and Wagner, 1997, 2007; Larsen-Freeman, 2004, 2007; Markee and Kasper, 2004; Lee, 2010; Hall, Hellermann & Pekarek Doehler, 2011). Those taking a strong emic position grounded in ethnomethodological conversation analysis have argued that there is no need for exogenous concepts and that conversation analytic methodology is sufficient for analyzing learning as it happens in in interaction (Lee, 2010; Sahlström, 2011; see also Markee, 2019; Markee & Seo, 2009). Instead of starting from a theory of learning, the aim is "to recover the evidence of learning in and as the parties' undertaking of the interaction" (Lee, 2010, p. 410). Others have drawn on insights in Situated Learning Theory (Lave & Wenger, 1991; cf. Brouwer & Wagner, 2004; Hellermann, 2009, 2011; Mondada & Pekarek Doehler, 2004) or sociocultural theory more generally to understand how L2 speakers show orientation to learning and how interaction drives learning. Combining CA with theories of language and learning necessarily changes the viewpoint and has consequences for analytic approaches and insights and methodological choices. The articles in this issue carefully explicate these choices and offer pointers for further research in the field. They provide compelling evidence for the benefits of combining conversation analytic methods with longitudinal research design.

Our own work aligns programmatically with conversation analytic SLA (CA-SLA) in that our focus has been on ways in which emic interactional resources are mobilized locally and holistically to achieve actions in a variety of activities (e.g., Lilja & Piirainen-Marsh, 2019a, 2019b). Like authors in this special issue, we believe that commitment to conversation

analytic methodology is needed to understand how L2 resources are put to use in jointly constructed courses of action, and that L2 development is grounded in the practices deployed as the L2 speakers learn to deal with the moment-by-moment contingencies of interaction in different sociomaterial environments (Nguyen, 2019; Schegloff, 1989).

The L2 database

Even though it is over 20 years since Firth and Wagner (1997) called for a broadening of the SLA database to extend beyond classrooms and we have seen a massive increase in research in CA-SLA, there still are important limitations that need to be addressed. First, while much attention has been paid to repair practices (e.g., Hellermann, 2009, 2011; Lilja, 2014), many other aspects of interactional organization, including the role of lexical, syntactic, prosodic and embodied resources in turn-taking, action formation and action ascription, remain understudied. In addressing the precise role of linguistic structures in shaping interaction and the development of interactional competence, this issue advances the field. Second, studies of L2 learning in everyday contexts in domestic and work settings are accumulating, but still scarce and focused on a limited range of settings (for a recent overview, see Hellermann et al., 2019). In addition, as contributions to this issue show, there is a need for more careful scrutinization of even the most widely studied activities in classrooms and other environments specifically designed for learning. More research is needed to understand how the interactional experiences and environments in the L2 speaker's lifeworld shape their emerging L2 grammars. The articles in this special issue answer this call and reach beyond it by developing a deeper understanding of grammar as a set of resources for social action and object of learning in different interactional environments. We agree with the contributors that the action-based approach to language and learning is fruitful in developing frameworks for L2 teaching and testing. In the following paragraphs, we take a closer look at the how the

studies discussed here respecify the notion of L2 grammar and comment on the implications of their findings for L2 education.

RESPECIFIYING L2 GRAMMAR

In linguistic research and theorizing, scholars have long debated about whether patterns of grammar stem from individual cognition or whether they are based on interactional experience. In SLA and language teaching the term 'grammar' is often used in its conventional sense to talk about the system and structure of language (see Hall's article in this issue). In contrast, the studies discussed in this issue, together with others (e.g., Auer, 2005; Cadierno & Eskildsen, 2015; Hopper, 1987, 2011; Mushin & Pekarek Doehler, 2021), study grammar in its natural environment, social interaction. The studies are firmly rooted in the functional and usage-based tradition that argues for the social nature of language and learning. In the introduction, Pekarek Doehler and Eskildsen situate the studies within an integrated framework building on usage-based models of language and L2 learning (e.g., Ellis, 2002, 2015; Hopper 1987; Tomasello, 2003) interactional linguistics (Couper-Kuhlen & Selting 2018; Hall, 2019; Mushin & Pekarek Doehler, 2021; Ochs, Schegloff & Thompson 1996; Thompson, Fox & Couper-Kuhlen, 2015) and ethnomethodological conversation analysis (for recent overviews, see Hellermann et al., 2019; Kunitz, Markee & Sert, 2021, for CA-SLA in the wild and in the classroom, respectively). As Pekarek Doehler & Eskildsen argue, these fields converge in their conceptualization of linguistic patterns as tied to communicative and interactional functions. They also complement each other in that usage-based SLA provides a framework for tracing exemplar-based development of language patterns over time but lacks specific methods for investigating situated actions in their sequential environment, which is at the heart of conversation analysis and interactional linguistics. Conversation analysis thus provides a framework for the analysis of linguistic

constructions in the context of positionally sensitive grammar (Schegloff, 1996), that is a set of linguistic and other semiotic practices "that have evolved in, and are organized in terms of, the *sequential positions* and actions of utterances in their everyday conversational habitat" (Thompson, Fox & Couper-Kuhlen, 2015, p. 8).

The studies reported in this issue draw on this integrated framework to examine the interactional workings of specific patterns and practices in a variety of languages, situations and sociomaterial environments. They share a broadly usage-based conceptualization of L2 grammar as semiotic resources for social action, but do so from different perspectives. They differ both regarding their analytic focus (which resources are analyzed, to what extent the analysis attends to embodied conduct) and methodological choices, which range from longitudinal design (Theodórsdóttir & Eskildsen, Pekarek Doehler & Skogmyr Marian) or microlongitudinal perspective (Hellermann & Thorne), to cross-sectional collection-based analysis (Greer & Nanbu) and corpus-based analysis (Hall).

Interactional competence – Theodórsdóttir & Eskildsen and Pekarek Doehler & Skogmyr Marian

One question frequently discussed in conversation analytic research deals with the nature of interactional competence, specifically to what extent the focus is on universal interactional abilities that underlie human sociality and what aspects of competence are language-specific (see e.g., Pekarek Doehler, 2019). Research in interactional linguistics has provided rich evidence showing that while the basic structural organization at the level of turns and sequences is similar across languages, different languages provide different resources for structuring turns, formulating actions and for the organization of repair (see e.g., Couper-Kuhlen & Selting, 2018; Fox, Hayashi & Jasperson, 1996, Mushin & Pekarek Doehler 2021). This calls for systematic analysis of the interplay of linguistic structures, temporality,

emergence and projection also in L2 interaction. The studies reported here show how L2 speakers' variable knowledge of language-specific resources and their diverse functions restricts their ability to participate in interaction, but also demonstrate how language experiences provide grounding for development.

Two of the studies trace developmental trajectories that show both increasing diversity and routinization of language patterns over time. Theodórsdóttir and Eskildsen examine how a L2 speaker's (Anna) ability to use the Icelandic auxiliary *ætla* developes in naturally occurring interactions in different types of service encounters and everyday conversations. Their analysis of Anna's interactions over a year demonstrates how her use of the auxiliary diversifies as she gains experience of it in different action contexts. Early interactions illustrate that limitations in Anna's linguistic repertoire restrict her ability to use the expression in a pragmatically appropriate way, but also show how her repertoire of resources expands with a "semi-permeable utterance schema to make requests in service encounters" (p. xx). The analysis highlights the intricate way in which lexico-grammatical resources are related to action formation. Tracking Anna's interactions across contexts demonstrates how she encounters novel uses of the auxiliary in turns with diverse interactional functions, including accounts. Learning the grammar of *ætla* entails growing ability to productively use it in formulating specific kinds of actions in emergent interaction across situations.

The study by Pekarek Doehler and Skogmyr Marian traces the developmental trajectory of the multi-word construction *comment on dit* in French focusing on the interplay of linguistic, prosodic, and embodied resources in turn construction. The authors' careful analysis of longitudinal data from one learner's interactions in L2 French 'conversation circles' over 15 months documents notable differences in formal patterns and functional uses of the construction in the beginning and end of the recording period. Both qualitative and quantitative findings indicate that these differences are related to a developmental process

whereby literal use of the expression to express 'how do you say' is routinized into a discourse marker-like organizational resource for managing word searches. The analysis shows that the use of the expression as a discourse marker increases and diversifies from initial use only as a marker of cognitive search to also marking self-correction. The findings have important implications for future research. First, they call for further study of parallels between developmental trajectories in L2 use and more general phenomena associated with language change, such as grammaticalization. Second, similarly to Theodórsdóttir and Eskildsen's work, they point to the importance of examining how L2 usage patterns adjust to and develop in response to local interactional needs. This lends support to the argument that "grammatical routines may be motivated by social-interactional exigencies" (p. xx, see also Couper-Kuhlen, 2011; Pekarek Doehler & Balaman, 2021). Importantly, the detailed qualitative analysis of the data reveals that the different uses of the multi-word expression intertwine with precise embodied displays, in particular recurrent gaze patterns. This calls for systematic attention to the ways in which bodily resources work together with the linguistic construction of utterances in emergent L2 grammar.

Multimodal L2 interaction – Greer & Nanbu and Hellermann & Thorne
Two of the studies adopt a holistic multimodal perspective on L2 interaction and direct the analytic lens to the details of bodily-visual conduct as resources for composing turns and organizing activities. A rich body of conversation analytic research demonstrates that the way that gestures and embodied displays are timed relative to verbal elements in turns and sequences in progress is fundamental to the organization of participation and achievement of mutual understanding (e.g., Goodwin, 1981, 2007; Mondada, 2014; Streeck, 2009). Bodily resources such as gaze, gestures, facial expressions, and other embodied configurations shape turn construction, the organization of units and turn spaces, and the interactive construction

of actions (Lerner, 2004; Mondada, 2014).

The study by Greer and Nanbu offers valuable insights into the grammar-body interface (Mushin & Pekarek Doehler, 2021) by examining interactional moments where L2 speakers of English whose first language is Japanese visualize text as they talk. Their data from paired discussion tests shows that the participants visualize elements of a turn-in-progress by embodied displays that depict these elements in the air or by writing such elements in the air or on the palms of their hands. In terms of their sequential context, these practices are typically found in word search sequences (forward-oriented repair). Their analysis offers rich insight into the emergent nature of grammar by showing how verbal and visual turn components interact, how the visualization practice is integrated into the temporal production of a turn and how it contributes to its recognizability as an action. Importantly, it also sheds light on cognition in action (see also Eilola & Lilja, 2021) by showing how the practice in focus makes visible processes of searching for, "seeing" and recalling written versions of the turn components that are visualized. The findings demonstrate how L2 learners, at least those whose experience of learning English has mainly been based on written materials, rely on textual elements also in producing spoken turns. This underscores the need for further research on ways in which literacy practices interact with turn-building in L2 interaction in different settings.

Hellermann and Thorne adopt a holistic and microlongitudinal perspective on interactions involving a group of L2 speakers of English at different phases of an augmented reality (AR) gaming task. While the other studies in this issue focus mainly on the contingent use of linguistic and other semiotic resources by the speaker, this study situates recurring multiword expressions in the group's collaborative activities and the participants' orientations to the technologically mediated task and the physical environment. The analytic focus is on an activity specified by the task: making an oral report about green technologies in locations

determined by the game. The participants in the study performed three versions of the report, and the analysis traces the semiotic resources in these events from a microlongitudinal perspective. The analysis shows that linguistic formulations are sensitive to and become meaningful relative to the bodily alignment and interbodied co-operative practices (i.e. coordinated body-to-body practices) as well as the larger activity framework as the participants jointly co-construct a discourse structure for creating a report. Linguistic choices and patterns emerge as a "semi-permeable embodied grammar" (p. xx, see also Lerner 1996). The microlongitudinal perspective lends support to the usage-based view of learning as involving collaboratively produced practices using a wide array of resources. One major implication of this study concerns the shift of focus from an individual L2 user's grammatical repertoires and abilities to the adaptive, collaborative practices of the group. This resonates well with recent calls for broadening the theoretical basis of SLA by developing a better understanding of emergent L2 use in cooperative, ecosocial action (Atkinson, 2019; Goodwin, 2018) and connected discourse (Hellermann & Lee, 2021).

Sequentiality in the L2 classroom – Hall

While Hellermann and Thorne's study sheds light on interactions in tasks designed for a place-based learning with AR technology, Hall's contribution examines how linguistic constructions are shaped by their sequential environment and social context in the more traditional L2 environment of ESL classrooms. Her focus is on the designs of information-seeking questions, specifically those seeking factual information in whole-group instruction. By analyzing the type of knownness embodied in the questions, the types of action accomplished by them and the responses they generate, the article contributes to understanding how the linguistic environment in Q-A sequences constrains participation and student engagement. The analysis shows that in spite of the massive attention directed to teachers' questions and the IRE-sequence in classrooms, categorizations arising from

previous research, such as those referring to open or closed questions, display questions, or opinion questions, do not capture the different ways that questioning sequences are organized and provide opportunities for learning. By paying detailed attention to intricate differences in the types of knownness that questions display, the analysis reveals new aspects of their linguistic design and interactional consequences. The findings thus extend our understanding of the type of work that teachers' questions do. They also point to limitations in the linguistic quality of the information-seeking sequences in that the questions were found to primarily engender responses accomplished with short one-word or multiword phrases, which restricts the students' opportunities for participation. The study highlights the multilayered nature of action formation (see also Levinson 2012): to analyze question design in light of knownness, there is a need to pay attention to its linguistic formatting and sequential positioning, the type of instructional activity and the materials associated with it.

IMPLICATIONS FOR LANGUAGE EDUCATION

Reconceptualizing grammar in L2 teaching

The articles in this issue advance research in CA-SLA by showing in rich analytic detail that the L2 speaker's linguistic repertoire involves much more than learning the rules that structure the composition of clauses and sentences. The findings further our understanding of language learning as active, occasioned and embodied participation in social activities. Language learning is also a dynamic and continuous process that involves diversification of resources and adaptation to new environments, while navigating interactions that are in constant flux. This calls for development of pedagogical frameworks and strategies that better support language learning as a contextualized process of discovery and adaptation of functional uses of language in instructed settings as well as the wild (see also Eskildsen, 2018; Eskildsen & Majlesi, 2018; Hellermann et al., 2019).

CA research has helped respecify L2 learning targets and informed the development of pedagogical activities and learning materials based on authentic data from everyday interactions (Betz & Huth 2014; Huth, 2020; Huth & Betz, 2019; Huth & Taleghani-Nikazm, 2006; Salaberry & Kunitz, 2019). Waring (2018, 2019), for example, shows how interactional practices for turn-taking and sequential organization can be approached as teachable objects (see also Wong & Waring, 2010). Teaching materials and pedagogic frameworks do not always capture the variety of pragmatic aspects and interactional functions of linguistic resources, as the studies by Theodórsdóttir and Eskildsen and Pekarek Doehler and Skogmyr Marian indicate. As Greer & Nanbu show, it is also possible that pedagogical approaches that emphasize written grammar influence L2 speakers' ability to deploy linguistic resources in locally appropriate ways and give rise to practices related to written texts. This resonates with earlier research that has drawn attention to limitations of textbook dialogues and a written language bias in language teaching and materials (see e.g., Kunitz & Yeh, 2019). Studies in this issue emphasize the need to support development of functional use of specific linguistic resources by creating opportunities for participating in social interaction. This highlights the importance of creating spaces for L2 speakers to practice their ability to navigate social interaction (see also Nguyen, 2012, 2018). Examples of such spaces include conversation circles, language cafés, technology-supported conversations with L1 speakers or other L2 speakers as well as pedagogically supported interactions in the wild (Hellermann et al., 2019; Kunitz & Jansson, 2021; Wagner, 2015).

Rewilding L2 education

The studies reported here, in particular those by Theodórsdóttir and Eskildsen, Hellermann and Thorne, and Pekarek Doehler and Skogmyr Marian, align with earlier work that stresses the value of rewilding language education (Thorne 2021) in the form of pedagogical

frameworks and infrastructures that center on L2 learners' needs and experiences of language use outside the classroom. This addresses "the challenge of how to dynamically integrate formal learning settings with the vibrancy and diversity of linguistic, experiential, and situational contexts out in the world." (Hellermann & Thorne, this issue, p. XX) As Wagner (2015, 2019) has argued, language learning in the classroom rarely prepares learners for the unpredictable nature of interactions in naturally occurring encounters outside. Broadening the range of opportunities for participation in social interactions in the learner's lifeworld provides opportunities for testing and extending their ability to sustain embodied interaction and accomplish actions in recipient designed ways.

Language learners' own experiences also provide rich material for analysis and reflection which can be incorporated in instructional design (e.g., Eilola & Lilja, 2021; Lilja et al. 2019; see also Clark & Lindemalm, 2011). A pioneering example of innovation to support L2 learning in a naturalistic environment is the Icelandic Village, which was based on collaboration between researchers, language teachers and designers (Wagner, 2015). To support socialization of L2 speakers in the local community, they made agreements between the university and business operators to facilitate students' participation in service encounters and used recordings of these interactions as material for reflective discussions and learning. Lilja et al. (2019) report on a similar project where real-life social tasks were integrated into classroom learning as part of the design of a "rally course" for advanced learners of Finnish. This involved designing tangible materials and activities to support the learners in designing their own learning journey and sensitize them to the potential opportunities afforded by interactions in their sociomaterial ecologies.

Hellermann and Thorne's study of coordinated accomplishment of an oral report specified by an AR gaming task shows how learners adapt to and can benefit from the rich semiotic resources and interactional infrastructure of technology-mediated tasks. The place-

based game that provided the research data was guided by the notion of rewilding and the game design principle of 'structured unpredictability'. These were applied to enhance learner engagement by providing "adequate-but-limited explicit guidance" (p. xx), which required players to accomplish tasks and objectives while encountering new and surprising environments. Their data show how L2 users engage in collaborative problem solving and negotiate the task in a dynamic and flexible way. The study illustrates the rich potential of AR and mobile technology for widening L2 speakers' opportunities for interaction not just for newcomers in a second language environment, but also in communities where the L2 is not extensively used as a second language. Augmented reality and gameful learning (Reinhardt, 2019) can be fruitfully combined with a wide range of instructional activities tailored for the classroom, including debriefing discussions and activities that focus on specific linguistic resources, discourse functions or genres.

Assessment and L2 teacher education

The implications of the research in this issue extend beyond language pedagogy to language testing, frameworks designed for assessment and teacher education. Research has already proposed ways for L2 assessment to bring in interactional competence (Roever & Kasper, 2018; Salaberry & Kunitz, 2019), but some of the findings in this special issue further demonstrate how embodied practices interact with verbal constructions and prosodic elements in turn-building (Greer & Nanbu; Hellermann & Thorne; Pekarek Doehler & Skogmyr Marian), highlighting the need to take this into consideration in developing and organising speaking proficiency tests and language assessment more generally. As Pekarek Doehler and Skogmyr Marian show, this has bearing on the way that notions like fluency are conceptualised and operationalised in assessment frameworks such as the Common European

Framework of Reference for Languages (Council of Europe, 2001; see also Burch & Kley, 2020).

Hall's study argues for raising awareness of the intricacies of classroom interaction and the need for intervention research to develop ways of "engineering" instructional activities to enhance their quality as a linguistic environment. The empirical results of the analysis of question–answer sequences call for intervention studies that test and examine changes to questioning practices and their consequences for student participation and engagement. As Hall argues, and as studies from other professional settings show, even small changes in linguistic designs of questions can have an impact on responses (Hall, 2020; Stokoe, 2014). Empirical study of the details of classroom interaction can not only raise teachers' awareness of their practices, but can inform teacher education, the development of language programs and learning environments. It also resonates with recent calls for a participatory approach in applied conversation analysis, which ensures that research participants can be actively involved in knowledge-production, identifying good practices as well as decisions about what conduct should be targeted for change (see e.g., O'Reilly et al., 2020, for an example of reflective interventionist CA).

CONCLUSION

The articles in this special issue provide detailed understanding of the organization of different interactional environments and the role they have in shaping L2 learning in general and the development of L2 grammars-for-social-action, in particular. They add to the increasing amount of data and range of empirical analyses emanating from usage-based and / or conversation analytic studies of L2 interaction and learning, in instructed settings as well as the wild, that conspire to show the importance of re-conceptualizing 'grammar' as a set of resources for participating in social interaction and of integrating classroom practices and L2

speakers' lifeworlds in efforts to rewild L2 education. Such insights may be fruitfully brought

to bear on L2 teaching and L2 teacher education. We hope that the special issue will be

widely read by language educators and future teachers and will help them in developing

pedagogical practices and activities that encompass various learning environments in the

classrooms and beyond.

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