



# The first lecture: Playing upon identities and modeling academic roles

Anne Bannink<sup>a,\*</sup>, Jet Van Dam<sup>b,1</sup>

<sup>a</sup> English Department/ACLC, University of Amsterdam, Opleiding Engels, Spuistraat 210, 1012VT Amsterdam, The Netherlands

<sup>b</sup> ACLC, University of Amsterdam, Opleiding Engels, Spuistraat 210, 1012VT Amsterdam, The Netherlands

## ARTICLE INFO

Available online 14 May 2013

### Keywords:

Institutional multiparty interaction  
Communicative practices  
Dynamic discourse  
Dialogism  
Educational ethnography  
Higher education

## ABSTRACT

In this paper we investigate the discursive practices that contextualize active student participation in a formal 'first lecture' situation. The observation that some experienced lecturers consistently generate high levels of student involvement, regardless of the specific student populations they are faced with, provided the starting-point for this enquiry. We zoom in on student speaker roles that are scaffolded in embedded and hypothetical interactional domains that often 'pass under the radar' (Erickson, 2004) of what counts as data in educational research. Attention to interactional detail in the multimodal performance of participant roles reveals how emergent open learning cultures might be bootstrapped on hybrid and complex discourse practices.

© 2013 Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

## 1. Introduction

In this paper we report on our search for discursive practices and unique discourse events that may foster active student participation in a formal lecture hall situation. The observation that some experienced lecturers *consistently* generate high levels of student response, regardless of the subject matter of the course and the specific student population they are faced with, provided the starting-point for this enquiry. Its interest lies in the fact that in socio-cultural perspectives on acquisition and learning the concept of participation is crucial (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Vygotsky, 1986). Since participation is mainly conceived as verbal participation in a community of practice, this raises important questions with respect to the interactional matrix which mediates learning in institutional multiparty situations. In a formal situation like a university lecture hall opportunities for individual students to adopt speaker roles are, in principle, severely restricted. How do experienced lecturers handle the dilemmas inherent in promoting student participation while at the same time observing the conventions of the lecture as a traditional monologic genre? Since these questions address dimensions of interactional situations that are intimately bound up with the shared discourse histories of participants, it makes sense to investigate initial settings or 'first events' (cf. Finch, 2010; Van Dam, 2002). So the global question we address in this paper is: Can we identify specific features of a lecturer's discourse style that feed into emergent open learning cultures and empowered participation roles?

We describe and analyze several sets of data that derive from our corpus of first lectures (see Section 4.1 on the project *Competences in Context*). In the first set we zoom in on a lecture that was presented twice on the same day (as well as relayed in an adjacent lecture room) by the same lecturer to different groups of first-year students. An unexpected event in the second lecture triggered a display of the lecturer's skill in 'taking questions' that was followed by so many spontaneous student contributions that the teacher had to change the agenda. The second set of data involves a different lecturer. Here we proceed from the first teacher question in a regular institutional IRF sequence (Initiation–Response–Follow-up; e.g. Cazden, 1988; Wells, 1993) – which eventually generates an accumulation of student answers – to a non-elicited, critical

\* Corresponding author. Tel.: +31 205253053; fax: +31 205253052.

E-mail addresses: [e.a.bannink@uva.nl](mailto:e.a.bannink@uva.nl) (A. Bannink), [h.r.vandamvanisselt@uva.nl](mailto:h.r.vandamvanisselt@uva.nl) (J. Van Dam).

<sup>1</sup> Tel.: +31 205253053; fax: +31 205253052.

student question that challenges a key notion in the professor's argument. We make a case for its significant occurrence in an *emerging* discourse trajectory that crucially features a hypothetical staged conversation between the lecturer himself and an anonymous generic student (cf. Bakhtinian dialogic modeling, 1981). In the embedded 'story' world the students are assigned fully-fledged academic roles on a par with the teacher (cf. 'scaffolding'; Vygotsky, 1986). These are significant discursive events, we suggest, that the students demonstrably orient to. We will argue that on these structural features of interactions and hybrid discourse practices (Kamberelis, 2001) more symmetrical participation modes and student agency can be bootstrapped.

## 2. Theoretical framework and methodology

In our analyses of the lecture data we emphasize the extent to which the meaning of utterances and interactional behaviors is *context-dependent and emergent in unfolding discourses* and social situations as a function of the interpretive activities of co-present parties. Reaching a consensus on what is currently happening is of crucial importance since human communication as the orderly coordination of utterances and interactional events would otherwise be impossible. If there are as many interpretations of a particular utterance or stretch of discourse or interactional event as there are participants (and overhearers?) in the situation, the notion of what is a relevant *next* act becomes opaque thereby defeating the emergence of coherent coordinated social action. Genres, templates or scripts that are conventionally given are important guides and anchors in organizing the distribution of roles and the procedural unfolding of tasks in social situations. They are essential in facilitating the interpretation of interactional behaviors and utterances on a moment-by-moment basis, thus constructing insider-relevant meaning. What complicates matters, however, is that these frames are seldom – if ever – discrete and monolithic. In order for discourse practices to be experienced as coherent participants continually need to monitor how different interactional roles and frames can be *locally* embedded. The complexity that results presents an analytic problem for participants and researchers alike. As educational researchers we need to address that complexity first if we hope to eventually achieve a better understanding of what relevantly goes on in task-oriented institutional interactions that have as their aim the learning and empowerment of many.

Departing from a socio-cultural *situated perspective* on learning in formal multiparty settings (e.g. Lave & Wenger, 1991; Vygotsky, 1986), we emphasize the importance of communicative practices in ecologies of learning as the proper locus of the study of linguistic and social meaning. An ecological approach to acquisition and learning, whether in institutional settings or the wider world at large, emphasizes the importance of initial conditions or 'first settings' and the participation frameworks that come with them in contextualizing the learning trajectories of individuals and groups of learners (e.g. Kramsch, 2002; Lantolf, 2000; Leather & Van Dam, 2003; Ochs & Schieffelin, 1983; Philips, 1972; Van Lier, 1996).

Our work is interdisciplinary and it is difficult to do justice to the many sources and research traditions that it has benefited from. Apart from Conversation Analysis, Discourse Analysis, Pragmatics and work on discourse markers and discourse particles (Gumperz, 1982; Schiffrin, 1988), key sources for the notions and metaphors that guide the analyses in this paper are Hymes' work on the *Ethnography of Communication* (1974) and Garfinkel's research on *breaching experiments* (1967), with in its wake, the work of educational ethnographers like Erickson (2004), Erickson and Shultz (1981), Lave and Wenger (1991), McDermott (1988), Mehan (1979, 1998) and Varenne and McDermott (1998). Clearly Bakhtin's work on dialogic roles and complex voicing in discourses and texts (Bakhtin, 1981, 1986) and the Vygotskian tradition in developmental research (Vygotsky, 1978, 1986) are seminal, as is Hanks' beautifully comprehensive work on indexical relations and communicative practices (1996) and Goffman's on speaker/hearer roles and participant frameworks (1979, 1981). Goodwin and Goodwin (2004) offer vital insights in the coordination of verbal and nonverbal behaviors and the multimodal modeling of interactional data. Finally, last but not least, Duranti and Goodwin (1992) and members of the Chicago School (e.g. Silverstein & Urban, 1996) have provided insights with respect to the search for an insider-relevant and dynamic notion of context and its application to the search of what makes sense in social practices. For formal accounts of discourse complexity, i.e. the ways contexts of talk can be embedded, shifted into and out of, invalidated, re-embedded and stacked on a moment's notice in the course of an interaction, we are indebted to the *Dynamic Discourse Model* elaborated in Polanyi (1988) and Polanyi and Scha (1983). Attempts to use this framework to clarify our understanding of educational multiparty settings have resulted in Bannink (2002), Bannink and Van Dam (2006), Van Dam (2002, 2003) and Van Dam van Isselt (1993, 2009).

## 3. The lecture: structural features of 'lecture' events

Through routine use, genres become natural themselves, that is, they become so familiar as to be taken for granted. Their special features are invisible to actors who experience the world through them. (Hanks, 1996, p. 246)

In order to appreciate the finer points of the interactional behaviors and teaching strategies to be described in the following sections, a summary of the global speech event context 'the lecture' is in order. Most interactions are experienced by participants as belonging to a certain socially recognizable occasion, e.g. an informal conversation, a lesson, a business meeting, a court session, a service encounter – and so on ('speech events'; Hymes, 1964). The more formal the speech event, the more likely it is that a set of specific conventions is defined about who are the participants, what is their role, what is the business at hand, what are the default norms, attributes and procedures that are currently in force. These interactional conventions should be seen as a tool to help people reach consensus on the definition of a current situation: 'where we are' in

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/10315882>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/10315882>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)