

# Clapping hands with the teacher: What synchronization reveals about learning



Friederike Kern

*Faculty of Linguistics and Literary Studies, University of Bielefeld, PO Box 100131, 33501 Bielefeld, Germany*

Received 13 March 2017; received in revised form 12 December 2017; accepted 12 December 2017

Available online

## Abstract

In German classrooms, children are regularly instructed to look at familiar objects – words – in a new fashion, to acquire knowledge about their phonetic features. Teachers' instructions are usually concentrated around a series of multimodal, embodied practices, consisting of clapping and speaking, in order to split the words into syllables. The aim of this study is to explore, using the methodology of conversation analysis, what first graders learn about words and syllables when they are asked to clap whilst vocalizing them. While words emerge as phonetic learnables in the course of the lesson, interactive and multimodal micro-analysis suggests that principally the children learn to synchronize their bodily and verbal conduct with their teachers'; this is then mistakenly understood as a publicly displayed understanding of what a syllable is.

While conducting interactive and multimodal micro-analysis, this article aims to propose an empirically based account of learning as observable bodily behaviour, which is displayed in systematic changes in learners' participation in interactively established, multimodal practices. For this purpose, a view of learning is adopted that regards knowledge and competency as deeply embedded in and emerging from the domain of publicly conducted action.

© 2017 Published by Elsevier B.V.

*Keywords:* Multi-modal analysis; Classroom discourse; Learning-interaction

## 1. Knowledge as public endeavour

In ethnomethodological theory, knowledge is usually regarded as 'seen but unnoticed' (Garfinkel, 1967). Garfinkel's (1967) famous 'breaching experiments' were one method of bringing unnoticed knowledge to the surface, by making a deviation from what is considered normal, rational behaviour, accountable to conversational partners. In everyday life, the fundamental non-observability of knowledge is considered to be compensated for in different ways (Bergmann and Quasthoff, 2010). Firstly, people usually assume that others have access to roughly the same collective knowledge as they do. People interpret other people's public behaviour on the basis of "tacit schemes of interpretation, such as mutual biographies, or various stereotype notions about the regularities of [...] life" (Garfinkel, 1963:60). Such assumptions are not simply options, but are reciprocally expected on normative grounds. Secondly, other people's actions are used to gain a rough understanding of their knowledge and competencies. Thirdly, people make an effort to make their own actions "visibly-rational-and-reportable-for-all-practical-purposes" (Garfinkel, 1967:11).

*E-mail address:* [friederike.kern@uni-bielefeld.de](mailto:friederike.kern@uni-bielefeld.de).

Similarly, the investigation of cognitive states is not pursued in Conversation Analysis. Not being interested in the 'single mind', CA focuses on the accomplishment of intersubjectivity by investigating the sequential order of talk-in-interaction as the locus in which meaning is jointly established. However, CA routinely makes claims about "ways in which participants themselves orient to, display and make sense of another's cognitive states" (Drew, 1995:77). Even though knowledge is not directly observable, participants can be seen to orient themselves to presupposed knowledge when interpreting turns as requests or assertions (Heritage, 2012a). Thus, a participant's assumed epistemic status is used as an important resource for understanding. According to Heritage (2012b:49), "interactants keep detailed score of 'who knows what' and 'who was told what' as a condition of the interpretation of utterances". Likewise, speakers position themselves as more knowledgeable with regard to specific domains ('territories of knowledge') when they produce pre-sequences (e.g., initiating a story). Conversely, they position themselves as less knowledgeable when requesting information (Heritage, 2012b). In conclusion, the epistemic status of participants shapes the morphosyntax and intonation of their utterances and thus plays a fundamental role in the construction of social action (Heritage, 2012a).

Knowledge can also be made an object of intersubjective understanding and joint meaning-making. This might take place in social situations, in which knowledge is made public. In family dinner conversations, knowledge may be self-initially displayed or claimed unsolicited, or demanded by others (Keppler, 1989; Keppler and Luckmann, 1992). In mundane family interactions 'occasioned knowledge' is imparted when situations are turned into ad-hoc lessons (Goodwin, 2007b). With regard to child development, Wootton (1997) stresses the public, local and moral nature of sequential knowledge in social situations, as demonstrated by young children when they perform actions such as requests in line with previous agreements "which have been overtly established within earlier talk" (Wootton, 1997:189). Hausendorf and Quasthoff (1996) show how interactions between children and adults function systematically to establish collective knowledge between participants under conditions of its uneven distribution. As part of a larger study of early childhood education Bateman (2016) gives an account of how knowledge is exchanged and managed in situ between teachers and young children, and how it is employed systematically in order to achieve shared understandings of social situations. This becomes especially important when teachers are required to provide emotional support when children show signs of distress.

More generally, knowledge is brought into the public eye when beginners work together with experts to acquire the ability to see objects in particular ways (Goodwin, 1994, 2013). The objects are then jointly looked at, operated on, and categorized, according to well-established embodied practices. As shown in Goodwin's archaeology lesson example (Goodwin, 1994, 2013), the discursive calibration of perception and knowledge is fundamental to interactions where apprentices are introduced to a new field. Even though professional communities of practice (cf. Lave and Wenger, 1991) may feature "different ways of learning, and [...] associated modes of access to the phenomena scrutinized" (Goodwin, 1994:627), knowledge always emerges and is socially distributed through mutual orientation to those embodied practices that are typical for the particular professional field.

Institutionalized teacher–student interactions are also typically characterized by the disclosure and delivery of knowledge. As a regular feature of knowledge management, teachers hold back on the knowledge they possess in order to let students "engage in the 'discovery' of phenomena already well-known, and which the teacher has already set up as the end point of their endeavours" (Atkinson and Delamont, 1977:103). McHoul and Watson (1984) investigate how 'commonsense' knowledge is transferred into 'subject' knowledge during geography lessons. They also point out (1984:284) that the 'essential work' of education is the teaching and learning about 'subjects', or, in other words, the 'quiddity' of school lessons is how knowledge is constituted in interaction and distributed among participants. This is why classroom interaction provides interesting data for the investigation of knowledge management and, indeed, of learning as an observable phenomenon.

## 2. Learning as changing participation over time

A promising and well-established way of observing the acquisition of knowledge in interaction is to conceptualize it as a change in the participation of the different individuals involved in co-operatively organized activities (Hellermann, 2007). Comparative analysis may find changes in participation on several levels of interaction: activities or practices can change over time, or different activities or practices can be employed. Activities and practices may be identified as cases; changes in the performances of these cases may be considered as instances of learning, in so far as they display a new understanding of the learning object. Learning is then located "in the methodic character of the activities within which the subject participates" (Koschmann, 2012; it becomes a public and accountable process as it is transferred from the individual mind into the public sphere of talk-in-interaction: "Learning, from an interactional

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/7297569>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/7297569>

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