

# Conceptual Changes and Methodological Challenges: On Language and Learning from a Conversation Analytic Perspective on SLA

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## **Introduction**

The last two decades have been witness to the increasing influence, across several disciplines in the human sciences, of research that challenges established conceptions of learning and of language. Within socioculturally and socio-interactionally oriented research, attention has shifted away from an understanding of language learning/acquisition as an intra-psychological, cognitive process enclosed in the mind of the individual, toward a concern with how learning is anchored and configured in and through the social practices the learner engages in. This rethinking has partially gone hand-in-hand with a reconceptualisation of language: usage-based approaches to language have refuted a static, context-independent notion of linguistic knowledge, insisting on its adaptive, dynamic character. These reconceptualisations broaden the scope of thinking about language and learning, and open new possibilities for how we go about documenting learning.

Within the field of SLA, conversation analytic research has played a major role in these developments. Ethnomethodological conversation analysis (CA) provides a conceptual and analytic apparatus that has been put to use in an important body of empirical studies across the last two decades, helping us to understand the detailed unfolding of L2 communicative practices and learning activities. Also, CA work on SLA (henceforward: CA-SLA) has provided important impulses

for rethinking dominant conceptions of learning, meeting in several regards sociocultural theory (Lantolf and Thorne 2006) as well as ecological (Kramsch 2002) and sociocognitive approaches (Atkinson et al. 2007) to SLA. Based on the immense impact of Firth and Wagner's (1997: 286) seminal position chapter calling for a 'significantly enhanced awareness of the contextual and interactional dimensions of language use', CA-SLA has forged a notion of learning as 'learning-in-action' (Firth and Wagner 2007): learning is seen as a sociocognitive process that is embedded in the context of locally accomplished social practices. Learning a language is not the mere internalisation of linguistic knowledge that can then be simply put to use, rather it consists of the continuous adaptation of linguistic and other semiotic resources in response to locally emergent communicative needs. It involves the routinisation of patterns of language-use-for-action through repeated participation in social activities. Such a conception rests on an understanding of social interaction as the bedrock of human linguistic and more generally social and mental functioning (cf. Garfinkel 1967; Schegloff 1991, 2006), and hence as the starting point for the study of second language learning.

The quoted developments bear testimony to a paradigm shift in contemporary thinking about language and language development, profoundly calling into question any ontological separation between language development and language use (Firth and Wagner 1997, 2007; Markee and Kasper 2004; Wagner and Gardner 2004; see also, from different horizons, Atkinson et al. 2007; Ellis 2003; Hopper 1998; Tomasello 2003). CA's current empirical contribution to this shift lies in documenting how language development, as part of interactional development, is inscribed in the micro-details of communicative practice.

Despite the intense conceptual discussions that the field has generated recently, CA-SLA's understanding of language has mostly remained implicit (but see Markee 2008). This is why, in this chapter, I wish to pay specific attention to what CA, and in particular CA as applied to L2 talk, can contribute to our understanding of language, and how this understanding relates to a reconceptualised notion of language learning.

This chapter first exposes the conceptions of learning and of language that emanate from CA-SLA, briefly sketching their relation to other research traditions. The chapter then addresses the methodological challenges that result from these conceptions when it comes to documenting learning, and discusses the empirical evidence for learning that is

provided by current work in CA-SLA in terms of both interactional and linguistic L2 development. The chapter concludes by outlining some parameters as regards a future CA-SLA research agenda.

## Learning as learning-in-action

### CA-SLA's conception of learning

In their introduction to the 88/4, 2004 issue of *The Modern Language Journal*, Markee and Kasper (2004: 496) state the following:

Learning behaviors may usefully be understood as a conversational process that observably occurs in the intersubjective space between participants, not just in the mind/brain of individuals.

Such a view does not deny that our capacities/aptitudes have an individual or even biologically determined dimension, but it stresses that they function and are shaped within the micro-details of everyday communicative practices and the social agents' local interpretive processes (for example, Firth and Wagner 1997, 2007; Kasper 2004, 2009). Learning is seen as rooted in the moment-by-moment deployment of socioculturally elaborated, locally accomplished and – most typically – interactionally organised courses of practical activities, such as telling a story, discussing an event, negotiating a mutual understanding, but also reading or writing. Factors such as motivation, learning strategies, and cognitive processing are seen as being configured in response to social practices – and as analysable in terms of how they are observably enacted within these practices. As a consequence, learning behaviours are not interpreted as the pure result of previous knowledge, stable individual traits or learner types; rather, learners behave in situated ways, depending on how they interpret the situation at hand through the course of its accomplishment. Therefore, learning a language involves a continuous process of adaptation of patterns of language-use-for-action in response to locally emergent communicative needs, and the routinisation of these patterns through repeated participation in social activities. The resulting competencies are adaptative, flexible and sensitive to the contingencies of use. This is what is captured by the notions of *learning-in-action* (Firth and Wagner 2007) and *competence-in-action* (Pekarek Doehler 2006b).

The situated dimension of learning has been highlighted by socially-oriented studies of cognitive functioning and development, in particular theories of situated learning (Lave and Wenger 1991) and

ethnomethodological analysis of practical cognition (cf. *infra*). Within socially-oriented SLA research, empirical support for such a view is provided by work which shows that linguistic and interactional competence is highly context-sensitive and co-constructible (Atkinson et al. 2007; Donato 1994; Firth and Wagner 2007; Hall 1995; Hellermann 2007, 2008; Markee and Seo 2009; Pekarek Doehler 2006b; Young and Miller 2004, *inter alia*).

### **Situated cognition**

#### *Situated cognition and its observability*

The CA notion of learning builds on a notion of cognition as socially situated, distributed and hence inextricably intertwined with action/interaction (cf. Schegloff 1991). A central correlate of such an understanding, which has crucial implication on how we go about documenting learning, is that cognition is not tucked away in a black box, but is deployed and made publicly available in interaction (see also Seedhouse and Walsh, this volume); as a consequence, it becomes at least partially observable for the researcher. The publicly accountable nature of social cognition has been stressed early on by Garfinkel (1967) in his ethnomethodological work on practical reasoning.<sup>1</sup> Garfinkel sees the relation between cognition and social organisation as being ‘accountable’, that is, observable and reportable: participants employ interactional procedures in a way that they are recognisable as doing such and such a thing.

The notion of *methods* plays a crucial role in this. Methods, in the ethnomethodological sense of the term, are instruments for accomplishing intersubjectivity and for establishing and maintaining social order; they are systematic procedures (of turn-taking, repairing, opening or closing conversation, and so on) by which members organise their behaviour in a mutually understandable way – and they use language as a central resource to do so. As such, ‘methods’ are part of a practical reasoning that defines human cognition as a situated process enacted through social activities. We have suggested earlier (Mondada and Pekarek Doehler 2004: 503) that these methods play a key role in situated learning; they are part of the competence that allows members to participate in social interactions (cf. Garfinkel 1967), including learning activities. At the same time, they are the very object of developing the ability to interact in a (second) language.

The publicly accountable nature of processes such as reasoning and understanding is a central issue for our purpose here, as it implies the possibility of analysing jointly accomplished activities as micro-moments

of socially situated cognition (Kasper 2009; Markee and Seo 2009; Mori and Hasegawa 2009; Schegloff 1991). It implies that at least part of the process of learning is analysable as embodied in the details of social interaction, through such pervasive elements as repair, hesitation, repetition, turn-taking and sequential organisation, but also gaze, gesture, body orientation and the manipulation of objects.

This is shown in extract (1), where three students, Anila, Ebru and Natascha, are involved in group-work in a French L2 lower-intermediate classroom. The extract starts with the researcher (who participates in the teaching) joining the group and asking (l. 1) ‘what do you want to say’, to which Anila responds (l. 2) that she wants to express more than ‘to love’ (non-verbal behaviour appears on a separate line, following the translation; its onset is marked by + within the speaker’s turn).

### Extract 1

- 001 R: qu’est-ce que tu veux dire.  
*what do you want to say*
- 002 A: +/ply/ que elle aime, (.) /ply/ que aime.  
*more than she loves more than loves*
- 003 (1.5)
- 004 R: h::m ehm tu peux m’expliquer la situation?  
*can you explain the situation to me*
- 005 A: ehm tz (...) +>mais nous achetons une petit cadeau, une  
*but we buy a little present a*  
*ani +reads her notes*
- 006 CD de chansons bollywood=parce< +que elle aim:e ça très?  
*CD of bollywood songs because she loves that very*  
*ani +looks at Res*
- 007 R: parce qu’elle aime ça beaucoup.  
*because she likes that very much*
- 008 A: +ai- b- okay.  
*all +bend over their sheets to write*
- 009 R: on peut dire elle adore +ça. [adorer  
*you can say she adores this to adore*  
*ani +lifts gaze to Res*
- 010 A: [+ah adore+  
*ani +nods*  
*res +Res leaves the group*
- 011 E: parce que  
*because*

012 N: elle  
 013 E: +adore  
           adores  
 ebr    +looks at Ani  
 014     (..)  
 015 E: elle adore?  
           she adores  
 016 A: elle adore.  
           she adores  
 017 E: +(hm?)  
 ebr    +looks at Anila  
 ani    +nods  
 018 +(3.8)  
 all    +bent over their respective sheets, writing  
 (CODI WSB -Tschu-181105-TG-s 12Sec-1)

The excerpt shows how learning-related cognitive processes are embodied in the multimodal enactment of talk (for an analysis of the co-construction processes in this excerpt, see Steinbach Kohler 2008).<sup>2</sup> After declaring what she is searching for (1.1–2), Anila provides a first possible wording (l. 6: *elle aime ça très* ‘she loves that very’), which is not target-language-like. Her rising intonation on *très* (l. 6), together with her gazing toward the researcher, can be interpreted as soliciting help. The researcher then proposes an alternative wording (l. 7), thereby displaying her understanding of Anila’s turn (and possibly gaze) as searching for help. Taken together, lines 6 and 7 show a self-initiated other-repair (cf. Schegloff et al. 1977). The candidate solution proposed by the teacher is ratified by Anila’s *okay* (l. 8), and the students’ bending down to write (see also l. 18) functions as a classroom-bound practice which consecrates the ‘correct’ linguistic form as it is jointly accepted by the participants.

At this very moment, the researcher presents an alternative wording, namely ‘to adore’ (l. 9). Anila again both verbally (by means of the change of state token ‘ah’ and repetition) and physically (nodding) enacts her recognition and acceptance of this alternative wording. The researcher’s subsequent physical moving away from the group (l. 10) indicates her understanding of the communicative obstacle as being solved.

The participant’s cognitive orientation toward language (and possibly learning) is organised through the sequential deployment of turns

at talk. This deployment demonstrably reflects and enacts processes that can be cast in cognitive terms as ‘attention focus’, ‘noticing’, or ‘understanding’. The noticing of the gap, the providing of a candidate solution, and its acceptance are interactionally occasioned. The interactional and the cognitive work deployed by the co-participants are inextricably intertwined.

In the following lines, a reconfiguration of the roles of expert and novice is embodied through talk and gaze. At l. 11, Ebru returns to the group’s micro task: formulating why the group will buy a CD. Ebru orients his gaze toward Anila at the very moment of producing the verb *adore* (l. 13), possibly in order to solicit Anila’s acknowledgement of the form, and then repeats *elle adore*, this time with rising intonation (l. 15), thereby more clearly displaying a call for ratification. Anila, in l. 16, fully assumes the role of expert by confirming Ebru’s wording, while clearly articulating every syllable of *adore*. Subsequently, a final checking is done by means of gaze between Ebru and Anila, which is then treated as confirmation of the wording *elle adore*, as shown by the students writing on their sheets (l. 18).

Clearly, the participants’ understanding of the ‘correctness’ of linguistic forms, as well as their conduct as ‘experts’ or as ‘learners’, are configured locally, through the moment-to-moment unfolding of the situation. Extract (1) demonstrates how socially contingent, mutually occasioned cognitive processes emerge out of the course of interaction. We observe a cognition in action that is organised through the sequential deployment of turns at talk, and embodied through gaze, prosody, body movements and verbal behaviour (cf. Mori and Hasegawa 2009; Olsher 2004).

Whether, in extract (1), learning is taking place is an open question: what we see are micro-moments of potential learning as observable through a sequentially contingent cognition in action. Evidence for learning, however, is provided by what Anila does exactly one month later in the same classroom, with the same researcher (cf. extract 2).

### *Situated cognition and evidence for learning*

In extract (2), the group is discussing with the researcher what kinds of clothing they like:

#### Extract 2

001 R: et pour toi anila?  
and for you Anila

002 A: <eh j'achète eh: °ähm°>=mais >j'a==

*I buy but I*  
 picture #1 #2 #3

003 A: =j'adore les vêtements s-=sportifs,<

*I adore clothing (that is) casual*  
 picture #4

004 R: mhm

005 A: et aussi (.) un peu élégants.

*and also a bit elegant*

006 R: mhm?

(CODI WBS – tschu-211205, 13'07-13'18)



#1

1. 002 *j'achète*

Anila gazes into the void  
 (researcher is to the very left,  
 kneeling)

7.1 Extract 2 photo 1



#2

1. 002 *mais*

Anila closes her eyes, keeps  
 posture

7.2 Extract 2 photo 2



7.3 Extract 2 photo 3

#3

1. 002 *j'a-*

Anila leans forward, gazes at researcher



7.4 Extract 2 photo 4

#4

1. 003 *j'aDOre*

Anila leans further forward, gazes at researcher

Anila's re-use of the verb *adore* (l. 3), one month later, can be taken as evidence for learning: a linguistic item that had been worked on interactionally earlier, and which proved problematic at that time, is now re-used in a contextualised way within a new communicative environment. But on what grounds can we claim that this learning is grounded exactly in what we have seen Anila do one month earlier (extract 1)? A close look at the linguistic, prosodic and bodily resources used by Anila can shed light on this question.

Anila's turn (l.2) starts off with slow pace, including a series of hesitation marks. It shows an online revision of the initial *j'achète* 'I buy' to yield *j'adore* 'I adore'. The *adore* is highlighted by several means: speeding up of talk, increase of volume, fixing of Anila's gaze on the

researcher, and progressive leaning forward towards the researcher. This is illustrated in pictures 1 to 4.

Through her detailed temporal coordination between talk, gaze and body, Anila not only displays her knowledge of the verb, but tags it as a particularly noteworthy item *for this specific interlocutor*. It is as if she was enacting 'look, I know that word which you taught me a while ago'. From an emic perspective, we witness how a previous moment of interaction is treated as a moment of learning, and how the present interlocutor is treated as a person designed to witness that learning. A shared interactional history is invoked, and Anila's understanding of her learning as being contingent on that history is publicly displayed (for similar observations, see Markee and Seo 2009).

Taken together, extracts (1) and (2) show how, throughout the micro-details of talk-in-interaction, embodied and socially situated cognition and learning-in-action can be documented. Such observations feed into a praxeological understanding of cognition and learning as deployed, structured and publicly accountable in and through social interaction.

### **Implications for studying SLA**

One highly significant observation with regard to this situatedness of learning in the course of practical activities is that language learning practices are embedded within patterns of participation (Mori 2004), interactionally configured and exhibited social identities (Kasper 2004), and organisational structures of talk-in-interaction both in the classroom (Hellermann 2008; Mondada and Pekarek Doehler 2004; Pekarek Doehler and Ziegler 2007; Seedhouse 2004) and in naturally occurring conversation (see the chapters in Gardner and Wagner 2004): all of these shape participants' learning activities and linguistic resources, while being at the same time structured by them. Language competence cannot therefore be seen as independent of the social-interactional dimensions of language practice, nor can the process of learning be so viewed.

Another empirical correlate of this conception of learning, as shown in extracts (1) and (2), is the fact that participants themselves exhibit orientation towards (and ongoing assessment of) each other's language expertise (Firth 2009; Kasper 2009) or cognitive states (Mori and Hasegawa 2009), and towards learning opportunities whose construction they contribute to (Firth and Wagner 2007; Mondada and Pekarek Doehler 2004; Mori 2004; Pekarek Doehler 2002). Such

evidence opens one interesting window onto the *process* of learning, helping us to understand what learning is for the learner and his or her co-participants.

## Language as language-in-action

### CA-SLA's conception of language

Such a notion of learning, and of its embeddedness in action, implies a specific understanding of language. Emanating originally from sociology, CA's primary concern is with social practice and not with language forms (Sacks 1992, vol. I: 622). Also, until recently, CA-SLA has not paid systematic attention to the specifics of linguistic structure, taking activity rather than language form as the point of departure for analysis. Yet, in looking at the details of language as a resource for interaction, CA-SLA has the potential to bring to bear new insights on the development of L2 grammar, as part of the development of L2 interactional competence.

From the classic CA chapters, grammar – broadly understood as the resources provided by the linguistic system, including lexicon, morphology, syntax, phonology and prosody – is treated as a (if not *the*) central resource allowing participants to coordinate their actions: it is central for turn-taking through the fact that participants orient toward the syntactic organisation of utterances in order to anticipate possible transition relevance points (Sacks et al. 1974); and it is central for the social coordination of activities by organising projection, allowing participants to anticipate, on the basis of sequentially prior segments of talk, sequentially subsequent segments of talk (Schegloff 1996).

A central consequence of this embeddedness of language in (inter) action bears on the very nature of linguistic patterns or constructions. As language is a central tool for the coordination of the temporal and sequential unfolding of actions, its structures cannot but be continually adapted to the contingencies of social (inter)actions (Auer 2009; Schegloff 1996). This point has persuasively been documented in Goodwin's (1979) early CA analysis of how the construction of a single sentence is formatted in real time in response to local contingencies, such as recipient reactions or their absence. It has also been evidenced in Lerner's (1991) work on utterance co-construction, where a second speaker completes a syntactic trajectory initiated by a first speaker, and thereby accomplishes locally relevant interactional work such as

displaying alignment. Such observations can be interpreted as providing evidence for the distributed nature of grammar (Pekarek Doehler, *in press*): language is a shared resource for action, distributed among speakers, whose structures and functioning are inextricably embedded in its natural habitat, that is, the moment-to-moment deployment of talk-in-progress.

On the basis of such observations, current work in CA-SLA proposes a praxeological and dialogic conception of language, whose most explicit formulations understand language and social activity as mutually constitutive (Firth and Wagner 1997, 2007; Mondada and Pekarek Doehler 2004; Wagner and Gardner 2004): the structures of language are used as a resource for organising and coordinating actions and are in turn shaped in response to this organisation: the linguistic system is fundamentally made not simply to say things, but to accomplish social activities.

This, of course, is a crucial point, as it radically challenges received conceptions of language within and outside of SLA. It is, however, a point that is corroborated by compelling evidence from a growing body of research emanating from different research traditions. Most importantly, in the field of interactional linguistics, numerous studies have documented that the way utterances are constructed, down to their linguistic details, is sensitive to their interactional context and more precisely to the organisation of the actions interlocutors are engaged in (Auer 2009; Ochs et al. 1996; Schegloff 1996).

This conception of language also resonates with usage-based approaches that see grammar not as a static, self-contained system, but as variable, adaptive, flexible and emergent through contextualised language use (Hopper 1998; Tomasello 2003; see also Larsen-Freeman, *this volume*). Despite their epistemological and methodological differences, the quoted research paradigms converge on one central issue: they radically question a stable, context-neutral notion of our linguistic knowledge as independent from language use.

### **Grammar as a resource for action: Evidence from L2 talk**

This dynamic character of language is a consequential issue when it comes to analysing and understanding L2 learning and use. In order to illustrate its relevance for issues of L2 talk and learning, I will focus in this section on how L2 speakers use one classic construction, namely left-dislocation,<sup>3</sup> for accomplishing locally relevant interactional work.

Extract (3) shows a self-initiated other-repair sequence that closes with a left-dislocation at l. 8:

### Extract 3

001 G: euh (..) la: (..) je pense que euh la b- (..) la b- (.)  
*hum the: I think that um the b- the b-*

002 la ba- [bilance  
*the ba- balance*

003 ? [(coughing)]

004 (0.4)

005 T: pardon?  
*pardon*

006 G: la balance, (..) °la balance°?  
*the balance the balance*

007 T: la balance oui.  
*the balance yes*

008 G: **la balance** (.) **ça: montre** (..) **s- euh si** on était juste (.)  
*the balance it shows s- um whether one was right*

009 **ou pas?**  
*or not*

(SPD25/26:29:13)

At l. 8, the repetition/acknowledgement of the candidate solution provided by the teacher at l. 7 is integrated by Gerd into a left-dislocated construction, produced under a single intonation contour. The left-dislocation allows the speaker to do two things at once: first it sets off the NP *la balance* from the rest of the turn, thereby scaffolding its recognition as doing a ratification (that is, ratifying the teacher's *la balance*); then it recasts that item by a clitic pronoun, thereby warranting its integration into the pursuit of the turn. The dislocated construction hence amalgamates two functions: ratification of a linguistic form, and pursuit of the communicative project under way. In this way, l. 8 presents itself as a direct continuation of the syntactic trajectory initiated at l. 1, the two together forming *je pense que la balance ça montre si on était juste ou pas*. Visibly, the use of the construction here responds to interactional contingencies as they emerge from the sequential unfolding of turns and actions, allowing the speakers to minimise the disruptive effect of other-repair.

A second case in point for left-dislocation as an interactional resource is provided by extract (4), where the left-dislocation is again

instrumental in minimising disruption, but this time in the case of self-repair.

#### Extract 4

[talking about Swiss Germans' need to master standard German]

001 G: moi je trouve que ce n'est pas nécessaire parce que: en allemand  
*me I think that it isn't necessary because: in German*

002 (.) ou en Allemagne on peut aussi parler suisse allemand,  
*or in Germany one can also speak swiss german*

003 et **les autres ils: (2.2) on les comprend.** (.) **quand même.**  
*and the others they we understand them anyway*

(SPD 19 «les autres»; Pekarek Doehler, in press)

At line 3, Gerôme starts off a turn construction unit as a left-dislocated format where *les autres* 'the others' is co-indexed by the subsequent subject clitic *ils* 'they'. However, after a 2.2 second pause, the plan is revised. The left-detached constituent remains available for a second, yet grammatically different, exploitation: *les autres* is now co-indexed by the object clitic *les* 'them'. The self-repair is built so as to minimise disruption: there is no cut-off, reformulation signal or up/down-step of pitch. The left-dislocation itself is instrumental in this minimisation, as it allows the speaker to restart a syntactic trajectory with a proform that is continuous, both syntactically and pragmatically, with the lexical NP in the precedingly abandoned structure, while proffering a retrospective re-analysis of the grammatical function of that NP (for a more detailed discussions of such revisions see Pekarek Doehler, in press). Again, the left-dislocation is a resource for dealing with the contingencies of talk-in-interaction. Also note that the initial NP+clitic cluster allows the speaker to 'buy time' while searching for his or her wording (see the 2.2-second pause), without being interrupted by the co-participant(s). Such occurrences of left-dislocated constructions suggest that speakers use grammar as a central resource for organising talk, and particularly L2 talk (where hesitations are frequent), and hence as a key component of their (L2) interactional competence.

Excerpts (3) and (4) present micro-phenomena bearing witness to the locally contingent nature of the linguistic system: grammatical constructions are used and sometimes moulded for all practical purposes, in response to local interactional needs, such as overcoming hesitations and minimising the disruptiveness of repair, thereby maximising the progressivity of talk. More importantly, for our purpose here,

such evidence suggests that a central business for the L2 speaker is to develop a grammar that can serve as a resource for dealing with the specifics of L2 talk-in-interaction. Clearly, such adaptative uses of syntactic resources by the participants cannot be accounted for in terms of sentence-level grammar, nor in terms of approximation to target-language norms. Yet, they are an integral part of learners' developing interactional competence. Therefore, they call for a microanalysis of grammar as it is deployed in interaction.

### **Implications for studying SLA**

By empirically documenting the embeddedness of speakers' developing L2 grammar in the micro-details of social interaction, CA-SLA brings to bear on SLA research a new view of language that has several critical implications.

First, it implies that language form is analysable in the first place as a contextualised solution to an interactional problem – part of members' 'methods' of dealing with the issues of everyday life/talk. This may, and regularly does, imply issues of grammatical appropriateness, and proximity to target language, but it also may, and regularly does, imply the use of transitional, alternative grammatical formats that are communicatively efficient and may serve as stepping-stones into more target-like constructions. Moreover, it may, and regularly does, imply the use of target-language constructions in a way that is instrumental in dealing with the specifics of (second language) talk-in-interaction. In this sense, language learning can be seen as a central part of the elaboration of contextually sensitive methods for 'doing things' (cf. Hellermann 2008; Mondada and Pekarek Doehler 2004).

Second, it suggests that language is not simply applied in action, but is emergent from action: it is (re)shaped (that is, sedimented or changed) through each use as a response to locally configured communicative needs. This is what I mean when defining language learning as routinisation of patterns of language-use-for-action (cf. *supra*). Language and practice are mutually constitutive; *mutatis mutandis*, language learning and language use are not ontologically separate phenomena.

Finally, while this view 'establishes talk-in-interaction as the key object of study for SLA' (Markee 2008: 5) – and perhaps of language more generally – it also outlines the need to look closely at the details of how talk is produced in real time, including how grammar is recycled, infused with hesitations and recasts, and incrementally extended for all practical purposes, both as part of language-as-a-resource-for-action and as a possible trace of learning behaviours. In this sense, CA-SLA

participates in a wider field of investigations which consider that it is by looking at the micro-details of language as it is used in communicative practice that we can provide new insights into both the nature of language and the process of language learning.

### **The methodological challenge: What is evidence for learning?**

The above-mentioned re-conceptualisations of learning and of language have fundamental implications for how we go about documenting learning and what we take as empirical evidence for learning. Within the conceptual framework and on the basis of the empirical research discussed above, the analytic focus is on how learners use language in talk-in-interaction to accomplish situated activities (such as opening a conversation, disagreeing, writing collaboratively) and in which they simultaneously orient to the rules of a social practice, linguistic norms, mutual organisation of actions, and so on. As the analytic interest focuses on how people behave in their everyday practices, analyses are carried out on L2 speakers within naturally-occurring data and not, for instance, in experimental or semi-experimental settings. A central concern is with how participants themselves orient to language and to language learning (emic perspective), as well as how they treat each others as 'learners' or as 'experts'.

Based on these analytic priorities, CA-SLA sets out to understand language learning in the light of the dynamics of language use. Here exactly lies a central methodological challenge when it comes to documenting learning. What is at stake is finding ways of looking not only at language across time, but at language-in-action across time: How does the accomplishment of L2 talk-in-interaction and L2 speakers' participation in talk change across time? And how are changes in linguistic form and in other semiotic means embedded in (changes in) the accomplishment of talk and participation? It is these embedded changes that provide evidence for L2 learning.

Currently, CA studies on SLA face two major challenges. On the one hand, classic CA work, while aiming to discover the 'methods' by which members organise their conduct in mutually recognisable ways, does not address the question of how members develop these methods:

The absence of a 'learning mechanism' creates a dilemma for L2 researchers who wish to apply CA not only to the study of L2 interaction, but to second language development. (Kasper 2009: 11)

There is no readily available conceptual or methodological apparatus that CA-SLA can draw on to investigate development over time. On the other hand, the object of study – that is, the ever-changing micro-details of social interaction – is dynamic, flexible, organic. Looking at language-in-action across time implies tracking language resources used within the same type of practice at (at least) two different moments in time – which presupposes a certain *consistency* across time of the practice being studied. Obviously, this is far from easy to achieve given CA's uncompromising insistence on naturally-occurring data. Because real-life situations are involved, control of variables can only be limited when comparing behaviour across time. Therefore, a central but tricky analytic task lies in clearly differentiating between what, in the observable change in behaviour, can be accounted for in terms of *local context-sensitivity* (that is, adaptation to a given interactional context), and what provides evidence for *change across time*, that is, learning.

Two scales of the time axis are currently being investigated. The first relates to change across larger time-spans as addressed by longitudinal (or cross-sectional) studies that are designed to capture some dimensions of the outcome (*product*) of learning – that is, a state of competence at a time X, X+1, and so on. Recently, a series of studies on interactional competence has been carried out in this vein. The second is concerned with how participants, within short time-spans, work their competencies in real time through the moment-by-moment unfolding of talk. These studies are designed to capture some dimensions of the *process* of learning, and typically focus on the learning of specific linguistic items or patterns. In what follows, I will briefly discuss some of the empirical evidence provided by these two lines of investigation.

### **Documenting learning I: Interactional development over time**

CA-SLA has recently generated or inspired a small series of longitudinal studies directly concerned with the development of L2 interactional competence.

Possibly the most systematic investigation into interactional L2 development to date is provided by Hellermann (2008). On the basis of a research design that enabled the same dyads of adult EFL learners to be followed in class across several months and even years, Hellermann documents their developing practices of opening tasks, of telling stories, and of disengaging from an activity. For instance, openings of teacher-assigned dyadic tasks at lower levels of proficiency are typically launched directly, with little or no prefatory talk, while at more advanced levels, participants show increased use of prefatory talk

before launching the task and a wider repertoire of verbal negotiations of the upcoming task. Hellermann thus documents major differences, across time, in how participants organise the sequential structure of a practice.

Cekaite (2007), in a longitudinal micro-analytic study combining the framework of language socialisation with CA methodology, follows a Kurdish immigrant child in an immersion context in a Swedish classroom. She situates the child's progress along a developmental continuum of verbal conduct moving toward fuller participation that can be observed through the child's turn-taking behaviour across three stages, ranging from silence, through inappropriate turn-taking, to correct identification of slots for turn-taking.

In a study inspired by Lave and Wenger's (1991) conceptualisation of learning as change in participation, from peripheral to full, Young and Miller (2004), again using CA methodology, show how an adult Vietnamese learner of English changes her mode of participation in weekly writing conferences with an instructor across a time-span of four weeks. The learner shows increasing interactional skills with regard to turn-taking and the sequential organisation of the practice (for example, transitioning between interactional episodes).

At the current state of research, two substantial contributions emanate from the quoted studies and a few others (for example, Brouwer and Wagner 2004; Hellermann 2007). First, they show that interactional skills related to turn-taking or the sequential organisation of a given practice are to some extent re-learned or re-calibrated in the L2, and not just automatically transferred from L1. This is a significant finding insofar as it not only adds an additional layer of complexity to SLA, but also empirically counters a conception of learning according to which communicative skills involve the simple putting-to-use of previously acquired linguistic patterns and rules, plus pragmatic and sociolinguistic knowledge. Clearly, the evidence provided by the quoted studies is based on a redefined, more holistic understanding of what the object of L2 development is. The attention paid to the details of language, however, is scant in the quoted research (for a notable exception see Ishida 2009).

Second, the quoted studies start to outline a useful methodology for documenting L2 interactional development. They show how we can track interactional development over time through longitudinal and micro-analytic research design by looking at recurrent interactional practices (such as participating in a writing conference) or micro-practices (such as opening a story). Clearly, both of these analytic focuses

narrow down the concrete site of investigation to micro-moments of social interaction, but they have the advantage of zooming in on practices that show a certain consistency and comparability across time, and which allow identification of observables for analysis (for example, turn-taking, sequential organisation) which can be used as indicators of interactional development.

## **Documenting learning II:**

### **The interactional configuration of linguistic patterns**

When it comes to documenting the process of language learning, as it is observably configured within the detailed unfolding of talk-in-interaction, another research design is relevant. Evidence is needed that goes beyond such local mechanisms as repair or negotiation sequences, and accounts for how participants progressively, repeatedly and collectively configure their L2 resources within joint courses of activities, and how they re-use these resources within same and different environments, in more and more context-sensitive ways (that is, ways that are adapted to local interactional needs).

Several recent CA-SLA studies provide micro-analytic investigations of learning processes across short time-spans (called ‘microgenesis’ in Vygotskian developmental psychology. For SLA see, for example, Donato 1994). In his account of English lingua franca telephone conversations in a workplace setting, Firth (2009) demonstrates how, during a telephone opening, participants use pace, intonation and the sequential structure of talk-in-interaction to progressively establish a synchronised rhythm of interaction. He shows that, progressively, they mutually calibrate their interactional competencies in a way that leads into a more and more fluent pursuit of a conversation which, in its beginning, was marked by slow pace and lengthy hesitations. In this study, joint interactional learning is evidenced in terms of a locally adaptative learning for all practical purposes, allowing participants to optimise their interaction in this situation, for this practical purpose, with this interlocutor.

In a recent study on French L2 classroom small-group interaction, Pekarek Doehler and Steinbach Kohler (under review) analyse how, while accomplishing the official task, students jointly work on the morphosyntactic shaping of their respective utterances online, throughout the moment-by-moment deployment of joint actions. The study documents a recurrent structure of situated learning, moving from (a) collaborative establishment of a morphosyntactic pattern, through (b) contextualised re-use of that pattern, to (c) creative re-use, that is,

variation on the pattern and progressive complexification (see also extracts 1 and 2 *supra*). The analysis shows that each step is jointly established in response to such locally configured interactional needs as providing an answer, showing expertise, or displaying participation. One case under analysis sheds light on the *process* of construction building: it suggests that the elaboration of such morphosyntactic patterns as the word-order of *tout ça fait/coûte X* 'all this makes/costs X' and *ça fait tout* 'that's all' crucially hinges on the use of lexically-based open-slot constructions functioning as unanalysed chunks, rather than on individual items and their combination rules.

Micro-analytic studies of locally enacted, interactionally configured learning (see also Atkinson et al. 2007; Firth and Wagner 2007; Markee and Seo 2009) offer two main contributions to our understanding of the process of learning. On the one hand, they show that, for participants, working on language is not primarily a process of elaborating target-language forms; rather, it is a process of elaborating language forms for action, that is, configuring patterns of language use in order to accomplish some locally emergent interactional business, of which learning may be a collateral product. Working on a linguistic form (or on such things as intonation and rhythm) and potential learning appear as interactionally contingent processes. On the other hand, by using CA's fine-grained analytical methodology, we can uncover how participants themselves locally orient to grammar, how they treat grammar online, and how they use linguistic constructions both as stepping-stones for new constructions and as instruments for the mutual coordination of talk. And we can document how this online treatment of 'emergent L2 grammar' (Pekarek Doehler and Steinbach Kohler, under review) is inextricably embedded in the process of taking turns at talk and jointly accomplishing social actions. Here lies possibly one substantial contribution that CA-SLA can offer to current thinking about second language development, namely in providing evidence for some dimensions of the *process* of L2 grammatical development, that is, the emergence and sedimentation of patterns of language use, which has so far remained largely unexplored in SLA research (cf. Ellis 2003: 68).

## Conclusion

In response to the general focus of this volume on conceptions of learning, I have set out to discuss how the concepts and methods emanating from CA research in the field of SLA can enhance our understanding of both the process and the product of SLA. I would like to conclude by

summing up CA-SLA's contribution to understanding L2 learning, and by sketching some possibilities and requirements for a future CA-SLA research agenda.

While much of the earlier work in CA-SLA has been undertaken to uncover the fine-grained mechanisms of L2 talk, today CA-SLA is centrally addressing issues of L2 development. Recent work in CA-SLA has provided methodological solutions for tracking L2 interactional development (focus on micro-practices) as well as concrete analytic observables (for example, turn-taking or sequential organisation of a practice) for doing so. This is a significant contribution insofar as, until now, little has been known about L2 interactional development, despite intense calls coming for instance from education policy-makers (for example, the Common European Framework of Reference) for a better understanding of interactional competence and its development.

As to the investigation of L2 grammar, micro-analytic CA studies of how participants work on their grammar in real time show that language can usefully be analysed as a resource people use in interaction, which is prone to being patterned and re-patterned in response to locally occasioned interactional needs. This invites us not so much to ask how learners' language relates to the target language (the target-language norms being constructs in need of explanation themselves), but to describe how linguistic structure and other semiotic resources are 'occasioned' by conversational structure and conversational needs, and thereby configured and sedimented in response to these needs.

One promising future path for CA-SLA to venture on is to intensify longitudinal and possibly cross-sectional micro-analytic studies of interactional development. A prominent need in this regard is to broaden the range of observables that are taken as indicators of interactional development. Another is to broaden the range of languages and social situations (beyond educational settings) that are being studied. At a given moment, cross-linguistic as well as cross-situational comparisons may provide additional fruitful grounds for an integrated regime of investigation.

Finally, I also believe that much can be gained in understanding SLA if we pay more systematic attention to the details of how language interacts with other resources, as part of members' methods for accomplishing talk-in-interaction. Exploring the detailed inscription of language-in-action provides a basis for better understanding the complex interrelation between linguistic and interactional development over time. A close look at this interrelation may carry us one step further toward a more holistic understanding of the learning of a second

language, in a way that can inform other research paradigms, but also needs to be informed by them.

## Notes

1. For discussions of the relevance of the ethnomethodological conception of cognition for CA-SLA see Kasper (2009), Mondada and Pekarek Doehler (2000) and Seedhouse (2004).
2. I thank Fee Steinbach Kohler for her important help with the transcription of the data.
3. A left-dislocated construction is commonly defined as a sentence structure in which a referential element (most often a NP) is located to the left of a matrix clause containing a pronoun that is co-indexical with that element.