Report on the International Symposium "Perspectives of Interactional Linguistic Research – basic and applied", Research Center "Interactional Linguistics", University of Potsdam March 17-19, 2021

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1. Introduction

Since its initiation in the 1990s, Interactional Linguistics (IL) has become a highly productive and internationally recognized research paradigm. Drawing on the theoretical and methodological principles of Conversation Analysis (CA), IL studies the role of linguistic resources in the organization of social interaction. While CA/IL scholars have been interested in everyday interaction from the very beginning, language use in institutional contexts is also increasingly coming into focus. Considering that many societies around the globe are striving to increase their "social capital" by improving their institutionalized educational processes on almost all age levels, especially educational and learning contexts are evolving into a fruitful new research area for interactional linguists (Gardner 2013, 2019; Hall 2019). Against this background, the symposium "Perspectives of Interactional Linguistic Research – basic and applied" aimed to bring together scholars working on everyday social interaction with researchers interested in interactional aspects of (language) learning and teaching to exchange ideas, learn from each other, and pursue and enhance their common line of research.

With her work on the role of prosody in conversation (e.g., Selting 1995), Margret Selting – in collaboration with Elizabeth Couper-Kuhlen – laid the foundation for the productive research area of prosody-in-interaction (cf. Couper-Kuhlen/Selting 1996) and paved the way for the establishment of the research program of IL (Selting/Couper-Kuhlen 2000; Couper-Kuhlen/Selting 2001). Nowadays, IL has spread into many parts of the world, as is impressively illustrated in the recent monograph "Interactional Linguistics: Studying Language in Social Interaction" (Couper-Kuhlen/Selting 2018). In March 2021, on the occasion of Margret Selting's retirement from her duties at the University of Potsdam, a number of colleagues, (doctoral) students and friends gathered for an online symposium in her honor to celebrate her scientific impact in the field of IL. More than 70 participants from countries such as Belgium, Canada, Denmark, Finland, Germany, the Netherlands, Switzerland, the United Kingdom, and the United States followed Dagmar Barth-Weingarten's invitation and came together to present and discuss recent work on social interaction in everyday and educational contexts.[1]
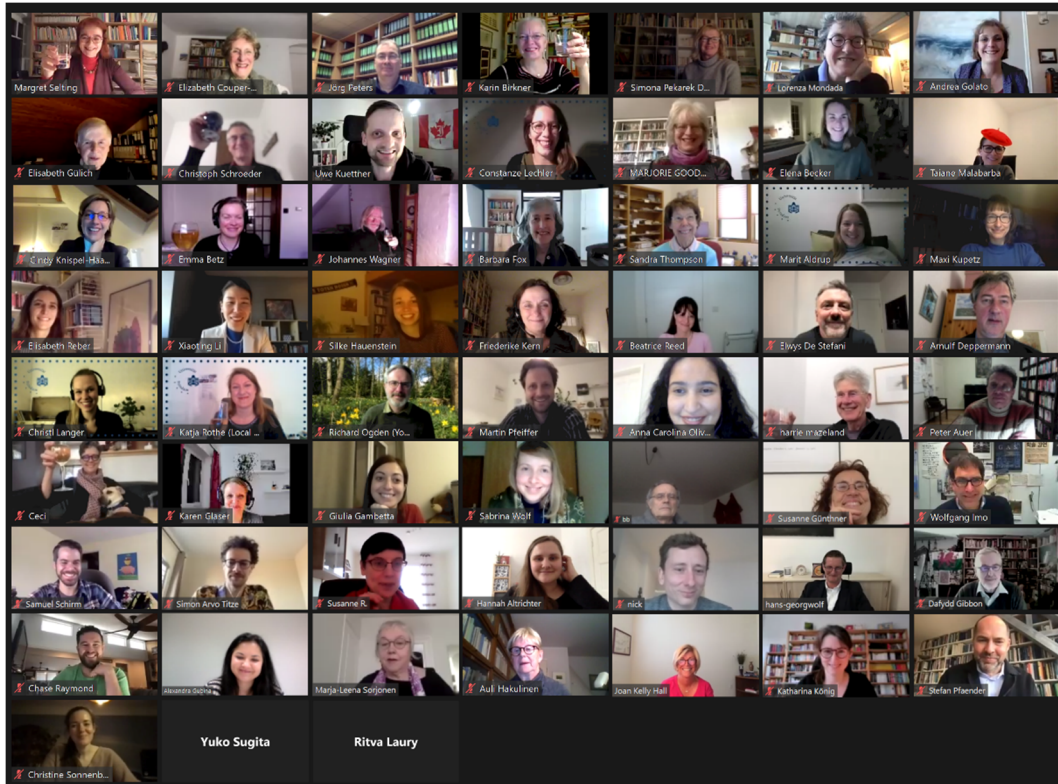

Image 1: Participants of the symposium "Perspectives of Interactional Linguistic Research".

To live up to the symposium's aims, the event was structured as follows: After an introductory talk by Margret Selting and Dagmar Barth-Weingarten on the development and current state of IL research, the program was divided into four thematic sections:

- Getting focused: IL and Second Language Acquisition (SLA)

- (Everyday) Social interaction: Practices and actions

- Managing contingencies

- The developmental perspective revisited

Within these four sections, each full-paper presentation was typically accompanied by two commenting papers, which discussed its findings and implications adopting either a basic CA/IL or a language learning perspective. The symposium was rounded off by a final discussion, in which a number of recurrent themes were taken up again and put into a larger context.

In what follows, we will first summarize the main points of each presentation and discussant paper in their order of appearance (section 2) and then offer a survey of recurrent themes and possible outlooks for IL research based on the final discussion (section 3).

2. Symposium presentations

2.1. History and state of the art of IL research

In their introductory paper, *Margret Selting* and *Dagmar Barth-Weingarten* gave a brief overview of the development of IL and the current state of the art of IL research. They highlighted that while many interactional linguists continue to explore the role of linguistic phenomena for the accomplishment of social interaction based on single-language data sets, there is also a wealth of rather recent larger-scale crosslinguistic studies on linguistic and other interactional phenomena in typologically different languages from all over the world. The latter studies typically combine thorough qualitative analyses with quantitative analyses. In addition to these two types of more "basic" IL research, which are concerned with describing linguistic and interactional patterns in (everyday) talk-in-interaction, the authors saw an increasing interest in a more "applied" IL, i.e., research that works on institutional settings, often with the aim of understanding and offering solutions to problems related to language use in these interactional contexts. Against this background, Selting and Barth-Weingarten argued for a more systematic pursuit of such more "applied" IL research, as the research field could profit from this in many ways. For instance, it could make IL research more attractive and accessible to students, researchers and practitioners by underlining the transferability of IL methodology and results into task-focused contexts of interaction. Given the symposium's interest in combining IL and research on language teaching and learning, the authors concluded their paper by posing several guiding questions, among others: "What can IL contribute to the improvement of (research on) classroom interaction and language learning?"

2.2. Getting focused: IL and SLA

Coming from an SLA perspective, *Joan Kelly Hall* pointed out that IL can make an important contribution to the field by studying authentic Second Language (L2) classroom interaction, which is the predominant source of L2 input and thus of great relevance for L2 learning. Using the example of a recent study on information-seeking question-answer sequences in a university-level L2 English class, Hall showed how an IL-inspired approach can contribute to a better understanding of the relationship between teachers' instructional activities and the development of L2 learners' grammars. Adopting Fox, Thompson and Couper-Kuhlen's (2015) distinction between telling and specifying questions, Hall found that the design of teacher questions is highly consequential for the linguistic complexity of student responses, in that L2 teachers' language use has an immediate impact on L2 students' output. Concluding her presentation, Hall highlighted the benefits of applying CA/IL methods and concepts to the study of classroom interaction and called for involving the research community in creating shared coding protocols and collaborative commentary tools to further advance research on L2 classroom interaction and learning.

The first discussant, *Marit Aldrup*, among other things, raised the questions whether concepts from everyday interaction, such as telling and specifying ques-

tions, are directly transferable to the classroom context and whether the idea of developing coding protocols is compatible with CA/IL methodological principles. She also pointed out that it may be worthwhile to consider additional aspects of turn design, such as prosody and bodily-visual conduct, as well as the role of the respective pedagogical context (Seedhouse 2004). The second discussant, *Marjorie Goodwin*, connected Hall's findings to L2 acquisition among children at the playground. Pointing to the importance of emotional involvement for learning, she called for looking at instances of language play and language learning "in the wild" from a multimodal perspective to better understand the relevance of in-situ learning, embodied language practices and the benefits of bringing "the wild" into the classroom.

2.3. (Everyday) Social interaction: Practices and actions

Arnulf Deppermann pleaded in favor of adopting a more interactional perspective on semantics. Unlike other linguistic approaches to semantics, an interactional semantics can account for the fact that meaning is not completely predefined by linguistic knowledge or cognition, but at least partially interactionally negotiated. After proposing four possible issues of interactional semantic research – the study of meaning in use, the sequential intersubjectification of meaning, meta-semantic practices and interactional histories of meaning – he provided examples for the latter two areas. Using data from job interview coachings and driving lessons, Deppermann first showed that meta-semantic practices, such as defining, contrasting or providing a synonym, are used to locally clarify meaning in the context of understanding problems, conflicts or instructions. Secondly, he suggested that interactional histories can help us to understand how intersubjective meanings emerge, i.e., how they stabilize, diversify, or even change, over time. This was demonstrated with reference to a longitudinal study on how an abstract concept is introduced and appropriated by student actors in the course of a series of instructions in a community theater project.

In her comment, *Karin Birkner* highlighted the long tradition of Deppermann's work on semantics in interaction (e.g., Deppermann/Spranz-Fogasy 2002; Deppermann 2011, 2020) and pointed to the relevance of technological enhancements for this area of research in particular. From a more general point of view, she concluded that IL, as a linguistic rather than philology-based approach, opens up a broader window to human cognition through a translingual perspective and facilitates a comparative approach to language use.

In their joint paper, *Alexandra Gubina*, *Barbara A. Fox* and *Chase W. Raymond* presented a study on the interactional uses of the two closely related grammatical practices *do you want me to* and *should I* in American English. Looking at telephone and face-to-face data from mundane and institutional contexts, they found that while both formats accomplish similar interactional work, i.e., proffering an action to be carried out by the current speaker, they occur in different environments and offer different affordances. The format *do you want me to* is used as a proposal to get involved in a co-participant's project when faced with (anticipated) trouble. The format *should I*, in contrast, is used to request specification of a current speaker's own task or as an offer to take on a task that has not yet been assigned to anyone. It thus appears that the two formats display different orientations to task ownership.

As a crosslinguistic comparison of English and German data showed, languages may differ in terms of whether this sensitivity is grammatically encoded or not: While there are two formats for such recruitments in English, German appears to provide a single format, namely *soll ich*.

The first discussant, *Harrie Mazeland*, suggested that it may be worthwhile to contrast the two formats based on aspects other than task ownership. For turns with *do you want me to*, he proposed to consider the benefactive status of the proffered action, as this format exposes the speaker as the benefactor and the recipient as the beneficiary. For turns with *should I*, on the other hand, deontic responsibility seems to be a more relevant factor, as this format is used to seek authorization from the recipient of the proffered action. The second discussant, *Karen Glaser*, commented on the paper from a variational, a contrastive and a social angle: She first asked how the presented findings from American English, a First Language (L1) variety, relate to other areal or learner varieties. She then pointed to the relevance of the findings for language teaching and learning, especially considering the commonplace transfer of linguistic formats based on structural similarity. Finally, she raised the question which role the respective social constellation plays for the selection of a particular format.

Continuing the crosslinguistic perspective on interactional resources, *Elizabeth Couper-Kuhlen*, in the following paper, presented research on the paradigm of third-position response formats to question-elicited informings with a special focus on particle responses. Drawing on previous CA/IL work on informings in English, German, Finnish, and Danish, she outlined different parameters of informing sequences that may affect particle choice, such as the nature of the informing and its various cognitive or emotive effects on the informing recipient. Notably, the crosslinguistic comparison revealed that languages differ in the parameters they linguistically encode and the linguistic means they employ for doing so, e.g., particles or prosody. Couper-Kuhlen then brought in a case study on the information receipt token *okay* in American English to illustrate the workings of the informing response paradigm and the benefits of conceptualizing response formats as belonging to specific paradigms.

Calling for a radical expansion of crosslinguistic IL research, the first discussant, *Nicholas Jay Williams*, drew attention to the absence of research on response formats in lesser-studied languages and varieties. He furthermore asked about the teach- and learnability of response paradigms and the distinction between language-specific and universal features. The second discussant, *Elena Becker*, highlighted the relevance of Couper-Kuhlen's findings for the study of knowledge transfer in the classroom. Instancing a number of examples from a Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) setting, she showed that both students and teachers employ information receipts in third position to display understanding in informing sequences, thereby working to achieve the interactional goals of teaching and learning.

Turning to a universal feature of talk, *Richard Ogden*, in the next paper, examined the role of swallowing in interaction. Treating it as an interactional resource, he showed that swallowing is more than a merely physiological process, in that swallows appear to be strategically placed in ongoing talk. Accordingly, swallowing does not only prepare the vocal tract for speaking but can even occur within and after stretches of speech. To illustrate these different environments of occurrence

and the associated interactional functions, Ogden provided three examples from different corpora of English talk-in-interaction: In the first case, swallowing was used by next speakers in pre-turn position to project and delay incipient speakership. The second excerpt featured an instance of post-completion swallowing reinforcing the relinquishment of the turn at a point of syntactic, prosodic and pragmatic completion. The third example showed how swallowing, in combination with certain facial expressions, can contribute to the display of affect or trouble within turns, in this case by conveying a speaker's "difficulty" with and confusion regarding a task she needs help with.

In her comment, *Elisabeth Reber* highlighted the importance of high-quality audio and video data as well as fine-grained transcripts for the study of phenomena such as swallows in interaction. She also identified two contrary tendencies in recent IL research, i.e., the in-depth multimodal analysis of a relatively small number of cases on the one hand, and the quantitative analysis of larger corpora in comparative studies on the other hand, and asked about their reconcilableness. The second discussant, *Maxi Kupetz*, pointed out the difficulties of separating somatically necessary instances of swallowing from interactionally meaningful cases. To illustrate this point, she showed two short data excerpts from one-on-one tuition in an L2 German context in which there was a possible lack of perceivability of and no noticeable participant orientation to the swallow.

In another study of paralinguistic phenomena at turn constructional unit (TCU) boundaries, *Beatrice Szczepek Reed* contrasted vowel-fronted TCUs in British English conversation which either featured glottalization or phonetic linking. In line with previous research on the same phenomena in German and French conversation, she found that glottalization commonly marks the beginning of new actions, whereas phonetic linking contextualizes the continuation of actions-in-progress. Despite this general, crosslinguistic tendency, she also identified cases in which linking co-occurs with new talk and glottalization is used with continuing talk for particular interactional ends. In addition, the comparison of German and English data sets revealed that, overall, linking seems to be more common in English than in German. Concluding her presentation, Szczepek Reed noted that glottalization and linking may as well be used for other interactional tasks (e.g., to contextualize affectivity) and that there may be other factors to be considered when studying boundary marking and action formation (e.g., pitch movements). Nevertheless, her study showed that sound patterns are not (only) products of language-specific phonologies and their environments of occurrence but can be seen as (partially crosslinguistic) resources for shaping the interaction.

In his comment, *Uwe-Alexander Küttner*, among other things, pointed at the possible relevance of turn-taking considerations for the analysis. On the one hand, linking is commonly used as a means for bridging transition relevance places, e.g., to provide two-component responses. On the other hand, the use of glottalization in tellings and lists may have different implications, since transition relevance is temporarily suspended in these contexts and next TCUs are considered as continuing the action-in-progress by default.

2.4. Managing contingencies

Xiaoting Li illustrated the interactional uses of the filler-like item *na(-ge) shenme* 'that what' in Mandarin face-to-face interaction. While this form can be observed in turn-medial as well as in turn-final position and in the context of both problems of speaking and stance-related interactional problems, Li's paper focused on turn-final cases in disagreement talk. She showed that *na(-ge) shenme* is typically produced in place of a potentially problematic assessment term at the possible closure of an extended disagreement sequence. It contributes to bringing such sequences to an end, in that it creates a space for mutual stance calibration. By alluding to an unspecified referent, it avoids explicit disagreement, thereby allowing the participants to achieve reconciliation and affiliation. Turn-final *na(-ge) shenme* can thus be seen as an interactional resource concerned with face work.

In his comment, *Elwys De Stefani* raised the questions whether there are functional differences between the phonetic variants of *na(-ge) shenme* and whether or not this form is related to trailing-off phrases described for other languages (e.g., Jefferson 1983, Selting 1996). Furthermore, he pointed at an analytic problem concerning the notion of 'avoidance': If something is avoided, it is never uttered and therefore difficult to analyze. The second discussant, *Taiane Malabarba*, related Li's findings to studies on disfluencies in learner speech. Nowadays, learners' use of fillers and similar interactional resources is not necessarily seen as a sign of linguistic inability, but rather considered part of their interactional competence. With recent SLA research increasingly distancing itself from an idealized native speaker baseline, Malabarba further raised the question of how predominantly L1-based findings from CA/IL can legitimately be used as a reference point in CA-SLA studies.

In their joint paper, *Emma Betz* and *Andrea Golato*, in collaboration with *Carmen Taleghani-Nikazm* and *Veronica Drake*, presented work in progress from a larger project on embodied adjustments in gaming interactions. Focusing on repair-related practices, they analyzed cases in which participants adjust their own or their co-participants' embodied moves, e.g., by redirecting a gesture or repositioning an object. Given that the term 'repair' was originally conceived for verbal trouble sources (Schegloff 1997:503) and the organization of embodied interaction differs from the organization of talk in central aspects, the authors chose to adopt the term 'remedy' to refer to practices that deal with problems of seeing, understanding, or performing embodied actions. They presented cases on a continuum from remedies akin to repair to remedies resembling groomings: The former address misunderstandings or rule violations and halt the progressivity of the game, whereas the latter orient to personal playing preferences and are rather unilateral in nature.

The first discussant, *Lorenza Mondada*, among other points, took up the distinction between 'repair' and 'remedy'. She cautioned against overrating the differences between verbal and embodied interaction and suggested to rather distinguish cases based on different trouble types. Furthermore, she highlighted definitional and analytical problems with the notion of 'progressivity'. The second discussant, *Johannes Wagner*, pointed out that in the data presented, intersubjectivity is gradually constituted by the cards played and the participants' embodied conduct, and only to

a lesser extent by talk. In addition, he suggested that when there were intersubjectivity problems that impeded decision making, cases could be legitimately categorized as instances of repair.

2.5. The developmental perspective revisited

Returning to SLA research with reference to L2 data from "the wild", *Simona Pekarek Doehler*, in the final paper, presented the results of a pseudo-longitudinal study on *je (ne) sais pas* in French L2 interaction. Asking how L2 grammar-for-interaction emerges over time, she studied the use of this multiword expression in a longitudinal corpus comprising interactions of four au pairs of different proficiency levels with their host families. She observed that while all au pairs used *je (ne) sais pas* in its literal sense as a claim of no knowledge, additional functions – such as turn-exiting or the projection of dispreferred responses – only emerged fully with the most proficient speaker. In addition to this diversification of interactional uses, Pekarek Doehler also observed a diversification of placement from stand-alone *je (ne) sais pas* towards turn-initial, mid-turn, and turn-final realizations. Overall, these findings suggest that L2 learners approximate L1 practices over time.

Taking up this last point, the first discussant, *Martin Pfeiffer*, raised the question whether there was some real-time evidence for the observed diversification processes, as the emergence of additional uses and turn positions on the upper-immediate proficiency level seemed rather abrupt. He also pointed to similar findings for German *ich weiß nicht* and asked about the underlying mechanisms for the emergence of marker-like uses in L1 and L2, such as grammaticalization, usage frequency, and language transfer. The second discussant, *Constanze Lechler*, related Pekarek Doehler's findings to children's developmental trajectories in L1 German. In her recordings of parent-child-interactions, she did not only find instances of diversification, but also observed a predominance of specific uses at certain developmental stages. She therefore proposed comparative studies of L1 and L2 developmental trajectories as a promising line of research.

3. Outlook: (Future) Perspectives of IL research

The symposium aimed to look back at the beginnings of IL research, to present and discuss the current state of the art, and to finally provide perspectives for future research. Taking up the guiding question "What can IL contribute to the improvement of (research on) classroom interaction and language learning?", the moderator of the final discussion, *Taiane Malabarba*, picked up on a number of themes which were recurrently addressed during the symposium. This outlook summarizes some central aspects that came up in the final discussion and addresses them from three different angles: perspectives on applicability, crosslinguistic perspectives and perspectives on classroom interaction.

3.1. Perspectives on applicability

Given the continually growing interest in improving institutional communication, research on how to deal with "practical problems" seems to be one core area for applying IL to educational, medical as well as commercial settings. However, the notions 'applied' and 'practical problem' are potentially problematic. In the final discussion, several participants pointed out that, as an approach which looks at real-time empirical data, IL imminently carries an applied dimension in it, which is why a binary distinction between 'basic' and 'applied' research perspectives may not be expedient or even feasible. What is more, "practical problems" can only be of interest for CA/IL researchers if they are relevant from an emic perspective, i.e., if the participants show an orientation to them.

While the symposium's main focus was on one possible area of application for IL, namely the improvement of language learning, the IL approach can be adopted for a larger range of settings. In fact, CA/IL has already been used as the theoretical and methodological background for research on several institutional contexts, such as doctor-patient, business, and classroom interaction, over the last years. As was pointed out during the final discussion, there is also a potential for applying IL methodology and findings to other contexts like artificial intelligence and robot-human interaction.

Asking how and what IL can contribute to the improvement of communicative practices in various institutional contexts, the relevance of applying IL findings and conveying the IL mindset in communication trainings immediately suggests itself. The symposium participants thus agreed that it could be fruitful to raise practitioners' awareness of the important role of language and linguistic detail in ordinary as well as in institutional interaction. On that note, IL could, for instance, help to resolve the common misconception that certain linguistic practices that are typical of spoken interaction are "wrong" or "faulty". By making practitioners aware of the *written language bias* (Linell 2005) and exposing them to recordings of authentic spoken interaction, they could be sensitized for how such interactional practices can be effectively employed.

Another question that inevitably arises when asking about the applicability of IL research is what effort interactional linguists need to make to bring their findings to bear outside the IL community. Most IL researchers study linguistic structures in everyday and in institutional and learning settings to provide detailed accounts of how the respective interactions unfold, but without explicating how their findings can be applied. While such detailed accounts in themselves may not be sufficient for practitioners who wish to make use of IL findings, IL researchers may not necessarily have the expertise required to transfer their findings for more "applied" purposes. Therefore, the symposium participants made a case for a more rigorous pursuit of interdisciplinary projects in which researchers and practitioners collaborate to identify "practical problems" and work towards the improvement of interaction in social institutions.

3.2. Crosslinguistic perspectives

In several papers, such as those by Couper-Kuhlen and Gubina et al., it became apparent that its aptness for comparing linguistic phenomena and their interactional uses across languages is a major benefit of the IL approach. IL can thus offer insights into language-specific resources and practices as well as possible universals. The associated issue of (un)translatability was brought up on several occasions during the symposium, as there is no one-to-one mapping of linguistic form and interactional function across languages. It was noted that such crosslinguistic differences can be particularly challenging for L2 learners. Therefore, they should be made aware that in the same sequential position, different formats may be available to contextualize the action performed, e.g., different particles that display different stances in response to informings. In addition, structural differences between a learner's L1 and L2 and the consequences of L1 transfer should be topicalized in L2 teaching. To better understand how to raise L2 speakers' awareness of the choices that they have in different languages, there is a need to further explore the teach- and learnability of crosslinguistic variation. Even though crosslinguistic research projects often constitute a complex endeavor, as they require several researchers with a focus on different languages to work together, detailed IL studies on linguistic resources, actions and practices across languages can thus enrich language teaching and learning considerably.

3.3. Perspectives on classroom research

Given the symposium's overall interest in possible synergies between IL and (S)LA research and considering the fact that language learning is often organized in classroom settings, it is hardly surprising that classroom interaction – as one major field of application (see section 3.1) – constituted a core theme throughout the symposium.

In order to fully understand and adequately analyze the structural and multimodal organization of classroom interaction, a well-founded understanding of everyday interaction seems crucial. Indeed, the relevance of basic findings for applied contexts was repeatedly highlighted during the symposium. While it thus seems beneficial to build up on, and transfer, methodology, concepts, and findings from everyday interaction when investigating classroom interaction, it was also pointed out that this should always be done with caution, as there is no one-to-one transferability.

As was emphasized on several occasions during the symposium, IL can make an important contribution to improving teacher training. A major concern that was brought up in the final discussion is that teacher-training curricula mainly focus on lesson planning in terms of content and pedagogical aspects and neglect organizational aspects of classroom interaction and teachers' linguistic practices, even though the latter appear to be equally important for effective teaching. IL studies on classroom talk can help to sensitize pre- and in-service teachers for the interactional consequences of their (linguistic) practices. The IL approach is particularly suited for this purpose, in that it can offer a holistic perspective on interaction in

classrooms and other educational and learning settings by integrating all the modalities of interaction and exposing the complex interplay of verbal, vocal, and bodily-visible resources.

It thus appears that IL research can be conducive to the development of teacher training and, by implication, also have a lasting effect on teaching, in that it can lead to a greater awareness of the relevance of teachers' linguistic practices in the societally highly relevant domain of learning and education.

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