Interaction management as a tool for pre-service teacher training: Initial reflections on a case study

La gestión de interacciones como una herramienta para el entrenamiento del maestro practicante: reflexiones iniciales sobre un estudio de caso

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Abstract

This article analyzes how a pre-service teacher of Italian as a foreign language manages interactions in which, contravening the task assigned by the teacher, students deritualize the teaching scenario and claim their role as I-subjects over their role as I-students. The theoretical framework that supports this study is action-oriented and uses interaction analysis as a professional training strategy. The reflections that arise from this case study show that observation of such interactions can be a useful tool for reflecting on teaching and serve as input for teacher training. Learning activities in line with the syllabus and the students' needs and that present meaningful communicative situations associated with the learning goals should be proposed. In addition, the ex-post analysis of the interactions allowed the participant teacher to reflect on and become aware of her practices.

Keywords: interaction analysis; deritualization; interpersonal relationships; initial teacher education; Italian as a foreign language

Resumen

Este artículo analiza cómo un futuro profesor de italiano como lengua extranjera gestiona episodios interactivos en que los alumnos se comportan de manera contraria a las obligaciones impuestas por el profesor, de-ritualizan el escenario educativo, y reivindican su rol como "yo" sujeto por encima del rol de "yo" estudiante. El marco teórico que sustenta el presente trabajo está orientado en la pedagogía de la interacción y utiliza el análisis de las interacciones que tienen lugar en el aula como una estrategia de formación profesional. Las reflexiones que se desprenden de este estudio de caso muestran que la observación de estos episodios puede ser un instrumento válido para reflexionar sobre la actividad didáctica y servir como *input* para la formación del profesorado. Emerge la necesidad de proponer actividades de aprendizaje que planteen situaciones comunicativas significativas estrechamente relacionadas con los objetivos de aprendizaje y que tengan en cuenta las necesidades de los estudiantes. Además, el análisis a posteriori de las interacciones ha permitido al docente reflexionar sobre sus prácticas y volverse más consciente de ellas.

Palabras clave: análisis de las interacciones; de-ritualización; relaciones interpersonales; formación inicial de profesores, italiano como lengua extranjera

1. Introduction and theoretical framework*

The study of interactions that take place inside the classroom began in the 1970s with the now-classic volume by Sinclair and Coulthard (1975) and is still relevant to scholars today, as evidenced by the numerous publications addressing this topic. Seedhouse (2004; 2019) is, unquestionably, one of the most influential researchers of the past decade; using instruments of conversational analysis, he described in great detail the interactive dynamics that regulates the language class, as well as the connections forged between pedagogy and interaction. Equally important are the studies by Walsh (2016, 2006), to whom we owe the notion of interactional competence in the classroom; this is defined as the ability "to use interaction as a tool for mediating and assisting learning" (2011: 158). To improve the quality of interactions, Walsh proposed various strategies that the teacher can utilize to capture learners' contributions through complex expansion work.[1]

Interaction analysis is frequently used to gather information about the degree of linguistic and communicative *expertise* of students, overlooking features related to the interpersonal relationships that develop between the interlocutors. Such interactions should not be neglected, as the classroom "is not just a place where events, activities, and actions occur, but is also where identities, representations, emotions, and wishes emerge and come into play" (Pallotti, 2002: 183).[2]

The studies by Hazel and Mortensen (2017), Degoumois, Petitjean,and Pekarek Doehler (2017), Birello and Ferroni (2013), and Ellwood (2008) are particularly important in this regard as

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* Although the study was designed and conducted by both authors, the written version must be attributed as follows: Roberta Ferroni (§§§ 1, 2, 3) and Marilisa Birello (§ 4). The section 5 is common to both authors.

[1] For a comprehensive overview of studies related to interaction in the language classroom, see Sert (2019).

[2] The translations of the quotes are ours.

they explored the conversational strategies used by students to deritualize the teaching scenario established by the teacher in order to claim their I-subject role in preference to the I-student role. Despite the conversational dissonance that they pose on the educational scenario — by abruptly interrupting the activity underway — such interruptions are key moments (Moore & Simon, 2002) since, by questioning the teacher's authority, students assert themselves and defend their territory as active learners. In doing so, they redefine their mutual roles, placing themselves on an equal footing with the teacher.

The study by Ellwood (2008) on a foreign-language (FL) class and, more recently, the one conducted by Ferroni and Araújo e Sá (2015, 2016) on learners of Italian whose native language is Brazilian Portuguese, identified interaction episodes that they called *identity acts*. These acts are used by the students to accept or deny their role and to express some degree of refusal or reluctance to the activity proposed by the teacher. The studies conducted by Ferroni and Araújo e Sá showed that some activities associated with specific conversational management modes may or may not encourage the students to participate in the ongoing task, which is then expressed through certain identity acts, or they may even exclude some students, particularly those who perceive themselves as linguistically more insecure.

However, those studies merely described what happens during the language class but did not provide guidelines that can be used by teachers when planning their lessons. Thus, insufficient importance has been given to those signals from students, and the importance of observing classroom interaction has been underrated, even though these could provide the teacher with tools to help her/him become more aware of the responses to her/his pedagogical decisions.

To partially overcome these shortcomings, in this study we will address the following aspects:

- verify whether (and when) episodes appear during the teacher-student interaction through which, by refusing to fulfill the obligations set by the teacher (Cicurel, 2011), the students initiate a process to deritualize the educational context (Degoumois et al., 2017) and assert their I-subject role in preference to their I-student role (Dabène, 1984):
- analyze how a teacher in training manages these interactional episodes; and
- provide guidelines that can be useful for pre-service training of FL teachers.

The theoretical framework that supports this study is the interactional approach, which has gained momentum with studies carried out since the 1990s in the fields of interactional sociolinguistics, foreign language acquisition, and praxeological pedagogy. This approach observes interactions as a space for the mobilization and construction of language competence in pedagogical situations. This research approach has been previously explored by researchers at the University of Aveiro (see, among others, Araújo e Sá & Andrade, 2002; Araújo e Sá, 2005).[3]

This epistemological approach is strongly action-oriented and uses interaction analysis as a professional training strategy (Araújo e Sá, 2005: 5). Thus, the analysis of the interactive work done by students in the classroom becomes a lens for examining the social activities that they undertake together or the meaning that they assign to these activities. Observation of pedagogical interactions and the critical analysis of what happens in a language classroom are powerful tools for updating our views on teaching (Araújo e Sá & Andrade, 2002). Through observation — that is, the set of activities whose purpose is to collect data and information on what happens

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[3] Analysis of video sequences is an effective instrument for fostering reflective training among pre-service and in-service teachers and overcoming problems diagnosed during observations (Sert, 2019, 2015; Ghafarpour, 2017; Waring, 2017).

during the teaching-learning process — teachers can develop personalized self-training programs.

Given the complexity and multiplicity of factors that affect this study subject, during the discussion of the data, we will refer to studies that describe discourse mechanisms in pedagogical contexts, as needed (see, among others, Walsh, 2011; Seedhouse, 2004).

2. Description of the study corpus[4]

The data we examine herein were gathered in the Italian courses offered by the Language Center of the University of São Paulo (Brazil) and that are linked to the teacher training program. The primary objective of the program is to provide an opportunity for FL teachers to gain classroom practice. The program is aimed at students enrolled in the teaching degree or graduate degree program of the Department of Modern Languages of the School of Philosophy, Languages, and Humanities at the University of São Paulo. The program is coordinated by professors in charge of mentoring the trainees through different activities, including monthly pedagogical meetings, biannual teacher training events, preparation of pedagogical material, and supervised apprenticeships. In order to learn about classroom actions and practices, and to address any issues identified when teaching / learning the FL, the coordinators can choose, with the consent of the student teacher, to record the lessons on video and then analyze them together at a later date, as in the case examined here.

This article presents results from a case study (Coutinho, 2000) carried out using the ethnographic approach (Watson-Gegeo, 1997; Van Lier, 1988) and based on the observation of four three-

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4   The data we present hereby come from a study funded by the São Paulo Research Foundation (project No. 2015/12825-09).

hour lessons of the same class. The corpus consists of 12 hours of video recordings that were subsequently transcribed.[5]

The teacher observed is a native speaker of Brazilian Portuguese who studied in Brazil. She was enrolled in the master's degree program in Applied Linguistics in the Department of Modern Languages at the University of São Paulo. Her first degree was in Portuguese and Italian Language and Literature and, at the time of the recordings, she was in her second semester of the program. She had studied Italian as a foreign language for six years and spent some time studying in Italy to fine-tune her linguistic knowledge, reaching the C1 level of the *Common European Framework of Reference* (2001).

The class in which the data was collected included 11 native speakers of Brazilian Portuguese, students at the B2 level of the *Common European Framework of Reference*, aged 20 to 60, who were given fictional names for confidentiality. The group had already taken one semester of Italian with the same teacher and claimed to have contact with the FL only in the class.

The course utilized an Italian for foreign language speakers textbook used in all the courses at that level,[6] which was not chosen by the teacher observed. According to the authors, the textbook follows a predominantly communicative approach, as grammar only appears in a complementary fashion and is strictly related to

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[5] We used the following transcription conventions, a partly modified version of those proposed by Van Lier (1988):

class: class group;
…,:   short pause;
=:   two overlapping speech turns;
-:   sudden interruption;
:::   prolonged sound;
?:   rising intonation;
!:   falling intonation;
oh: text that is read.
((inc)), ((laughter))   double parentheses indicate an incomprehensible part of the conversation or remarks on the transcription, such as laughter etc.;

[6] For ethical reasons, we choose not to name the book used in the course.

communicative structures. In addition to the textbook, the program supervisor had allowed the student teacher some leeway in choosing which topics or materials to present, as long as these were consistent with the students' language level.

3. Analysis

In this section, we describe the methods used to analyze the interactions recorded during the Italian as a FL course.

The lessons were recorded with a video camera by the supervisor of the Italian program and co-author of this article over four sessions at the beginning of the semester and were discussed with the pre-service teacher in a subsequent meeting. After the recording was fully transcribed, each lesson was subdivided into units called *pedagogic steps* (Araujo e Sá & Andrade, 2002). Pedagogic steps (PS) are units of analysis that help "depict the interactive story by means of the communicative-verbal situation created by the teacher and the group under observation" (Araújo e Sá & Andrade, 2002: 36). We used the following criteria to delimit the PS: semantic (topic studied), pragmatic (transactional objective), and interactive (type of participation) (Araujo e Sá & Andrade, 2002).

Based on the above-listed criteria, this macro-unit of analysis provides an overview of the structure of each lesson: activities performed, contents covered in terms of linguistic skills and learning, and patterns of interactive participation by the class. Assuming that students must fulfill a series of duties, i.e., speak and understand the FL, subject to "sanctions" when failing to do so (Cicurel, 2011), we distinguished those interactional episodes in which the students claimed their role as I-subject, thereby failing to fulfill the task assigned by the teacher, from those in which they accepted their role as learners and followed the teacher's instructions. To identify these episodes and examine how they were managed at a local level, we carried out a microanalysis of the conversational phenomena that govern the typical format of pedagogical interactions: turn-taking and the pairs formed by the questions asked by

the teacher followed by the students' responses (see, among others, Walsh, 2011; Seedhouse, 2004).

4. Findings

Before describing how interactional episodes were managed by the pre-service teacher, we analyzed those in which the learners deritualized the teaching scenario (Hazel & Mortensen, 2017) and claimed their role as I-subject as opposed to I-student (Degoumois *et al.*, 2017), and identified the context in which this took place, in order to gain a general view of what happened in the four lessons observed.

The analysis of the observed teacher's ps (Araújo Sá & Andrade, 2002) showed that each lesson consisted of 25 steps on average. We identified an average of 11 practice / training, 5 interpretation / inference, 5 reflection / evaluation, and 4 communication / production activities in each lesson.[7]

In each lesson, we identified an average of 24 interactional episodes in which deritualization of the teaching scenario occurred as a result of students' actions. Most episodes (22) took place during practice / training activities and the rest (2) during communication / production activities.

The examples described in this section were selected based on the criteria listed above and their relevance to the objective of this study. They should be interpreted as "a collection of individual cases documenting the recurrence of specific phenomena" (Mondada, 2006: 46), gathered to serve the objectives of the study.

[7] Araújo e Sá & Andrade (2002: 38) identified four main groups of activities, as follows: communication / production (c / p) activities such as discussions, narrations, and oral exposition of personal facts serve to test communicative-discourse competence; reflection / evaluation (r / e) activities, whose objective is to reflect on how the language being studied works; practice / training (p / t) activities consist of repeating, memorizing, and imitating predefined models; and interpretation / inference (i / i) activities, whose objective is to grasp the various meanings of the language.

When students are involved in the repetition, memorization, and imitation of predefined patterns — such as structural exercises involving repetition, transformations, and micro-conversations that result in a relatively controlled student production where they speak in a closely guided way (Araújo e Sá & Andrade, 2002), they break free of the initiation-response-follow-up format (Seedhouse, 2004) entirely controlled by the teacher, to open up the interactive space and momentarily avoid the activity underway, claiming their I-subject role over their I-student role.

Those episodes in which the students deritualize the teaching scenario create opportunities for dialog with the teacher, prompting the students to use strategies and signs of an active communication approach and a willingness to achieve their own communicative objectives. In this way, the students express their wish to temporarily escape the activity, perhaps because it is seen as boring or overly guided. The teacher, in turn, demonstrates sensitivity by accepting such evasions, as seen in Example 1.

(1)[8]

1. Teacher: *facciamo insieme? abbiamo già fatto metà divertirsi ci si diverte* =
    'shall we do it together? we have already done half enjoy yourself enjoy oneself'
2. Gloria: = <u>*ci si diverte*</u> ((reading))
    'enjoy oneself'
3. T: *aiutarsi ci si aiuta e poi l'altro sentirsi*
    'help yourself help one another and then the other to feel'
4. Class: <u>*ci si sente*</u> ((reading))
    'to feel'
5. T: *ci si sente accorgersi? ci si accorge*
    'to feel to notice? to realize'

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[8] These examples have been transcribed verbatim. As inter-language is involved, the examples may contain inaccuracies in the target language.

6. Class: *ci si accorge* ((reading))
              'to realize'
7. Kaiam: *sei andata alla mostra del Rinascimento*?
              'did you go to the Renaissance exhibition?'
8. T: ((shaking her head)) *non ci sono andata ero in Italia a luglio*
              'I didn't go, I was in Italy in July'
9. Flavia: =*ma::: bellissima bellissima vale la pena* ((looking at Kaiam))
              'but:::It's excellent excellent it's worth seeing'
10. T: *sei andata anche a quella di Dalì*?
              'Did you also go to the Dalí exhibition?'
11. Flavia: *no::: questa ancora no però::: questa del Rinascimento è fino al ventitre settembre*
              'no::: not yet but::: the Renaissance exhibition is until September 23'
12. T: *allora devo devo*
              'then I should, I should'
13. Flavia: ((talking loudly, looking at her classmate)) *devi andare è nel centro cultural Banco do Brasil è bello sì io sono andata settimana scorsa tu fai due ore di fila però io fatto con le amiche::: devi andare*
              'you should go, it's at the Banco do Brasil Cultural Center, it's beautiful, yes I went there last week. You wait in the line for two hours, but I was with friends… you should go'
14. T: *avete siete andati all'esposizione? quella dei maestri del Rinascimento*?
              'did you go to the exhibition? The one on Renaissance masters?'
15. Class: *no ancora no*
              'no, not yet'
16. Flavia: *Botticelli eh::: Michela- Michelangelo e qualcosa di::: di::: di Da Vinci io sono andata sabato::: scorso*
              'Botticelli eh::: Michela- Michelangelo and something by::: by::: by Da Vinci, I went there last::: Saturday'

17. T:	*c'è anche quella di Da Vinci no?=*
	'there is also Da Vinci, right?'
18. Flavia:	*= Dalì*
19. T:	*Dalì*
20. Flavia:	*sì tutti e due sono vicini tutti e due sono::: nella Praça da Sé*
	'yes they are both close, they are both::: in the Praça da Sé'
21. T:	*allora ragazzi andate lì vedete prima una e poi l'altra::: bene continuiamo l'esercizio*
	'then go there guys, visit one first and then the other::: good job. Let´s continue the exercise'

The class had been working on a practice/training activity in the class textbook for about four minutes.[9] The activity consisted of transforming sentences by inserting the impersonal form of the corresponding verbs, in an interactive format entirely controlled by the teacher (turns 1-6), who states the infinitive form of the verb and confirms the correctness of the students' conjugation by repeating the verb form.

In turn 7, however, Kaiam self-selects, thus violating the question/answer teaching format. This insubordination triggered an aside (Orletti, 2000) that lasted for 15 turns. Kaiam suddenly interrupted the main sequence, starting a real conversation that was meaningful to him but diverged from the topic of the lesson and went beyond the content of the pedagogical unit. The teacher, however, accepted the opening of an extra-pedagogical interactive space and began participating in the conversation (turn 9), which was primarily led by Flavia.

While speaking to her classmate, Flavia assumed an attitude of semantic dominance over the teacher taking control of the topic discussed (Orletti, 2000), as the teacher had not yet seen the exhibition. The teacher showed genuine interest in the topic and tried to involve the other students, albeit with little success. Flavia

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[9]   Due to space limitations, we here reproduce only part of the activity.

then showed off her expertise, speaking relatively long sentences intended both for her classmates and the teacher (turns 11, 13, 16, 20). The aside, which was very similar to ordinary interactions in terms of its interactive organization, ended in turn 21, when the teacher reclaimed her role and asked the class to return to the practice / training exercise suspended in turn 6.

This example shows that the teacher's willingness to accept this evasion allowed the opening of an extra-pedagogical relational space that was very rich in terms of discourse. The students were granted the opportunity to express themselves in the language they were studying and to test their linguistic repertoire with some freedom and spontaneity. The students' deritualization of the scenario led to a change of activity. The class switched from an activity focused on how the language works (practicing the use of the Italian impersonal form *si* + third person) to a more stimulating conversation in which the students felt free to speak about their own experiences, even though they were not using the language structures being studied in the practice / training activity. The student teacher should realize that this act of avoidance was a signal of the disappointment of the students and that, in the future, it would be worth finding a way to combine interesting and stimulating conversations with the linguistic content being studied.

Always in relation to practice / training activities — which, as already stated, are overly structured and repetitive — students broaden the interactive situations in which they claim their I-subject role over the I-student role in a humorous way. What distinguishes these episodes is that, in addition to creating a fun aside, they also allow the learners to avoid an activity excessively focused on the code, practicing the words or phrases being studied but now contextualized in the form of witty remarks. We see, in this respect, the teacher's reaction to these episodes (Example 2).

(2)
1. T: *quindi se::: dobbiamo:: completare la tabella quella a destra* ((looks at the book)) *cosa mettiamo? lo sapete già?*

facciamo un ripasso dell'imperativo no? ((writes on the board)) *ok quindi prima coniugazione seconda coniugazione e terza coniugazione* ((indicating the verbs written on the blackboard)) *siete tutti d'accordo?ok e gli imperativi dei verbi irregolari* ((reads the book)) <u>*andare avere dare dire fare*</u>

'so if::: we should:: complete the table on the right' 'what do we put? Do you already know? Let's review the imperative, ok?' 'ok so first conjugation second conjugation and third conjugation' 'do you all agree? ok and the imperatives of the irregular verbs' '<u>to go, to have, to give, to say, to do</u>'

2. Gloria: *andare vado*
                 'to go, I go'
3. T: *ok vado*
                 'ok I go'
4. Maria F.:   *avere abbia*
                 'to have, have'
5. T: *abbia dare?*
                 'have, to give?'
6. Lila: *dia* ((while writing))
                 'give'
7. Class: *dire dica*
                 'to say, say'
8. T: *dica ok e fare?*
                 'say ok and to do?'
9. Class: *faccia*
                 'do'
10. T: *faccia*
                 'do'
11. Maria A.:   *fassi?*
12. T: *faccia come la faccia* ((pointing at the face)) <u>*sia essere stai stare sappia e venga*</u> ((reading the book))
                 'faccia like face' 'is to be stay to stay know and come'
13. Gloria: *che venga la pioggia* ((laughter))
                 'let the rain come'

14. T: *speriamo bene e che ne venga davvero tanta* ((laughter)) *e*
            per chiedere di avere pazienza?
            'we hope so and that a lot comes' 'and to ask to be pa-
            tient?'
15. Class: *abbia*
            'be'
16. T: *abbia pazienza ok perfetto*
            'be patient ok perfect'
17. Maria F.: *abbia pazienza con me* ((laughter))
            'have patience with me'
18. T: *ne ho anche troppa* ((with a joking tone that makes the class
            laugh)) *e prendere?*
            'I even have too much' 'and to take?'

Example 2 took place shortly after the class had listened to a di-
alog containing imperative verb forms and was carrying out a re-
flection / assessment activity consisting of noting the function of
the imperative in the dialog heard. At this point, the teacher pro-
posed a practice / training activity from the textbook for practicing
irregular imperative forms. The exercise involved transforming a
list of verbs from the infinitive to the imperative form and used the
question-response format, initiated by the teacher and followed by
responses from the students (turns 1-10).

The verb transformation activity proceeded as expected un-
til turn 11, when Maria Amelia posed a metalinguistic question
related to activities of reflecting on language and how it is used
(Gombert 1992: 13), asking whether the correct form in Italian is
fassi. Thus, the learner indicated her difficulty carrying out an ac-
tivity that demands a high level of abstraction, as it involves prac-
ticing verb forms detached from any context.

In the next turn (12), the teacher first intervened providing the
correct subjunctive form of the verb *fare*, *faccia*, adding linguistic
(by saying *come la faccia*) and non-verbal language support (by
pointing at her face). Then she continued the transformation exer-
cise, always starting with the decontextualized verbs.

At this point, driven by the need to practice the verb tenses, Gloria self-selects and responds to the teacher's request by not only providing the correct form of the irregular verb *venire*, but also contextualizing it with a witty remark: *let the rain come* (turn 13). The humor, which arose from the severe drought that the city of São Paulo was suffering at the time, prompted her classmates' laughter. While speaking in practical terms, this was a clear attempt to test how the language works, to put the newly-acquired skill into practice. The request was welcomed by the teacher who responded jokingly using the imperative, inserting it into the context: *we hope so and that a lot comes* (turn 14).

Shortly after responding to Gloria's comment, the teacher returned to the practice / training activity, carrying on with the same verb transformation exercise. However, this time she chose to contextualize one of the uses of the selected verb form: *have patience,* and the class responded quickly (turn 15). In turn 17, Maria Florinda reiterated the need to create a link between meaning and form by constructing a sentence in which she correctly used the verb presented in a humorous tone: *have patience with me*. The teacher again welcomed the student's comment and responded, also in jest, stressing that she has had *too much* patience.

One can perceive in this episode how the exchange of comments in the deritualization of the roles of teacher and class not only broke up the monotony of an activity that seemed too rigid, but also allowed reusing the verb forms being studied in a meaningful context through examples that alluded to the students' experiences. Unlike Example 1, in this case the students were able to combine a conversation that they found stimulating with the linguistic content being dealt with in the lesson, and did so in a spontaneous, fun way. The students' experience thus appears to be important in making the class dialog meaningful.

As an ice-breaker, the teacher devotes the first few minutes of each lesson to a communication / production activity whose objective is to speak in the FL, asking the students to answer questions about their private lives. On this occasion, the students opened up

the interactive space by showing some resistance (Ellwood, 2008) to the activity, triggering a "deritualization of the teaching scenario" (Moore & Simon, 2002: 13). As seen in Example 3, when faced with these interruptions, the teacher chose to continue the activity instead of shifting direction, without achieving the desired result.

(3)
1. T: *allorat Stefani raccontaci un po' il tuo fine settimana come è stato:::cosa hai fatto in particolare?*
            'now Stefani, tell us a bit about your weekend, how did it go:::what did you do?'
2. Stefani: *sono andata a una lezione di danza tradizionale russa*
            'I went to a traditional Russian dance lesson'
3. T: *bene molto interessante allora Flavia cosa hai fatto di bello questo fine settimana*? ((addressing Flavia))
            'good, very interesting so Flavia what good thing did you do last weekend?'
4. Flavia: è:::… *niente di bello* ((while answering she puts some sheets of paper in order))
            'ah:::... nothing good'
5. T: *e tu Kaiam tutto bene? come è andata questa settimana? tutto apposto? hai fatto qualcosa di particolare? di interessante?*
            'and you Kaiam is everything ok? What was your week like? Everything ok? Did you do something special? Something interesting?'
6. Kaiam: *allora di particolare:::… non mi ricordo* ((laughter)) *se ricordo ti dico*
            'something special::: I don't remember' 'if it comes to me, I will let you know'
7. T: *eh va bene allora ragazzi:::* ((taking the book)) *avete fatto::: gli esercizi per casa del libro::: eh::: ci sono dei dubbi::: qualcosa che non avete capito ah*

'eh ok so guys::: have you done::: the homework from the book::: eh::: do you have any questions::: something you haven't understood ah'

In turn 1, the teacher asked Stefani what she did during the weekend. Stefani responded that she went to a Russian dance course (turn 2). The teacher acknowledged the grammatical correctness of the response and made a positive remark on the activity, defining it as *very interesting*. Then she asked another student, Flavia, the same question (turn 3) adding, however, that she should tell them about a *good* activity. The way in which the question was posed led to misunderstanding. Rather than recounting what she did over the weekend, the teacher's request was misunderstood by the student who, believing she had not done anything exceptional compared to her classmate, responded that she did nothing special (turn 4) after a drawn-out vowel and a brief pause. This way, she halted the conversational mode (Goffman, 1967) and opposed the teacher's request.

Instead of reformulating the question, which did not have the desired effect, namely, that the student talked about herself in the FL, the teacher asked Kaiam the very same question (turn 5). Kaiam, like Flavia, opposed the teacher's request and, stressing that he had not done anything *special*, reacted to the embarrassment caused by the question with a laugh. Then he asked for time to think about it and respond later.

After this response, the teacher quickly changed to a different activity (turn 7). It is interesting to note that, unlike the previous examples, in this case, the experiences of the class did not stimulate conversation, and the teacher encountered resistance from the students. This attitude could have been caused by that 1) the students interpreted the question literally *what good thing did you do?*, understanding it to mean something unique or different; or 2) the ice-breaking activity was perceived as a filler activity that the teacher used to stall while waiting for all the students to arrive, following the IRF model (turns 1-3). Thus, despite the reference to the

students' experiences, they did not find it interesting, in part because they did not see any clear learning objective in it.

This episode was discussed afterward with the student teacher and led to reflect on the effects that some questions can have on the students since, as in this case, the way in which it was posed left no room for more detailed responses but instead stifled the conversational mode (Goffman, 1967). The student teacher thus realized the difficulty of managing a free-production activity that, in fact, did not turn out as she wished. This difficulty, which emerged from the *ex-post* analysis of the lesson, can be attributed to various factors. Perhaps the most important one was the presence of the external observer, who happened to be a native Italian speaker, whose role was to supervise the teacher's training. This caused uncertainty in the student teacher, afraid of looking bad in the eyes of the expert, hampering her ability to manage a linguistically unpredictable activity through a strongly teacher-controlled interactive format, similar to what was observed in the practice / training activities.

5. Final remarks

After having identified and described interactional episodes in which students of Italian as a foreign language deritualized the actions planned by the teacher and claimed their I-subject role over the I-student role, together with the way such episodes were managed by a student teacher based on the activities in which they were participating, in this section we offer some reflections made during the study.

Our analyses showed that these interactional episodes arose during practice / training and communication / production activities. We identified two types of episodes: 1) avoidance of the activity and 2) resistance (Ellwood, 2008) to the activity. In the avoidance episodes, the class resorted to personal experience, and two different student actions can be distinguished: 1) temporarily avoiding the activity (Example 1), with the linguistic content to be studied

not being practiced; or 2) creating a playful aside (Example 2), in which the students did practice the linguistic content to be studied. The resistance episodes showed that even when referring to the students' personal experiences, the teacher was unable to get them involved in the activity; this may depend on the interactive format proposed by the teacher, which is under her control.

In all cases, there was a mismatch between the communicative situations and the language content to be studied. In our view, these incidents are clearly indicative of the students' dissatisfaction with the activities, which mostly consisted of performing exercises that drastically reduce the learners' discursive responsibility and are carried out mechanically, without any kind of reasoning or reflection.

Concerning interaction management, it is interesting to note that when accommodated by the teacher, sequences occurred in which the interaction boundaries were redrawn. The interaction shifted from a highly-structured conversation driven by predictable exercises to discursively-stimulating, communicative exchanges in which the learners: 1) occasionally defined the form, objectives, and content that can potentially satisfy them, as in Example 1, and 2) contextualized the linguistic forms to be studied through situations related to their own experience, as in Example 2. This made the learners mobilize strategies and signs of active participation in the communicative episode in order to reach their own communicative objectives, even though they did not have full command of the target language. Note that this type of situation — intercomprehension — is what the teaching institution aims to prepare the students for, fully aware that its objective is not, nor could be, to produce a perfectly bilingual person (Araújo & Sá, 2002).

Sometimes, however, the teacher chose to overlook the interactional episodes in which the students deritualized the actions she had planned, indicating their sense of frustration and opposing the teacher's requests when the type of question and the interaction format did not provide conditions enabling more spontaneous interactions.

We began with the assumption that, in the context of training, the teacher must be vigilant to the effects of pedagogical interactions, given that the teaching / learning process consists of continuous interactions and that the communicative competence that one hopes to achieve in the FL stems, in turn, from a system of interactions (Araújo e Sá & Andrade, 2002).

We conclude by highlighting that analysing the deritualization episodes was particularly stimulating. On the one hand, the polyphony of voices coming from the classroom allowed us to recognize signs indicative of the success of the educational activities employed. What emerged, in particular, was the need to utilize learning activities that align the syllabus and the students' needs, meaningful communicative situations associated with the learning objectives.

On the other hand, the analysis of interactions provided an important incentive for teachers involved in training activities as well as valuable inputs for pre-service trainees. In fact, the *ex-post* analysis of the interactions allowed the student teacher to reflect on her practices and become aware of them. From the standpoint of the trainer, this participant observation experience has served first as a space for breaking the barriers separating teaching theory from practice; furthermore, it consolidated greater self-awareness and consequently contributed to the teacher's professional development by stimulating proactive actions to diagnose the issues that emerge in training situations jointly.

We hope to expand the study to include a larger corpus that helps identify the skills and approaches that have to be developed in pre-service training through *ad hoc* training programs focusing on observing pedagogical interactions.

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