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## Learnables and Teachables in Second Language Talk: Advancing a Social Reconceptualization of Central SLA Tenets. Introduction to the Special Issue

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Following Firth & Wagner's (1997, 2007) call for a social reconceptualization of central tenets of second language acquisition (SLA) research, this special issue of *The Modern Language Journal* focuses on practices for teaching and learning a second language (L2) with special attention to the details of socio-interactive contexts of teaching and learning behaviors/activities. Its goal is to unveil learning processes and practices as socially observable phenomena *in situ* and *in vivo* and to discuss pedagogical implications of the findings. As such, the issue focuses on some well-established concepts from the SLA field, including noticing, attention, and corrective feedback, but aims to explore and reconceptualize them in terms of social displays of behavior and social practices as seen through the lens of conversation analysis. This Introduction sets the stage for the articles in the special issue by tracing SLA's interest in socio-interactive aspects of learning before moving on to a brief discussion of the epistemology of CA. We then outline the ways in which the individual articles empirically contribute to a social understanding of learning and cognition in SLA, before summarizing the main points addressed in the special issue.

*Keywords:* language learning; learning behaviors; conversation analysis; social cognition

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STUDIES ON SOCIO-INTERACTIONAL ASPECTS of the contexts of learning have been growing since the mid-70s (Hatch, 1978; Mchoul, 1978; Mehan, 1979; Sinclair & Coulthard, 1975) and were made prominent in SLA through Long's (1983, 1996) interactionist framework which focuses on modified input and negotiation for meaning as key to L2 development. Despite the discourse-analytic and ethnomethodological starting points of the pioneering work in the 1970s, most of the work on L2 interaction, following Long's lead, has traditionally belonged to the strand of SLA that identifies itself as a branch of cognitive science (Doughty & Long, 2003). For

a considerable period of time, the cognitivist approach to SLA constituted the mainstream of the field, as evident, for example, in the responses to Firth & Wagner (1997) in which multiple authors argued that, while research into the socio-interactive aspects of L2 use is of interest to the field of applied linguistics, it would not reveal anything about L2 acquisition. One of the key arguments in Firth & Wagner (1997), however, was that the field of SLA would benefit from a more balanced weighting of 'acquisition' and 'use,' the 'cognitive' and the 'social,' based on the fundamental assertion that use and acquisition are essentially inseparable. Not only is language learned through interaction, but it can also be difficult to ascertain where one ends and the other begins. That insight is central to the many approaches to SLA that have emerged since the 1990s which dispute the purely cognitivist approach

to learning, such as socio-cultural theory (Lantolf & Thorne, 2006), socio-cognitive theory (Atkinson, 2002, 2011), sociolinguistics (Block, 2003), identity theory (Norton, 2000), ecological approaches (Kolstrup, 2015; Kramsch & Whiteside, 2008; van Lier, 2000), conversation analysis and ethnomethodology (Firth & Wagner, 1997; Kasper & Wagner, 2011; Majlesi & Broth, 2012; Markee, 2000; Wagner, 2015), and usage-based linguistics (e.g., Ellis & Larsen-Freeman, 2009; Eskildsen, 2011; Eskildsen & Cadierno, 2015; Ortega, 2014). Alongside this development of a multitude of approaches has come the recognition that it no longer makes sense to speak of a mainstream SLA (Eskildsen & Markee, 2018; Swain & Deters, 2007).

Drawing on these ongoing developments, we present this special issue to continue incipient work that reconceptualizes the central, traditionally cognitivist concepts of SLA through a lens that views cognition as socially situated, distributed, and embodied (e.g., Goodwin, 1997; Hutchins, 1995, 2010; see also Atkinson, 2010) and language learning as embedded in larger human practices of social interaction (Burch, 2014; Eskildsen & Markee, 2018; Fasel Lauzon & Pekarek Doehler, 2013; Firth & Wagner, 2007; Kasper & Burch, 2016). More specifically, the articles in this issue do not investigate learning as a mental process constituted by symbolic representations but rather as a social process constituted by accountable, embodied practices (cf. Shapiro, 2011) including visible—observable and reportable—human talk-in-interaction. The articles thus approach their phenomena from the perspective of human action analysis, drawing particularly on ethnomethodology and conversation analysis, to which we now turn.

#### ETHNOMETHODOLOGY AND CONVERSATION ANALYSIS

Introduced by Harold Garfinkel (e.g., 1967) and rooted in sociology, ethnomethodology (EM) is concerned with how people achieve social order through particular methods of accomplishing everyday actions and practices *in situ* and *in vivo*. EM thus took a micro-perspective on sociology, focusing specifically on how social order is understood from a participants' perspective (Garfinkel, 2002; Goffman, 1983; Schegloff, Ochs, & Thompson, 1996). Derived from EM's interest in studying social order in social activities, conversation analysis (CA), through pioneering works of Sacks and

his colleagues (e.g., Sacks, Schegloff, & Jefferson, 1974), sought to explain the methods whereby the various interactional practices that specify social order are achieved in and through talk-in-interaction, based on the notion that ordinary conversation is the bedrock of talk-in-interaction, "the primordial site of human sociality and social life" (Schegloff, 1987, p. 101).

CA began as an analytic enterprise on the empirical basis of telephone conversations, but since then, especially with the advent of video-recorded data, it has come to be concerned with more than the business of verbal interchange (see, e.g., Goodwin, 1979, 1997, 2000). As noted by Neville (2015), there has been an embodied turn in studies of social interaction so that the research interests in CA now include all interactional behavior, including embodied actions such as gesture, gaze, and body posture, and uses of and orientations to configurations of space, objects, and tools in the environment.

While it is beyond the scope of these introductory remarks to give an exhaustive review of CA's epistemology and analytic methods, we emphasize two notions as particularly important to understanding CA, namely (a) intersubjectivity (Schegloff, 1991) and (b) the next-turn-proof-procedure (Sacks et al., 1974). Intersubjectivity concerns the on going work people carry out through visible conduct to ensure a common understanding of what is currently happening in interaction, and CA focuses on explicating people's methods for achieving this. It does so by analyzing people's production and displayed understanding of actions in interaction. The next-turn-proof-procedure is the analytic tool whereby analysts scrutinize people's methods of achieving and maintaining intersubjectivity. It derives from the basic CA finding that conversation consists of turns-at-talk and that these are done in adjacency pairs (Sacks et al., 1974)—that is, when an action is produced, the next relevant action is occasioned, and this next action gives meaning to the prior one. In other words, by providing an answer to a question, or accepting an invitation, or mitigating and producing an objection to a produced comment or assessment, people show their understanding of what their co-participant just said, thus ensuring the constant building of the architecture of intersubjectivity (Heritage, 1984). If intersubjectivity is challenged, people can initiate repair and work through the challenge to restore intersubjectivity (for further detail on CA, see introductory texts to CA such as Hutchby & Wooffitt, 2008; Schegloff, 2007; ten Have, 2007).

## CA AND COGNITION

While CA is often held to be non-cognitive, it does in fact make certain assumptions about cognition as a socially shared, publicly visible phenomenon (Schegloff, 1991; see also Kasper, 2009; Kasper & Wagner, 2014). Cognition, that is, ‘knowledge held in common’ displayed in a procedural sense of common or shared practices, can be studied through people’s observable behavior in any social activity (Garfinkel, 1967) as well as in and through talk and other embodied behavior in interaction (Heritage, 1984; Schegloff, 1991, 2006). In a recent study of L2 learning and interaction, Eskildsen & Markee (2018) showed empirically what has been a widespread conception in the cognitive sciences since the mid-1980s (Lindblom, 2015), namely that cognition is both embodied, distributed across participants as they display their shared knowledge in interactional settings (cf. Schegloff, 1991), and deeply embedded in and contingent upon the configuration of the local space (Hutchins, 1995). This is demonstrated through meticulous analyses of participants’ visible orientations, that is, their constant displays of their current ecologically mediated thinking through verbal and bodily actions. They do not just speak; they enact, point, nod, shift gaze, etc. Moreover, through embodied language-as-action the co-participants in Eskildsen & Markee’s study were shown to accomplish teaching, explaining, understanding, and learning in a way that is fundamentally co-constructed and that cannot be reduced to any one of its constituent turns-at-talk. Cognition and language learning and use thus all emerge as embedded, embodied, and distributed. Although this has been a widespread epistemological notion in the cognitive sciences for 30 years and a fundamental insight driving conversation analytic L2 learning studies (CA-SLA) at least since Markee (2000), it is only slowly making its way into cognitively oriented SLA (Ellis, 2014; Eskildsen & Cadierno, 2015).

## LEARNABLES AND TEACHABLES

The articles in this special issue scrutinize, through this CA-lens, phenomena such as language planning processes, grammar tasks, defining vocabulary, corrective feedback sequences, meta-linguistic explanations, and word searches. These issues are seen in the respective individual articles as observable and reportable through social practices in interaction directed toward identifying, understanding, and/or teaching linguistic

items as learnables/teachables in the activities of language learning and/or use (Majlesi, 2014a, 2014b; cf. Cohen, 1998). Thus, the articles highlight through visible phenomena in the data the role of both agency and collaboration in interactional orientations toward learnables/teachables and describe and explicate socially observable behavioral engagement of language teachers and language learners/users in these orientations. Taking an emic perspective, that is, a purely participant-relevant perspective, we use the notions of learnables and teachables to refer to that which is made interactionally relevant as objects of incipient understanding, learning, and/or teaching. In and through detailed analyses of recorded data in real time, the articles in the issue reconceptualize our understanding of certain central SLA concepts such as ‘noticing,’ ‘attention,’ ‘negotiation for meaning,’ ‘corrective feedback,’ and ‘meta-linguistic explanations’ as socially constructed actions and practices that people carry out, accomplish, and display orientation to in interactional pursuits of learnables and/or teachables.

## CA-SLA

CA-SLA studies based on their empirical and emic approach to naturally occurring activities—usually in face-to-face encounters—have so far shown how learning or teaching activities are organized in and through talk and embodied behavior, both in classrooms and other contexts designed for pedagogical purposes (Eskildsen & Wagner, 2013; Hellermann, 2008; Kasper, 2004; Majlesi, 2014b; Markee, 2008; Mondada & Pekarek Doehler, 2004; Seedhouse, Walsh, & Jenks, 2010; Sert, 2015) and also in the wild (Barraja-Rohan, 2015; Eskildsen & Theodórsdóttir, 2017; Hellermann et al., 2018; Sahlström, 2011; Theodórsdóttir & Eskildsen, 2011; Wagner, 2015). Attending to members’ displayed understanding in and through talk and other embodied behavior in interaction, CA analyzes social organization from within, adopting the perspective of the members in situ and investigating their sense-making procedures and methods. In order to understand the organization of learning activities, participants’ methods in such activities, and their choices and actions, CA attends to the course of activity, its development, and its production as it appears empirically and without making a priori assumptions about cognitive processes. Instead, this research is inherently empirically driven and rooted in the notion that people’s *in situ*, participant-relevant

cognition, including orientations to learning, is made publicly available in and through talk and other embodied conduct. This has resulted in an abundance of research demonstrating that L2 learning can be investigated as a temporal and sequential social accomplishment, situated in and contingent upon social interactivities (e.g., Eskildsen & Theodórsdóttir, 2017; Eskildsen & Wagner, 2015; Fasel Lauzon & Pekarek Doehler, 2013; Firth & Wagner, 2007; Hall, Hellermann, & Pekarek Doehler, 2011; Hellermann, 2008; Kasper & Wagner, 2011, 2014; Lee & Hellermann, 2014; Lilja, 2014; Majlesi, 2014a; Majlesi & Broth, 2012; Pekarek Doehler & Pochon-Berger, 2015; Seedhouse et al., 2010). Thus, learning is traced, *in situ* and *in vivo*, as participants' displays of the recognition of, and orientations to, something as learnable through some "observable-reportable methods" (Garfinkel & Sacks, 1986, p. 183; Garfinkel, 1967, *passim*), which are inherently indexical and accountable practices.

CA-SLA has pointed to a variety of language learning behaviors, including co-achieved repair sequences, assertions of understanding such as change-of-state tokens, definition talk, and participants volunteering new information connecting the learning objects to their previously established knowledge and interactional repertoires (Eskildsen, 2018; Eskildsen & Theodórsdóttir, 2017; Markee, 2008). The articles in this issue cast further light on this ethnomethodology of learning; that is, what participants do to display that they are, in fact, presently engaged in a learning activity. But they also tread new paths by focusing on (a) the embodied nature of learnables/teachables, (b) motivated choices in orienting toward learnables/teachables, and (c) collaborative performances of the participants in learning/teaching activities. The overriding theme of the chapters, however, is that they all bring us closer to a social understanding of traditionally cognitivist processes. They do not argue that cognition is not important; instead, they show that the cognitive processes involved in learning can be understood and investigated empirically as people's visible conduct. It is not necessary to hypothesize that 'noticing' matters to L2 learning once one steps away from a definition resting on conscious registration (Schmidt, 1990) toward a definition based on socially displayed behavior. Moreover, Eskildsen's contribution drawing on longitudinal data also broaches the topic of ramifications for long-term changes in people's methods to display understanding, learning, and teaching, thereby linking to the growing branch of CA research on developing L2 interactional

competence (Pekarek Doehler & Pochon-Berger, 2015) and suggesting that engagement in learning/teaching activities is part of a developing interactional competence worthy of further attention in future research.

#### TOWARD SOCIAL RE-SPECIFICATIONS OF ASPECTS OF LEARNING AND COGNITION: THE ARTICLES IN THIS ISSUE

The articles in this issue cover not only a variety of social situations in the form of everyday talk in noneducational settings and classroom interaction, as well as a range of L2s (Danish, Dutch, Icelandic, Italian, Swedish), they also cover a range of tasks within formal and informal social activities with regard to the planned and unplanned emergence of learnables/teachables. They attend to what precedes the language learning behaviors, namely how something is designed for and addressed to an unknown recipient (Goodwin, 1979), motivating his/her orientations toward a learnable in the first place, and finally what happens after interactional participants have located learnables in talk, such as the social processes and methods by which people orient to an interactional moment as a learning/teaching moment and/or integrate problematic items in the upcoming talk.

Running as an undercurrent through the contributions is Kasper and Burch's (2016) call for a focus on the L2 speaker's agentivity in action and the underlying assumption that L2 speakers are interactionally competent rather than defective communicators (Firth & Wagner, 1997). Kunitz shows how L2 learners collaboratively construct their focus on learning an Italian gender marker for specific writing purposes. Their focus on form is brought about by an attention-mobilizing turn-at-talk following which the work to reach a common agreement on the right morphological form is co-constructed by the participants. In other words, not only is focus on form shown to be a socially shared and distributed activity; the notion of attention itself, at the heart of much work in cognitive SLA, is crucially dependent on socially displayed and distributed cognition.

Eskildsen and Theodórsdóttir, in their respective articles, show how learning is done as social accomplishment in the wild. Eskildsen argues that the practices at the heart of negotiation for meaning are not only rare in the wild, they usually do not relate to any of the interactional participants being L2 users, and thus cannot be used to account for how language learning is

done outside of classrooms. It seems that in such naturally occurring L2 talk, people rarely engage in comprehension and confirmation checks and clarification requests; instead, they often engage in co-constructed word searches. Eskildsen shows in these word searches that the agentivity of L2 speaker is crucial to the practice. Whereas the main actions in the negotiation for meaning framework are carried out by a 'native speaker,' the next turn proof procedure of CA clearly shows that turns-at-talk only get their meaning and function through the next relevant action: Speakers show in 'the next turn' their understanding of 'the prior turn' (Hutchby & Wooffitt, 2008). A collaborative word search is identifiable as such by virtue of participants' public displays of orientations in interaction.

The same reasoning applies to Theodórsdóttir's study on corrections and meta-linguistic explanations in the wild. In cognitive SLA, these are procedures carried out by 'native speakers,' but Theodórsdóttir forcefully shows and argues that they can only be thought of as such if the L2 speaker in her next turn acknowledges them as such through particular social actions. That is, corrections and meta-linguistic explanations are inherently social endeavors and only become just that through collaborative work in interaction. Moreover, Theodórsdóttir also shows that meta-linguistic explanations and other forms of helping the L2 speaker understand corrections are occasioned and situated; they are there for a reason (for example in unresolved word searches) and do not happen out of the blue. This again is tied in with the nature of the data. Like Eskildsen, Theodórsdóttir argues that her findings are anchored in the non-classroom setting of her empirical material. Corrective feedback is a concept that is derived from educational contexts in which it is considered normal behavior when a teacher makes positive and negative assessments of students' performance. As Theodórsdóttir demonstrates, teacher and learner identities are more fluid and negotiable in the wild and therefore need to be made relevant through particular conduct in interaction.

These studies all emphatically move the focus of research from the 'native speaker' to where it naturally belongs, namely the agentivity of the L2 learner. To varying degrees of explicitness these studies also show that the noticing of form, grammar, or vocabulary that is brought about by the collaborative attention work, word searches, or correction/explanation practices is essentially a socially shared and publicly displayed phenomenon. While cognitivist SLA has pointed

out that the efficacy of corrections depends on whether or not the L2 speaker attends to it (Ellis & Sheen, 2006), Theodórsdóttir goes one step further by asserting and showing empirically that a correction only becomes a correction if oriented to as such by the L2 speaker. The practice of doing corrections is shown to be a fundamentally social-interactive enterprise.

Majlesi, in his article, uses video-recorded classroom data to show that such feedback sequences and meta-linguistic explanations are not only collaborative in nature but are fundamentally embodied. Moreover, when local configurations of space allow for it, such practices are also dependent on objects in the ecology of learning/teaching. Majlesi explicates that overheads and whiteboards are jointly constructed points of focus on which participants, most notably the teacher, may apply additional markings and symbols that work to enhance the L2 learners' attention to and awareness of particular linguistic details. Importantly, the reason why we know that this is happening is found in the L2 learners' displayed orientations to the teacher's actions; their attention and awareness are on public display. Vocabulary and grammar teaching are thus seen as embodied, collaborative, mediated, and publicly accountable behavior.

To sum up, the articles unpack how people produce learnables and teachables in both classroom situations and beyond in ways that are in accord with general turn-taking mechanisms and the architecture of intersubjectivity. The activities in which people produce learnables and teachables may occur as unplanned, especially in the wild, but learning is documented to be happening as a visible, hence intentional, process. This empirical observation not only shows that CA has developed since Firth & Wagner (1997) in that it is possible, in certain cases and with the right methodology, to pinpoint learning as social action (Sahlström, 2011); more importantly, such an orientation leads to a social reconceptualization of traditionally cognitivist terms in SLA, such as attention, noticing, and corrective feedback. The articles drawing on everyday interaction have brought about yet another insight, namely that the concepts and practices of corrective feedback and negotiation for meaning, while still engrained in many a foreign language classroom, have little bearing on people's everyday lives. Once they are observed outside the classroom, people simply seem to do different things. In itself, this may not be a new discovery, but the empirical insight that everyday conversation is fertile soil for engaging in learning activities is crucially

important. It is our hope that the evidence in the articles will resonate with the readers of the special issue and that they will find that we have offered a viable social reconceptualization of core SLA tenets and concepts, one that does not constitute a denial of the role of cognition but an empirically derived development of the field.

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