Linguistics and Education 46 (2018) 56–69

Contents lists available at ScienceDirect

Linguistics and Education

journal homepage: www.elsevier.com/locate/linged

Humor, uncertainty, and affiliation: Cooperative and co-operative action in the university science lab

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ARTICLE INFO

Article history:
Received 14 August 2017
Received in revised form 12 June 2018
Accepted 18 June 2018

Keywords:
Humor
Conversation analysis
Classroom interaction
STEM

1. Introduction

Teacher and student turns at talk are complex actions that simultaneously manage affect, epistemic positioning, and interactional trajectories (Waring, 2016). During the course of classroom interaction, students may encounter moments when they must provide responses about which they feel uncertain. In turn, teachers must manage student responses that display various levels of uncertainty. Such contingencies may arise in the ubiquitous initiation-response-follow-up (IRF) sequence in which the teacher initiates a sequence, students respond, and the teacher provides follow-up in the third turn (Mehan, 1979; Sinclair & Coulthard, 1975). It has been recognized that the interactional work that students and teachers do in the IRF is complex and that turns take various shapes, accomplish a variety of actions, and can both disrupt and uphold the moral order of the classroom, perhaps through the use of humor. We suggest that humor is a resource that students and teachers use to manage moments of uncertainty.

Drawing on data from an undergraduate science lab at a U.S. university, this paper presents sequences in which students have trouble producing responses and display uncertainty by providing responses that fill an interactional gap but do so humorously. Other students and the teacher orient to the turns as humorous but do not break the IRF sequence. Humorous stances are made observable in embodied actions through disaligning turn design, prosody, gaze, facial expression, and/or laughter. In both second and third turns of IRFs, the decomposition and reuse of materials with modification (Goodwin, 2018) are an essential practice for designing humorous turn. The findings add to our understanding of the complexity, contingency, and embodied nature of both the IRF and classroom humor.

2. Initiation-Response-Feedback (IRF)

2.1. *The complexity of second and third turns*

In Asian, European, and North American contexts including K-12, university, STEM, and L2/FL classrooms, extensive work has been conducted to unpack the complexity of the individual components of the IRF sequence, i.e., the I, the R, and the F. For instance, initiations can take various forms like display questions (Lee, 2006) or designedly incomplete utterances (Koshik, 2002) and involve the mobilization of various embodied resources such as gaze and pointing to nominate next speakers (Kääntä, 2010). Display questions are interrogatives to which the teacher already knows the answer. In various contexts, teachers have been shown to recalibrate display questions based on student responses so as to guide interactions in a specific direction during the unfolding of sequences of multiple IRFs (Lee, 2006; Zemel & Koschmann, 2011).

Responses are second turns in which students act or verbally reply to teacher initiation turns. For instance, a student might produce a candidate response to a teacher's display question. In some cases, response turns are produced by a single student. In other cases, they involve multiple speakers bidding for or co-constructing the turn (Ko, 2014; Lee, 2016; Waring, 2013). Multiple responses

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https://doi.org/10.1016/j.linged.2018.06.003
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create a situation in which teachers must monitor multiple speakers and at times choose specific student actions to focus upon while ignoring others. IRFs do not always unfold smoothly. At times, students explicitly display insufficient knowledge in second turns, perhaps in the form of claims of insufficient knowledge (CIK) such as "I don't know" or "I can't remember" (Sert & Walsh, 2013). At other times, students produce actions that resist or disrupt the IRF sequence, perhaps in a humorous manner (Berge, 2017; Lin, 1999; Piirainen-Marsh, 2011; Roth et al., 2011; Waring 2009). Thus, we see that response turns are not merely correct or incorrect responses from one student. They are contingent actions produced according to the producers' understanding, or lacking understanding, of the prior turn.

Response turns mobilize a variety of follow-up turns which can be broadly placed in two categories, those that provide positive feedback and those that provide negative feedback (Hellermann, 2003; Margutti & Drew, 2014; Seedhouse, 2004; Waring, 2008). Overwhelmingly, third turns provide positive feedback. Verbatim repetition, prosodically and lexically, of responses and explicit positive assessment (EPA) are the most commonly cited forms (Hellermann, 2003; Margutti & Drew, 2014; Waring, 2008). In contrast, negative feedback is less common. When providing negative feedback, teachers may reuse lexis from responses while altering the prosodic pattern to contrast with the prior turn (Hellermann, 2005). Negative feedback and the absence or withholding of follow-up may mobilize additional responses from students (Lee, 2016; Zemel & Koschmann, 2011). In fourth turns (Park, 2014), teachers may initiate a new IRF or students might self-select to provide further candidate responses or to account for the prior response (Hellermann, 2005; Park, 2014).

Thus, the work that follow-up turns do is more nuanced than just positive or negative evaluation of student turns. For example, follow-up turns might contain evaluation as well as seeking clarification or justification (Hall & Walsh, 2002; Nassaji & Wells, 2000; Park, 2014). Lee (2007) elegantly demonstrates that terms like follow-up, feedback, and evaluation cannot precisely describe the complex interactional work of third turns and actually obfuscate and downplay the interactional complexities of teaching. A "teacher's third turns display multiple layers of meaning making as she punctuates the discourse in this pedagogical way for both the content of the lesson [. . .] while steering the discourse interactionally and purposefully" (Lee, 2007: 195). One way that teachers and students have been found to tend to the multiple layers of meaning making in the classroom is through the use of humor.

2.2. *Classroom humor and (Dis)affiliation in IRF*

A handful of studies look specifically at playful second and third turns that transform mundane tasks, i.e., the IRF, into moments of resistance and affiliation for students and teachers. It is a shared history in the classroom that makes recurrent sequences like the IRF opportune locations for displaying humorous stances (Poveda, 2005). Students and teachers become socialized into routines, and certain classes may establish rapport such that students and teachers playfully improvise during routine moments. In IRFs, students humorously construct second turns by providing absurd, inappropriate, or sarcastic responses (Berge, 2017; Lin, 1999; Piirainen-Marsh, 2011; Roth et al., 2011). Piirainen-Marsh (2011: 380) calls such turns "(designedly) inappropriate or cheeky answers." In cheeky responses, students display humorous stances in part by providing actions that defy expectations and potentially alter the trajectory of interaction (Reddington & Waring, 2015). In addition to sequence, displays of humorous stances in response turns rely on a collection of embodied resources such as but not limited to lexis, prosody, smile, gesture, and gaze.

Humorous second turns disrupt the moral order of the classroom by resisting "the official business of the moment" (Piirainen-Marsh, 2011: 369). At the same time, they fill an interactional slot, i.e., the response turn, and are packaged in a turn design that indexes a humorous stance thus invoking deniability (Piirainen-Marsh, 2011; Roth et al., 2011). Humorous second turns also index some level of intimacy (Drew, 1987; Roth et al., 2011). For example, students in a seventh-grade science class use the name of the teacher's husband (Roth et al., 2011). While students may not personally know the husband, knowing the husband's name and career indexes more than a passing familiarity with the teacher. Berge (2017) shows that humorous responses are recurrent when students are struggling with content and provide answers that might be incorrect. Thus, we see that in humorous second turns students negotiate personal and institutional identities and perpetrate and mitigate potentially face-threatening actions (Pomerantz & Bell, 2011; Poveda, 2005).

Following humorous student responses, teachers affiliate with students' humorous stances (Stivers, 2008), if only momentarily, before redirecting the course of action seriously. Teachers' humorous follow-up "turns can serve as a resource for invoking the normative order of instructional talk while still addressing the playful or subversive elements of prior talk" (Piirainen-Marsh, 2011: 369). Thus, like student humorous turns, teacher humorous turns are dualistic. Piirainen-Marsh (2011: 373) notes that ironic teacher turns, the focus of her study, are rare and seem "to be used only on occasions where the student's answer is itself hearable as ironic or displays a critical attitude." In playful follow-up turns, teachers affiliate with students' humorous stances while simultaneously asserting their institutional authority and realigning the interactional project of the class (Lehtimaja, 2011; Piirainen-Marsh, 2011; Roth et al., 2011).

In sum, IRFs are sequences in which humor recurrently emerges. In IRFs, humor has been framed as a dualistic resource that participants use to disrupt or resist the moral order of the classroom as well as to affiliate and uphold the moral order (Piirainen-Marsh, 2011; Roth et al., 2011). While past research has emphasized the resistant nature of humor, the analysis in this paper suggests that the line between resistance and cooperation is not always clear-cut. During the IRF sequences analyzed in this paper, students produce responses that are oriented to as humorous at times of potential interactional trouble, i.e., when students struggle to produce a response. Humorous second turns fill an interactional gap while playfully demonstrating uncertainty. By presenting second turns humorously, students allow for the teacher to advance the classroom activity by providing a third turn. In third turns, the teacher affiliates with students by taking up humorous responses as such but also indicates that the prior response is inadequate. Our paper builds on past classroom humor research by showing how humor is an embodied resource for displaying uncertainty and affiliation during a specific, recurrent, and well-documented sequence in classroom interaction.

3. The study

3.1. *Alignment, affiliation, and Co-operative action*

CA and likeminded frameworks such as Interactional Linguistics are empirical perspectives for analyzing the embodied and socially situated unfolding of language and social interaction (Goodwin, 2000, 2013, 2018; Ochs, Gonzales, & Jacoby, 1996). These perspectives hold that social interaction is cooperative (Schegloff, 2007; Stivers, 2008) and co-operative (Goodwin, 2018). The cooperative nature of interaction can be conceptualized in terms of alignment and affiliation. Alignment is cooperation "with respect to the activ-

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