This second edition of Classroom Discourse Analysis provides teachers with the tools to analyze talk in their own classrooms. Through discussions of classic and contemporary classroom research as well as examples, activities, and questions, the first chapters walk readers through the techniques for recording, viewing, transcribing, and analyzing classroom interaction. The subsequent chapters focus on specific features of talk and interaction: patterns of turn-taking, the effects of intonation and nonverbal behavior, the role of storytelling in classrooms, and the way participation is framed by both physical classroom arrangements and ways of speaking. This new edition introduces a “repertoire approach” to the study of talk in classrooms, highlights the increasing role of linguistic variety and Internet resources, and includes examples from current research that emphasizes these aspects of classroom interaction.

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Classroom Discourse Analysis
A Tool for Critical Reflection
Second Edition

Betsy Rymes
Those of us who presume to “teach” must not imagine that we know how each student begins to learn.

Vivian Gussin Paley
The Boy Who Would Be a Helicopter, 1990, p. 78
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Much has happened since the first edition of this book was published in 2009, both in the world of education and to my own thinking about classroom discourse analysis. Most significantly, education research and practice has become even more infused with the demands and problems of high-stakes testing and standardized curriculum. In counterpoint to this emphasis on standardization, a discussion has been growing about the diversity of communication in classrooms—in terms of languages and ways of speaking, but also in terms of new technologies for communication.

Much of the first edition, I believe, stands up to this brief test of time. However, over the last several years, to account for these changes in educational discussions and research, and to adequately make sense of forms of communication I’ve been seeing in classrooms, I have worked to develop an understanding of how the concept of “communicative repertoire” can be woven into the analysis of discourse in classrooms. I have written about a repertoire perspective elsewhere (Rymes, 2010, 2014a, 2014b, 2014c), but only now, in this second edition, have I been able to weave it systematically into a methodology for analyzing and reflecting carefully on talk in classrooms.

I introduce the term “communicative repertoire” to readers in Chapter 1 and, in Chapter 2, I describe how developing a recognition of communicative variety in a classroom can go hand in hand with a focus on social context and interaction patterns, enhancing researchers’ (as well as students’ and teachers’) perspective on classroom events. In subsequent chapters, through new examples, activities, and questions, I illustrate how to take a repertoire perspective in the analysis of classroom discourse.

The result is a slightly altered stance toward talk in classrooms than the one I took in the first edition: I have tried to include more discussions of linguistic variety and Internet resources, and I have simultaneously backed away from any statements I made about what type of communication categorically “functions well” in a classroom. But, this slight shift has not altered the overarching position stated in the first edition, that a primary function of classroom discourse analysis is to engage in an iterative process of reflective practice—whether as a researcher or a teacher or both.
In the process of developing the repertoire perspective, I have been guided by the wisdom and advice (implicit and explicit) of dozens of colleagues, friends, teachers, and students I have worked with over the last several years. Much of the new thinking on communicative repertoire has grown from discussions with my colleagues here at the University of Pennsylvania: Nelson Flores, Anne Pomerantz, Robert Moore, Nancy Hornberger, Santoi Wagner, and Diane Larson-Freeman. I have also been inspired and influenced by doctoral students who have taught classroom discourse analysis with me, discussed its possibilities, or built their own research studies around discourse analysis in classrooms and beyond, especially Andrea Leone, Mark Lewis, Sarah Gallo, Holly Link, Catrice Barrett, Heather Hurst, Krystal Smalls, Phil Nichols, and Geeta Aneja.

Classroom discourse analysis cannot exist as a pursuit without classroom teachers who care. In this regard, I have endless gratitude and respect for Bob Zakrzewski, who through his calmly inspired daily practice makes the possibilities of a communicative repertoire perspective in classrooms seem generative and real. His approach to teaching high school English—his gentle respect for and tending of the massive linguistic, social, and intellectual potential of each of his students—consistently inspires me.

This edition is infused with new examples from my own recent research, but also from students in my classes who conduct their own studies, all of which illustrate the potential of a repertoire perspective to illuminate social and interactional dimensions of classroom talk. Much of my own commitment to the practice of classroom discourse analysis flows from the enthusiasm and participation of students in my masters’ class, Classroom Discourse and Interaction, especially, and most recently, Sophie Degat, Bear St. Michael, Megan Doyle, and Hajra Kayani. These students and others have brought their commitment to classroom teaching to my course, and their weekly illuminating comments continue to foster my dedication to the analysis of classroom discourse as a way of working collectively to figure out how to listen, take note, and discuss language and its relationship to learning in classrooms.

Thank you also to Lesley Rex, my friend, colleague, and editor at Hampton Press, and to Barbara Bernstein for publishing the first edition of this book, and to both of them for facilitating the transition of this material to Routledge, where I am grateful for the assistance and endless patience of Elysse Preposi and Leah Babb-Rosenfeld for carrying on with the second edition.

And no set of thank-yous is ever complete without my inspirational children, Anya and Charlie, who contribute endlessly to my life, and, through their candid opinions and entertaining impersonations, to my thoughts about classrooms and schools, and the talk and learning that goes on there.

Betsy Rymes
Philadelphia, June 2015
It is a luxury to finish a book and to allow oneself a moment to think about the people who shaped its current form. It is also daunting: Where to begin? I could never have written this book were it not for the encouragement, guidance, and inspiration of students, teachers, colleagues, schools, communities, and my own family and friends.

From the beginning, Lesley Rex, my editor, encouraged me to go forward with this project and had the patience to stick with it over the years it has taken to complete. I thank her, and three initial reviewers whose comments helped me think carefully about how to represent the material. Gretchen Kreuter read this work from cover to cover, providing well-tempered editorial suggestions, all of which have improved the final version. Many of the ideas in this book developed out of discussion among my colleagues and students in the Athens Discourse Inquiry Group at the University of Georgia: Kate Anderson, Cati Brown, Amy Heaton, Amy Johnson, Paula Mellom, and Csilla Weninger. I owe special thanks to Mariana Souto-Manning, who first insisted I write this book and continued to encourage me and offer feedback and ideas along the way.

Generous discussions with colleagues and friends in Georgia also resulted in ideas that show up in perhaps unlikely places in this book. For these moments of insight, I thank Misha Cahnmann-Taylor, Lisa Caine, Esperanza Mejia, Cindy Molloy, Rachel Pinnow, Don Rubin, and Bettie St. Pierre. JoBeth Allen has been unspeakably generous: She and I were writing books together when I began this project, and as we exchanged chapters I relished her feedback, encouragement, and writerly company.

Sean Hendricks boldly piloted this manuscript while teaching Classroom Discourse Analysis at the University of Georgia, giving me the courage to do so myself here at the University of Pennsylvania. I am grateful to the students at both institutions who began to analyze classroom discourse with the guidance from various manuscript versions of this book.

At the University of Pennsylvania, the Division of Language and Literacy in Education has provided generous opportunities to present versions of my work and to teach my own course on classroom discourse analysis. Maren Aukerman, Nancy Hornberger, Kathy Howard, Susan Lytle, Kathy Schultz,
and Lawrence Sipe have all offered commentary, encouragement, and insight on different aspects of this project. These colleagues and the students in my graduate course, Classroom Discourse and Interaction, finally clarified the place and purpose for this work.

Thank you to the generosity, openness, and dedication of teachers at “City School” and “Georgia Elementary School,” where I spent hundreds of hours videotaping classroom discourse. I could never have written this book had these teachers not graciously granted me permission to haunt their halls and classrooms, to listen in on talk, and share my analyses with them and with others.

Betsy Rymes
Philadelphia, May 2008
2 Dimensions of Discourse and Identity

Preview Questions

Katha Pollitt, a feminist poet, essayist, and critic, has joked that by the time she reached midlife she automatically avoided “men who said ‘groovy’ ” (2007). Do you also have certain words that change the way you think about their speakers? Now, think about some of the words and phrases used in your classroom (e.g., hey dude, great!, WOW!, ain’t, darnit!). Do they mean different things to different people? Do they have different effects depending on who says them? Do they affect the way you think about their speakers? How might such words change student engagement in your classroom?

As introduced in Chapter 1, a person’s communicative repertoire is an accumulation of habits and norms for communication acquired over a lifetime. An individual’s entire history of interactions outside the classroom has gone into shaping this repertoire. Once inside the classroom, interactions there will shape how a student’s repertoire grows and, possibly, how certain individuals are excluded. For example, no matter how many other languages they speak, students whose repertoire does not include English may be excluded from any interaction in a classroom in which English is the language of instruction. However, gradually, students’ repertoires may expand. Depending on the interactions in the classroom, the teacher and the English-speaking students may also begin to augment their repertoires, learning a few phrases from additional languages in the classroom, or drawing on additional modalities (drawing pictures or diagrams, for example) to communicate.

How do we use classroom discourse analysis to study classroom repertoires? In this chapter, I first elaborate on the concept of communicative repertoire and its relationship to a person’s social identity. Then, I illustrate how classroom discourse analysis provides a method to study how a student’s communicative
Dimensions of Discourse and Identity

repertoire (and as such, an individual’s emergent classroom identity) is contingent on three dimensions of classroom talk: (1) social context outside the classroom (social and institutional norms); (2) interactional context of a single speech event (interactional norms); and (3) individual agency (the ability for an individual to build their awareness of social, institutional, and interactional norms and use their repertoire in new and different ways).

Communicative Repertoire and Social Identity

Consider this paradox: While a communicative repertoire is unique to each individual, an individual's “identity,” built through interactions with others, is a “quintessentially social phenomenon” (Bucholtz & Hall, 2004, p. 377). How does this work? One’s identity, or the kind of person one appears to be, is constructed through how other people encounter that person. Whether one is considered a “good kid” or a “troublemaker,” a “nerd” or a “cool dude,” is largely a result of the kinds of social interactions that person has and the language that person uses. Katha Pollitt, for example, in the quote that opens this chapter, jokes that any man who uses the word *groovy* is undateable. Another person might decide someone who uses the word *felicitous* in place of *lucky* is a pretentious bore. In the same kind of process, teachers may decide that students who use words like *ain’t* are low achievers.

In making these generalizations from single words to what kind of person somebody is, one is judging an individual on the basis of a small slice of that individual's communicative repertoire. Yet each individual has a unique and wide-ranging set of communicative resources, most of which are not displayed in a single interaction. Some children’s repertoires include both the contractions *ain’t* and *isn’t*. Some students might use both *y’all* and *you* (as a plural form), and others may only know how to express you-plural as *you*. The collective range of individuals’ repertoires in any given school is potentially boundless, but the repertoire range voiced in a typical classroom can be very limited—thus eliminating many voices and potential identities from classroom interactions. Ideally classroom talk and interaction will give voice to a wide range of communication, augmenting the repertoires of everyone in the room. In this way, a classroom develops as a learning community not by eliminating elements from children’s repertoires but by developing overlap and building common ground. Developing some common ground across those communicative repertoires may help prevent students from acquiring classroom identities that don’t capture the extent of their repertoire. As described in the previous chapter, misreading a student on the basis of his or her words (or silence), storytelling style, or other communicative behaviors can lead to a career of remedial educational experiences—and the socially constructed identity of “bad student.”

Throughout this book, with the goal of understanding how identities and learning develop through classroom talk, three interrelated dimensions of interaction—social context, interactional context, and individual
agency—link the repertoire perspective on communication to methods of classroom discourse analysis. Here is a summary of these dimensions.

1. **Social context** (including the entire biographical history of an individual) shapes what repertoire an individual commands. If I grew up in Mexico, chances are that Spanish is a significant part of my communicative repertoire. But social context also shapes how others value that repertoire. Even if an individual prefers to use Spanish in math class, a teacher might make rules that prohibit the use of languages other than English. To paraphrase George Orwell, some repertoires are more equal than others.

2. **Interactional context** (the moment-to-moment unfolding of an interaction) shapes which elements of an individual's repertoire emerge and how they function. For example, even if there are no official rules about which languages are allowed in our conversation, if I start speaking Spanish, whether someone chooses to respond in English or Spanish (or some other way) potentially changes the course of our conversation.

3. An individual has varying degrees of agency to affect how certain repertoire elements become relevant in any given interaction. For example, if a student persistently uses Spanish among classroom peers, or explains to a monolingual teacher why they are using Spanish in addition to English, or even teaches the teacher a few phrases, that student may be able to construct a larger role for Spanish in that classroom.

**Social Context: A World of Others’ Words**

Each individual has a unique communicative repertoire, the result of a lifetime of competent language use and social interaction. Even a single word spoken by an individual has a history of use and a future to be determined by its use. As has been expressed by the literary theorist Mikhail Bakhtin, any word we use comes already “populated—overpopulated—with the intentions of others” (1982, p. 294). We live in “a world of other’s words” (Bakhtin, 1984, p. 143). *Groovy*, for example, as used by Katha Pollitt, has accumulated a certain social history of associations that she understands as a woman who grew up as a feminist around “radical intellectuals” in the ‘60s. So despite the imagined role of *groovy* in one man’s individual repertoire, the message that word communicates about his identity will always be contingent on a larger social context; in Katha Pollitt’s case, it raises the red flag of a hypocritical, blindly ignorant, male feminist of the ’60s. This irony becomes less funny and more sinister when we consider the role of broad social context in the classroom. Students who come to school with individual repertoires that have served them well in their families and peer groups may find themselves judged negatively in the classroom for using precisely the same words that worked well at home, at work, or with siblings or friends. In a given context, some repertoires carry more value than others. In a school context, some ways of speaking count as “wrong” that may seem very right in other situations.
Interactional Context

Bakhtin articulates how social history inevitably populates an individual’s words. Words speak from their past. But words’ meanings are not determined by their past. Instead, each word has the possibility to take on new meanings each time it is used. As soon as an individual gives voice to a word, a phrase, or a gesture, that expression also becomes subject to interpretations of a new set of others, and the meanings given to our words by these others can be wide-ranging and highly indeterminate. As classroom discourse analysts, we can explore their emergent meaning in classrooms by looking carefully at interactions. Imagine, for example, a student greeting their English teacher in Spanish, Hola. The teacher might follow with any one of these responses:

(firmly) “English only, please.”
(with delight) “Hey! That’s Spanish! Do you know Spanish?”
(firmly) “Good morning.”
(hesitantly) “Hola.”
(in a no-nonsense teacher voice) “Buenos días.”

There are infinite other possibilities—including noncomprehending silence. Each of those possible rejoinders suggests a slightly different way that the Spanish word Hola, and the Spanish language in general, might function in this classroom. As classroom discourse analysts, we are able to record these interactions, follow up on the ensuing interaction, and track how individuals’ repertoires grow, change, and develop in ways that overlap with others or highlight distinction. We can follow responses to repertoire difference over the course of a single interaction, a series of interactions, a week, month, semester, or even a number of years.

In this chapter and the remainder of the book, I will illustrate how some interactions unfold in ways that silence some repertoires or call on familiarity with a common repertoire that is not shared by all students. Other interactions open possibility for fuller contribution by more students and growing repertoire overlap. In these cases, classroom interactions draw on different languages, personal pronouns, key words, shared terminology, or other repertoire elements to build common ground.

Agency

Given the power of broad social context and interactional contingencies to shape interaction in classrooms, how much control does a single individual really have? Answering this question involves taking a close look at what communicative resources students and their teachers bring to the classroom, and how those resources get taken up. Given the huge repertoire range represented in classrooms today, asserting one’s own voice becomes complicated, but crucial.
Students in today’s classrooms are likely to have lived in different geographical regions, if not different countries. Even those who have remained in the same region their entire life have likely interacted with a wide diversity of people via Internet-circulated social media. For this reason, Jan Blommaert (2010) recommends we think about linguistic diversity today in terms of “mobility” rather than “distribution.” In other words, while sociolinguists used to make generalizations about how New Yorkers talk or Bostonians talk, such claims no longer hold because people move in and out of cities so rapidly these days. Even if students are not so physically mobile, most have virtual access to a huge repertoire range via the Internet. As discourse analysts and teachers, we can no longer presume, “Hey, I’m in Hawaii, kids in my classroom will probably be telling Hawaiian talk stories.” However, this does not mean people are becoming more “the same” in their communication style. Contrary to some fears of “McDonaldization” (homogeneity being brought on by mass media), contemporary mobility and Internet-circulated forms of social media have, instead, created a context of extreme communicative diversity (Rymes, 2014a).

This proliferating communicative diversity suggests classroom education also needs to diversify. One single, standardized form of education is no longer a guaranteed path to opportunity for at least two reasons: First, we cannot assume that all students have one way of speaking in any classroom, that students from a certain region or a certain country have one standard repertoire, or even that the teacher possesses the repertoire that is most coveted or useful. Second, once individuals leave the classroom, whether in the immediate sense (to go to a different classroom), or to go to an afterschool job, or to go on as adults in a diverse and dynamic communicative world, they will need to command a repertoire that encompasses a much broader range of life activities than standardized school repertoires might cover. In sum, students and teachers are communicatively diverse and our world necessitates a command of this communicative diversity.

Therefore, the primary learning goal associated with a repertoire perspective is not to master one “standard” but rather to facilitate the awareness and expansion of multiple repertoires. Students need to develop a growing ability to use their expanded repertoire to “shuttle between communities, and not to think of only joining a community” (Canagarajah, 2012, p. 238, emphasis mine). The goal of a multidimensional, repertoire approach to discourse analysis is to develop insights into how individuals negotiate the role of their own repertoire within the broad social context and among the interactional contingencies of today’s classrooms.

**Using Classroom Discourse Analysis to Explore Repertoire**

We can begin looking at communicative repertoire in classroom discourse by examining how single words function in a given speech event. For example, take the word *dude*. From a one-dimensional, decontextualized perspective,
the word *dude* sits there on the page, a line of letters, D-U-D-E, a synonym for *person*. Now think of using this word in your classroom. Would you? Would students in your classroom use it? In other words, is *dude* a part of your communicative repertoire or that of your students? What impressions would you have of a speaker who used *dude* (rather than *person, man, guy, kid, etc.*) during a lesson? Now consider this simple description of a picture, offered up by Danny, a second grader, while the group was discussing a book:

Teacher: Do men wear a lot of hats now?
Danny: Some don’t. The train *dudes*—the train *people* wear
they wear these like, big old things that—

Suddenly, the word *dude* gains dimensionality. Danny had an individual choice to make: Perhaps out of habit, he started with the word *dudes*, but he changed to *people*. Why did he make this change? Part of this change probably has to do with his recognition of the context within which he was speaking and the person he was addressing. Clearly, the words *dudes* and *people*, while synonyms at a very basic level (and both part of Danny’s repertoire), have different ramifications in use. This chapter provides a framework for examining how words like *dudes* and other elements of students’ unique *communicative repertoires* bring an individual’s social history into the classroom, but also take on new and unpredictable meanings through interaction. Speakers who command a broad and diverse communicative repertoire and are able to use it flexibly can ideally use that repertoire not only to talk in a classroom, but also to effectively move between classrooms, various peer groups within those classrooms, and the multiple communities in which they spend the rest of their day.

Building on our preliminary definition of classroom discourse analysis as an investigation into how discourse (language-in-use) and context affect each other, our methods delve into the three dimensions of language-in-use discussed earlier: (1) *social context;* (2) *interactional context;* and (3) *individual agency.* This multidimensionality—the simultaneous influence of social (or institutional) context, interactional context, and individual agency—is a feature of every classroom interaction. Within this multidimensional landscape, an individual’s communicative repertoire charges into action. Of course, each of these dimensions is inseparable from the others, and at times, one may be featured more prominently. Teasing them apart through discourse analysis, however, affords greater understanding and control over words in classrooms—so that we will not interpret words one-dimensionally or use or hear language without recognizing its multidimensional power to control how we see others and ourselves.

### The First Dimension: Social Context

A foundational dimension of classroom discourse analysis is the broad influence of the social context outside the classroom (including the institution
in which that classroom is based) on what gets said inside the classroom. Language-in-use (discourse) and social context each influence each other in a dialectic relationship; not only does what we say function differently depending on the social context, but also what we say changes what might be relevant about the social context:

Language-in-Use ↔ affects → Social Context

**Discourse Functions Differently Across Different Contexts**

Our definition of discourse as language-in-use adds an important element to understanding how individuals’ communicative repertoires function. Knowing words like *dude* does not necessarily mean that one understands how to use them. Returning to Bakhtin’s formulation, these words are not only “populated . . . with the intentions of others” (1982, p. 294) but will also be subject to the interpretations of others once they are spoken. Having a full command of *dude* means knowing the word and being able to use it with facility in context—knowing, for example, that you might say it to your friend but not your grandmother. Having the word *dude* in your repertoire means knowing that it has, to use a phrase from the linguistic anthropologist Benjamin Lee Whorf, “covert categories” attached to it (Whorf, 1945). *Dude* is not simply a stand in for *person*. *Dude* is male gendered. But *dude* is also not simply a stand-in for *man*. There are additional covert social meanings associated with this word.1 *Dude* is more casual, but *dude* is not simply a casual way of saying *man*. It has something “youthy” and perhaps “African American” about it. Perhaps. Obviously, all this covert information is not written in stone (or a dictionary definition). Rather, these associations accumulate over a word’s career—over years of interactions. These associations can also be negotiated or confirmed in every subsequent interaction. When David switched from *dude* to *man* in the previous example, he was confirming a Whorfian covert association with the word *dude*—that, perhaps, it is not a word to be used in school.

One’s repertoire includes single words like *dude* but also longer stretches of talk. Phrases also have covert categories and tacit expectations for usage. “How are you?,” for example, overtly takes the form of a question. However, in most contexts in the United States, the phrase “How are you?” functions as a greeting. If you are a teacher in the United States, for example, greeting a student in your classroom will probably go something like this:

Teacher: Hi Jack, how are you?
Jack: Great, how are you?
Teacher: Great. ((student proceeds to desk))
Knowing how to do this kind of greeting by using “How are you?” is part of having a full command of this phrase in your communicative repertoire.

In some contexts, however, the form “How are you?” may be taken as a genuine question, not a simple greeting. Imagine, for example, one of these students paying a visit to the counselor’s office, plopping down in the chair in front of her desk. The counselor might start out with the same form, but its social meaning may emerge very differently:

Counselor: How are you today, Jack? ((concerned expression))
Jack: Well, not so good actually. ((bursts into tears))

As these two hypothetical examples show, two instances of a seemingly identical form take on different functions in different contexts:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Language Form</th>
<th>Context of Use</th>
<th>Function</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>How are you?</td>
<td>a. Teacher addressing a student entering the classroom</td>
<td>a. Greeting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>b. Counselor addressing a student in her office</td>
<td>b. Question</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In other words, forms and functions vary across context, so forms take on situated meanings. That is, the meaning of a word varies according to the context in which it is used. “How are you?” means one thing in the counselor’s office, something else in the hall, something else in the classroom. This phenomenon can also be described in terms of types and tokens. Forms are representative types: For example, the word you looks the same and has a standardized spelling in every instance of use. Tokens, in contrast, are instances of that type used in a particular situation: Just who you refers to depends on the instance of its use.

The fact that word types function very differently as tokens in different contexts enables us to use language in new and creative ways every day. Unfortunately, the vast variation in what words mean also provides great potential for misunderstanding, especially for an outsider. Visitors from other countries may have mastered the form of the English language and formal typology for its usage, but have not yet become aware of its varied functionality as living tokens of use. International students, for example, who are not familiar with certain situated meanings may respond to “How are you?” as a genuine inquiry about their well-being. When their questioner doesn’t seem interested, they may have an impression of native speakers as superficial or uncaring: Why would a person ask such a question and then pay little attention to the answer? An important aspect of becoming a member of a new community is learning local nuances of how certain forms function; otherwise, this sort of cross-cultural misunderstanding can result.

Just as visitors from other countries may be unaware of norms for situated meanings of certain forms, visitors from different communities and even
individuals of different generations (e.g., teachers and students, parents and teenagers) may be unaware of the situated meanings of each other’s ways of speaking. Adults may find teenage sons and daughters to have developed so many uniquely situated meanings of words that when their teenagers talk among themselves, it is difficult to know what is going on; *bad* can mean good; *ill* can be cool; a *dog* might be a good, human friend. Internet-circulated social media have accelerated this youthy proliferation of distinctive tokens and meanings and extended it beyond words to iconography. For example, some 11th graders, working on a sociolinguistics project in a class I’m researching, interviewed teachers and their peers about the meanings of emoji (see Figure 2.1) and discovered vast gaps in the communicative meaning attributed to those faces by different generations. Teens tended to understand the nuanced value of these faces for communication and described that when interviewed. Their teachers, however, usually just described the pictures, without indicating much sense of their communicative value.

**Discourse Functions Differently in Different Classroom Events**

While evanescent teen language—not to mention the iconography of social media—may always remain somewhat beyond adult comprehension, teachers can facilitate learning in the classroom by reflecting on the general ways that situated meanings vary across activities in their classroom. Even within the classroom context, the functionality of words and images varies from activity to activity. Think again about the word *dude*. In the example, Danny uses the description “train dudes” but self-corrects, changing to “train people.” Though only in second grade, he seems to have internalized a sense that the word *dudes* was a less appropriate descriptor than *people* when discussing a picture book. Why? In another activity context, in the same school, the word *dude* is received positively by a teacher. In the following exchange, for example, *dude* receives approval:

**Rudolfo:** (draws a card and reads) Dude.

**Teacher:** Yes.

In this example, Rudolfo is playing the Phonics Game™ with several other students, all English Language Learners. In this game, saying the word *dude*
indicates he has read it correctly and, perhaps, knows the “magic e” rule for sounding out words like this. The teacher’s “yes” has nothing to do with the content of the word dude but rather with his correct reading of the form.

Usually, however, in school and at home, and especially for the new language learners in this group, the meanings of words count, not just the ability to pronounce them. In fact, even in the phonics game play, where points are awarded strictly on the ability to say words out loud, students bring meaning to the words through their playful asides:

Rudolfo: ((draws a card and reads to the teacher)) Dude.
Teacher: Yes.
Jose: ((turns to classmate and changes to a “cool” tone of voice)) Hey dude, how you doing?

Jose’s aside, “Hey dude, how you doing?” (many more like it that occurred during this game play), while marginal to the explicit goal of the Phonics Game, is important because it is a way of testing out possible functions of words. Kids enjoy playing with possible situated meanings and functions. This kind of word play may even be a developmental necessity. For young students, word play forms the basis of nursery rhymes, riddles, Dr. Seuss books, and knock-knock jokes. In adult life, this word play develops into an understanding of the multifunctionality of language that makes reading, writing, and thinking a creative pleasure. In schools, however, this kind of interaction is often discouraged. Too many asides can take away from classroom focus. Even at the university level, it can be difficult to negotiate a balance between playful talk and classroom talk without shutting students down. As careful analysis of classroom discourse reveals, however, more is more: Paying attention to the multifunctionality of talk is an asset in the classroom and need not subtract from more regimented classroom goals.

For example, despite the potentially decontextualized approach the Phonics Game takes to reading, these students loved to play it, and their play always included many meaningful asides with words. These students, whom I watched and videotaped playing this game over a semester, repeatedly found ways to use words in differently functional ways. So even though, technically, the only object of the game was to sound out words, new situated meanings and functions kept bubbling up. Even the names of the different games within the phonics program (for example, “Double Trouble” and “Silent Partners”) are based on meaningful word play. So, despite the intentions of the game designers, the Phonics Game could potentially become a format to experiment with language multifunctionality: To demonstrate and practice not only how to sound out words, but also to enjoy the sheer fun of reading and language.

I do not mean this as an endorsement of the Phonics Game, but rather as an illustration that even despite curricular materials and their implied
approach, teachers and students can use these resources and simultaneously use language in creative multifunctional ways. Paying attention to language function and its variation across contexts can be empowering to teachers and students. Take a look at the multiple functions of *dude* we’ve already encountered:

<table>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>b. Reading a card off while playing the Phonics Game: “Dude”</td>
<td>b. Display of sounding out ability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>c. Using a word from the phonics game: “Hey dude!”</td>
<td>c. Being funny and/or displaying knowledge of <em>dude</em> functionality</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Just because differences between home, peer-to-peer, and student-to-teacher language functionality exist, the classroom does not necessarily need to be more homelike or the home more class-like. For most people, the classroom is a different place and has a different job to do than does dinner conversation or peer-group negotiation on the playground. The key here is to be aware of the different functions that language has in any context. A teacher knows whether her students need to focus more on the rules of phonics or on other functions of language. But doing both is best, because both aspects of language are crucial to meaningful language use. In the process of playing with various language functions, students become more aware of their own repertoire diversity and the teacher learns more about the repertoire range in her classroom.

Drawing attention to repertoire diversity in this way also helps students make connections between different contexts; classroom learning will make more sense if it can be generalized across encounters. Parents and teachers often encounter disconnects between learning in and out of the classroom: A child who reads effortlessly at home but struggles with reading and writing in the classroom; a child who calculates and plans an entire garden plot but struggles with geometry in school (Johnston, 2004). These students need to be aware that classroom learning is *supposed* to be relevant in other contexts, even though it may sound very different there. Even words from “peer” contexts have a place in school, but a nuanced place. For example, the word *dude* in the phonics game would be a great word to use in a story or script. Describing train workers as *dudes* could be an excellent descriptive device, but calling out “Hey, dude!” to the school principal might not be such a good idea.

To summarize, we can help students to generalize and use language creatively across contexts, to “shuttle between communities” (Canagarajah, 2012), by encouraging students to explore a broad repertoire range. A discourse analysis
approach facilitates this exploration for teachers and students because it can make explicit the relationship between communicative repertoire outside and inside the classroom and across multiple classroom contexts.

**Contexts Outside the Classroom Also Affect Repertoire Use**

So far, the simple examples of *dude* and “How are you?” and the occasional emoji have illustrated that language and other communication media function differently in different contexts—that even within the classroom, one’s repertoire takes on very different meanings in different situations. *Dude* has a different meaning in a phonics game than it does during a picture description or when addressing the principal of the school. Now let’s turn to the big picture: Language-in-use is also always affected by social structure outside the classroom—this broader social context includes educational policy and curriculum, socioeconomic, racial, and ethnic backgrounds of teachers and students, and gender norms that develop long before children set foot in a classroom.

**Educational Policy and Curriculum**

Educational policy and mandated curriculum often tell teachers what is and is not an appropriate communicative repertoire for the classroom. For example, standardized tests count a certain form of English as “right” and another as “wrong.” Policies that are based on standardized high-stakes testing potentially have the effect of silencing those children who do not come to school already knowing the forms of language that will be deemed acceptable by tests and standardized curricula. Many teachers have agonized about how to teach the English forms needed to succeed on tests without belittling the robust communicative repertoires of their students. Think about these two sentences for example:

“*I be happy.*”

“I am happy."

While a teacher can only count “I am happy” as correct in the context of a test on English grammar, “*I be happy*” is a correct form within a system of African American English. The verb “*be*” within African American English functions as a marker of an ongoing state of happiness—“I am a happy person.” However, in school, “*I be happy*” does not communicate that sense (Green, 2002). Learning how children’s language functions as part of each child’s repertoire, and explaining to children that language functions differently in different contexts helps students understand, without feeling judged, why they need to produce a certain kind of language for tests.

As Freire has written, it is important for teachers to recognize the usefulness, rationale, and functionality of “*I be*” if they are ever to teach students to say, instead, “I am.” Freire draws on the simple contrast between these two
forms (I be versus I am) to illustrate the powerful symbolic differences between home language and school language: Without being recognized as competent speakers of the language they learned before school, students may not be able to make connections between the depth of their childhood language socialization and the new language they are learning in the classroom. Drawing connections between the two provides openings for deeper learning in the classroom and beyond. An individual who has a command of both “I be” and “I am” has a greater communicative repertoire and the resources to participate more broadly in the world than someone who can only use one or the other.

By conceiving of learning as an interactive process, through which learners gain the use of tools necessary to participate in their multiple social worlds, expanding their communicative repertoire, discourse analysis illuminates the form and the functionality of language inside and outside the classroom: Students are not only learning new content but they are also necessarily and simultaneously learning new ways of speaking and participating—they are learning about the multifunctionality of language and adding to their individual communicative repertoire. With command of multiple ways of speaking, students learn how to function more competently in a range of social contexts. In addition, they would be able to distinguish when the use of “I be” is part of a shared repertoire, and when it would indicate “incorrect” language use (see chart).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Language Form</th>
<th>Context of Use</th>
<th>Function</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. I be “I be happy”</td>
<td>1a. At home</td>
<td>1a. Correct way to express an ongoing state (“I am a happy person”)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1b. On standardized test</td>
<td>1b. Incorrect—indicates lack of standard grammatical knowledge.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. I am “I am a happy person”</td>
<td>2a. On standardized test</td>
<td>2a. Correct—indicates standard grammatical knowledge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2b. At home</td>
<td>2b. Incorrect—indicates lack of knowledge of home language.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As this chart indicates, what counts as functional or “correct” is dependent on the context of its use. Even though, in the context of a standardized assessment, “I am a happy person” might be considered the grammatically correct way to express an ongoing state of happiness, in the more informal context of a conversation at home, using “I am a happy person” rather than “I be happy” to express an ongoing state of happiness could be “incorrect”—in the sense that it would be interpersonally odd.

But this point is not only about the forms “I be” and “I am.” Nor is it only about African American English. Classroom discourse analysis can bring teachers’ and students’ attention to the different contexts in which words are used and the corresponding functionality of our language. Taking note of different kinds of classroom language and constructing form/context/function charts like this one (teachers and students can do this together) could be an
exercise that accomplishes the Freirean goal alluded to earlier: As teachers and students learn about and document the multifunctionality of language and its dependence on social contexts, they become empowered as capable interlocutors in multiple social worlds.

**Characteristics of the Speaker**

Characteristics of the speaker are another aspect of context that influences how one’s repertoire functions. For example, it often seems to be the case that when the rich and famous use colorful language it is profound, but when the lowly use the same language it is offensive. Sometimes the relevant context for understanding language includes the race, gender, features of the appearance, or the reputation of the person speaking. Unfortunately, sometimes people use these superficial features as a context for understanding what a person is saying. It is unlikely people would pass negative judgments on a white middle-class professor who knowingly used nonstandard forms like especially for especially or Pacific for specific, or if she jokingly proclaimed, “Say it ain’t so!” However, in many situations, cases in which the speaker is nonwhite, speaks a regional variety of English, is young, is old, has long hair, has short hair, dresses differently (you name the superficial cue), individuals have far less license with their language. An ain’t or an especially in these cases may be read as a sign of ignorance or lack of education. Those who pass such judgments are often unaware of the way a person’s superficial features are shaping the interpretation of someone’s language.

In a classroom full of children this kind of misunderstanding may have profound effects on future learning. Remember, for example, the “problem” child, George, mentioned in Chapter 1. He was also an African American child, considered by many to be a troublemaker. He had been singled out as a candidate for special education pull-out services (Souto-Manning, 2008). When he claimed the study of farm and zoo animals was “boring,” he could easily have been interpreted as being insubordinate. His teacher could have claimed he did not understand. She could have suggested he be tested for special services, or moved to the resource room that day. Fortunately, because his teacher recognized that he, like all students, would have some substantial contributions to make in her classroom, she did not prejudge him based on his looks or reputation. Instead she continued to talk to George about why he did not want to study farm and zoo animals, and what he did want to learn. Rather than letting superficial features influence her interpretation of how his language was functioning, she chose to draw him out and learn what he knew and what he was capable of learning.

Unfortunately, while some interrupting and talkative children are considered bright and curious, others are considered disruptive and less intelligent. So, “this is boring” when uttered by an Anglo child may be an emblem of giftedness; when uttered by an African American child, it may be considered an emblem of a problem learner (see the next table). The same sorts of duality
of judgment occur when children make reading errors. The linguistic anthropologist James Collins has shown through classroom discourse analysis that children in high reading groups can make small sounding-out errors (reading miscues) while reading aloud and continue reading the story, but children in low reading groups are repeatedly interrupted and corrected by their teachers (Collins, 1996). Similarly, the reading researcher Richard Allington (1980) has shown that children in high reading groups are asked questions about the meaning of a text, while students in the low reading group are asked questions about how to say a word. An important step in refraining from such premature judgment (and avoiding their consequences) is to pay attention to how context is shaping the interpretations we make of students’ words. As discourse analysts, teachers can make charts, like this one, and reflect on whether the same words function differently simply because they were said by someone who looks different or has come into the classroom prejudged as a certain kind of learner.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Language Form</th>
<th>Context of Use (who said it)</th>
<th>Function</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. This is boring</td>
<td>1a. African American 6-year-old</td>
<td>1a. Indicator of a problem child</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1b. Anglo 6-year-old</td>
<td>1b. Indicator of giftedness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. A reading miscue</td>
<td>2a. Student in the high reading group</td>
<td>2a. Simple error, not needing correction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2b. Student in the low reading group</td>
<td>2b. Indicator of lack of phonemic awareness or a pronunciation problem, cause for correction</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Speaker, Context, and “Appropriateness”**

Let’s push this discussion of social context and communicative repertoire one more step forward. We began this section by discussing Danny’s self-correction from “train dudes” to “train people” and suggesting that he has internalized the idea that it is not “appropriate” for him to use the word *dudes* in a classroom context. Next, I revisited George, who had criticized the class theme as too juvenile. As these examples suggest, race can have an effect on how teachers interpret and hear students’ words and whether we deem them appropriate or not. In their article *Undoing Appropriateness: Racial Linguistic Ideologies and Language Diversity in Education* (2015), Nelson Flores and Jonathan Rosa discuss how race and categorical descriptions of language like African American English also influence what gets counted as appropriate in class—and what teachers hear. What seems like “appropriate” or “academic English” for a white, English-speaking student may not seem appropriate, even when the exact same forms are used, from an African American or Spanish/English bilingual student. Race may predispose teachers to hear language differently. Once we
name something African American English, however well-meaning, we can start hearing the word *dude* as African American English when it comes from a black child, but as Standard English when it comes from a white child. Flores and Rosa suggest an alternative stance: Rather than naming entire types of language academic English or African American English and thus appropriate or not appropriate for certain contexts, we need to work toward “denaturalizing” such categories. A repertoire approach to classroom discourse analysis moves in this direction: Looking closely at talk in classrooms provides the first step to understanding in detail and thinking critically about how learning and classroom engagement, rather than what types of speaking count as academic or appropriate.

**Gender Expectations**

Like race, language background, or institutionally endowed categories like gifted, gender can also impact the way we hear our students and how we then treat them; even small differences between how we react to girls and boys can dramatically change their educational trajectories. From the perspective of a classroom discourse analyst, normative gender expectations are often reproduced, if not largely created, through talk. What boys and girls do and say in classrooms is often interpreted against a gender normative backdrop, and there can be substantial consequences in the direction a child’s learning takes. For example, in one pre-K classroom that I have observed many times, girls are frequently the only ones at the art center (a table with drawing and painting materials). Boys are spread around, usually very busy at many different centers, but rarely putting crayon to paper. Since these art activities are good practice for the writing children will be doing in kindergarten, I mentioned I had noticed these differences to the lead teacher. She chuckled, “That’s pretty typical. Boys just do not like to draw. They usually come around in kindergarten when they have no choice!”

This teacher’s response provides some insight into the social construction of gender expectations, even the stereotype that girls are better at the humanities and boys at the sciences. What boy would gravitate toward drawing and writing in later grades, when all he associates with these activities is being forced to do them? But as a teacher, trying to combat the momentum of this gendered role expectation is difficult. There is even research that further suggests boys’ early preference not to color has *biological* roots: Developmental research suggests that boys do not develop fine motor skills as early as girls. Girls are much more able to draw at an earlier age (Eaton & Enns, 1986; Martin, Wisenbaker, & Hitunen, 1997). So it makes sense that no boy would want to sit at a table of girls who are drawing much better than he is. In many cases, gross motor activities like running might be more desirable for boys, and fine motor activities like drawing may be more desirable for girls. But need these general differences be compounded in how classroom activities are structured?
While boys may be minimally represented at the preschool art table, other studies have shown that girls are minimally represented in classroom talk across the school years (Best, 1983). Ben Rampton found, in his study of high school classrooms in England, for example, that boys were focal classroom participants as well as the highest achievers. Boys were playful, even exuberant, participants in class discussions. They cracked jokes, made fun of each other, and played with the teacher’s language. In this case, these rambunctious boys earned the highest grades in the class. Girls didn’t participate in this banter and, perhaps as a result, did not identify with school or value classroom participation. Moreover, because of the way boys teased them during class discussions, girls were reluctant to participate, as one student described:

If I say something, the boys they’ll take they’ll start saying “oh what’re you saying that for” and start on you and laugh at you if you answer this question and it’s wrong and like the girls ain’t got much confidence I don’t think.

(Rampton, 2006, p. 64)

Rampton’s research echoes a tradition of classroom observation that indicates that girls’ voices are silenced in the classroom (e.g., Best, 1983). However, such observations—be it boys’ exclusion from the art table or girls’ exclusion from class discussion—do not necessarily reflect what biologically or socially must be but rather what developmental psychologists or social scientists have described as being there. This is a chicken–egg situation: If we accept “boys cannot draw when they are four” or “girls are excluded from class discussion” as a truth, it will become true. A child’s gender (rather than his or her potential) will become a feature that teachers, parents, and peers will use to judge what they do, how well they do it, and what they are able to do in the future.

The repertoire approach provides teachers a way to study children as individuals without interpreting developmental continua as universal or biologically determined and without taking other studies of children’s interaction as determinate of what will happen in their own classroom. This is because a repertoire approach recognizes the interaction between context, speaker characteristics, and language in use. No speaker is programmed, robot-like, to do gender-normative behaviors at all times. In different contexts, different kinds of behaviors emerge. So, a shy girl in the classroom context may be witty and talkative on the playground. A boy who dislikes art at school may be a talented and renowned graffiti muralist in his neighborhood. What’s more, once girls and boys and their teachers are aware of how identity is shaped through talk and relative to context, they potentially can make choices about the kinds of identities they want to promote or display in the classroom. A girl can be not only a “girl” or a boy a “boy” in the classroom; instead, an infinite number of identities can be constructed through talk and interaction.
One of the first steps a classroom discourse analyst can take in addressing the number of identities available to girls and boys is to observe students’ interactions in multiple contexts. For example, in contrast to psychological research characterizing girls as “relational” rather than “hierarchical” (Gilligan, 1982), the linguistic anthropologist Marjorie Goodwin has shown that girls can be master debaters on the street (1990) and vociferous sticklers for the rules during playground hopscotch games (2002). These days, Internet-based social media offer another medium through which both boys and girls manage their social and often their academic demands. By recording and reflecting on talk in multiple contexts in this way, teachers can also reflect on gender norms and how they are affecting discourse in their own classroom.

Overdetermination

Just as students evoke teachers’ expectations simply by being boys or girls, so too do words themselves bring vivid histories along with them, making us react to them in ways that sometimes seem beyond our control. Consider this story about language in church: One Sunday morning a preacher stood up and began his sermon by shouting, “Shit!” Everyone was aghast. Then he explained: “It sure is a sad commentary on our society that good church people would be more upset by a 4-letter word shouted from the pulpit than they are about children dying every day from starvation.” Why weren’t the good people in front of him enraged by real offenses?

This story illustrates how specific words in our language come with baggage—baggage that can distract us from the human beings behind words. The term overdetermination, coined by Louis Althusser (1971), a philosopher of language, is a term for the effects of social histories on what words mean. Swearwords (as illustrated by that preacher) are prime examples of overdetermined words. Over its interactional history, the word shit has been subject to the effect of other social structures and practices that change who can use it, what it will mean, and under what circumstances. Some single words are so powerfully overdetermined that they may even be legally designated as hate speech that can lead to violence. The N-word, for example, can be used in a highly degrading way to refer to African Americans in the United States. I would never write that word in this book, or use it, even among close friends, because it is layered with social histories that I have little control over and do not fully understand.

But the function of more innocuous words in the classroom can also be overdetermined. For example, why did David think that dude was a worse word than people? Why is dude not a good word for a second grader to use to describe a picture? Like the N-word, it is possible that the meaning of dude is not only situated in its immediate context, but also functionally overdetermined by its own history of use. Unlike swear words, the word dude probably will not offend anyone directly, but it may do more indirect damage to the speaker, depending on how it is interpreted. The word dudes is often more casual sounding than
people and, therefore, in many school contexts may not be appropriate. Using it on a formal essay exam could give the impression that a student does not know more formal forms of expression.

In sum, single words can cause serious emotional injury to others. Single words can also give lasting impressions about their speakers. Therefore, in classrooms, recognizing and, in some cases, talking explicitly about the overdetermined nature of many words or ways of speaking can be helpful. Children are often not familiar with the same social histories of words that adults are, nor are second language learners. And when people cross any social boundary, as most teachers and students do every day when they enter their classrooms, they will meet words and ways of speaking that are overdetermined in ways they may not be familiar with. In practice, any new user of a language (including any new dialect), that is, any student in our classrooms, will likely make some social blunders. Teachers can poll students on which words are painfully overdetermined for them (stupid, fatso) and discuss those words. And teachers can talk to students about words or ways of speaking that give poor first impressions academically (dude, homey). Even technical language (like the word gravity discussed in the next section) may need to be demystified by teachers so that their overdetermined social histories do not skew classroom discourse in favor of a certain minority of students who already know these words. Awareness of how words function in different contexts, again, gives teachers and students more control over how even the most loaded words affect classroom discourse.

The Second Dimension: Interactional Context

Up until now, we have been referring primarily to social context and examining how it influences discourse. We have included in social context the world outside the classroom, the history of interactions inside and outside the classroom, the context of the classroom itself, different activity contexts within the classroom, and broad social categories like race and gender. As discussed earlier, where people say something, what they look like, where they live, and their social history all potentially affect how discourse functions. James Gee, a linguistic and discourse analyst, refers to these aspects influencing language function as “big D Discourse” effects.

In any interaction, however, broad social categories are only as relevant as speakers make them. Therefore, another crucial dimension of classroom discourse is interactional context. Gee refers to the influences of interactional context on language function as “little d discourse” effects. In big-D terms, gender has social ramifications; for example, women are still expected to be primary caregivers or responsible for childcare, as evidenced by the fact that
many employers expect women, but not men, to take leave when there is a newborn in the family. Despite big-D discourse norms like this, however, in little-d discourse terms, individuals potentially renegotiate gender norms in each interaction; for example, a man who talks about his newborn and childcare issues with his colleagues may be refiguring what it means to be male in today’s workplace. Similarly, in classroom discourse, the ramifications of being male or female, gifted or special, a good kid or a troublemaker are determined not only by big-D discourses about these categories but also by everyday sequences of interaction, or little-d discourse. This section is concerned with analyzing classroom discourse at this little-d level.

**Predictable Interactional Context: Adjacency Pairs**

Much of what we say every day to students and how students answer back is predictable (“Good morning class!” “Good morning!”). Without this kind of predictability, it would be difficult to conduct class at all—or a simple conversation, for that matter. The field of conversation analysis focuses on the study of this predictability embedded in any interaction. One of the primary tools driving interaction, from this perspective, is the **adjacency pair**, a two-part interactional sequence in which the first part (e.g., a question) produces the expectation for the second part (e.g., an answer). Admittedly, this is an obvious feature of discourse. But, perhaps because of its obviousness, it is easy to ignore how powerful the force of an adjacency pair can be in interaction; if one person says something, another must respond. Even if an addressee does not respond, their silence indicates some kind of response, simply because they have been addressed. For example, imagine a teacher greeting a student cheerfully and being met by silence:

**Teacher:** Good morning, John!

**John:** ((walks silently to his desk))

Immediately, the teacher might be wondering what is bothering John. Is he sick? Is he tired? Does he have a hearing problem? Does he speak English? Should he be tested? Much early language socialization involves learning to respond appropriately to these sequences; when students do not respond in expected ways, we assume there is a reason.

Expectations for adjacency pairs are part of an individual’s communicative repertoire. Because people who share a certain social background have internalized the unspoken rules of adjacency pairs, many responses are very predictable across individuals. Some typical adjacency pairs in English in the United States are: Greeting/Greeting; Question/Answer; Invitation/Acceptance; Assessment/Disagreement; Apology/Acceptance; Summons/Acknowledgment. All of these take place in classrooms day after day in predictable ways (see table).
Typical Adjacency Pairs in Classroom Discourse

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Adjacency Pair Type</th>
<th>Example</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Greeting/Greeting      | Teacher: Good morning!  
                        | Students: Good morning!                                                 |
| Question/Answer        | Teacher: Is today Friday?  
                        | Student: Yes!                                                          |
| Invitation/Acceptance  | Teacher: Would you like to read next?  
                        | Student: Sure.                                                         |
| Assessment/Disagreement| Teacher: This is a beautiful short story.  
                        | Student: I thought it was creepy, actually.                             |
| Apology/Acceptance     | Student: I’m sorry I’m late.  
                        | Teacher: That’s okay—we started late today anyway.                      |
| Summons/Acknowledgment | Teacher: John?  
                        | John: Yes?                                                             |

While these adjacency pairs are probably intuitively obvious to readers of this book, individuals’ repertoires may vary in understandings and expectations for these routines. When students’ responses counter our expectations, we need to think on our feet—it is not always easy to change the momentum of expectations set up by the first part of an adjacency pair.

**Unpredictable Interactional Context: Foiled Expectations**

Many teachers design and redesign lessons precisely because their expectations for the second part of an adjacency pair sequence have been foiled. One of the most common conundrums teachers face is silence. How teachers interpret these silences and respond to them differs in different classroom environments. In traditional classrooms, for example, silence is often interpreted as an absence of knowledge, as in the following hypothetical sequence:

**Teacher:** What’s the capital of Portugal?

**Students:** ((silence))

Here, students’ silence suggests they do not know the correct answer. In nontraditional classrooms, however, silence is interpreted as thinking time. Waiting through a silence can give students who ordinarily do not contribute a chance to become participants (Gallas, 1995; Johnstone, 2004). These nontraditional classrooms are founded on an understanding that while much of interaction is predictable, there is also a great deal that is not predictable—and as teachers we need to be ready to wait through those silences or unexpected answers to discover what our students know that we could never have predicted.
This approach has been the cornerstone of Karen Gallas’s approach to analyzing discourse in her own classroom. As a teacher-researcher who routinely analyzes classroom discourse with her primary school students, Gallas has spent years thinking about and changing the way she starts science discussions in her classroom. One method she developed to stimulate students’ natural curiosity about science was to have students suggest discussion-initiating questions (Gallas, 1995, 1997). Students originally came up with questions like the following:

- What is gravity?
- How do plants grow?
- Why do leaves change color?
- Where do dreams come from?

These were questions the children all agreed they were interested in exploring during science time. However, Gallas found, in practice, discussions that began with these questions consistently led to silence on the part of a predictable group of students.

When the science questions her students posed weren’t generating the kinds of inclusive discussions Gallas had hoped for, she began to look closely at the interactional effects of certain questions. After trial and error—and much recording and discussing of science talks—Gallas found that there were better ways to frame the initiating questions. For example, the question, “What is gravity?” worked better as “Why, when you jump, do you come down?” “Where do dreams come from?” worked better as “How do dreams get into our heads?” (Gallas, 1995, p. 95). What is the difference here? Gallas found that questions that used overdetermined science terminology (like gravity) invited talk from students who were already familiar with those terms, but excluded students who did not have this familiarity. Even though the question was originally offered up by students, it functioned more like a known-answer question in a traditional classroom:

**Question:** What is gravity?

**Students:** ((silence))

When this question was reframed as a question about everyday ordinary experience, rather than one that implied previous knowledge of science terminology, more students participated.

Why then did a question like “Where do dreams come from?” fail? It does not contain any science terminology or presuppose science knowledge. Instead, Gallas found, the problem was in the abstract nature of the question. When she rephrased it using a personal pronoun (“How do dreams get into OUR heads?”), students were able to reference their own experience of dreams in their responses rather than abstract generalizations about dreaming
phenomena. As Gallas comments, “it seemed as if every child was invited to contribute his or her personal idea” (1995, p. 95).

Creating New Interactional Context: Interactional Contingency

Gallas’s science discussions illustrate that carefully considering the kinds of questions we ask can facilitate learning. In addition, how teachers respond to silences or unexpected answers can change how those answers function as the discourse continues. This ever-present potential for interaction to reshape the meaning of preceding individual utterances is called interactional contingency. How one person’s words function is always contingent on what happens subsequently in talk. In the following interaction, recorded in a second-grade reading group, Danny gives a lengthy response to the teacher’s question, but the teacher’s subsequent response suggests what he has said is irrelevant:

**Teacher:** Do men wear a lot of hats now?

**Danny:** Some don’t. The train dudes—the train people wear they wear these like, big old things that—and somebody better put on some um things for um there little thing cause they hurt their ears ((pointing into his ears)) because, the noise is come in the air and—

**Teacher:** But do men, do a lot of men wear hats now?

In this case, the teacher sequentially deletes (Ford, 1993) Danny’s response. That is, by re-asking her question about hats after Danny has already provided a lengthy answer, she constructs his response as nonexistent. This tendency to ignore what seem to be digressions can have unfortunate consequences in classroom discourse. In the case of the hats discussion, it led to Danny’s silence for the rest of the session.

Admittedly, it takes careful interactional negotiation to sequentially construct unexpected or confusing student responses as contributions that are potentially leading somewhere important. This is where classroom discourse analysis can be helpful. For example, in another science discussion in Gallas’s classroom—about how babies are able to grow in the womb—one student offers up an initially unexpected answer:

**Germaine:** It’s just like caterpillars.

**Teacher:** Go ahead.

**Germaine:** It’s just like caterpillars when they grow. They turn into butterflies. You know how butterflies grow? It makes more sense if the baby grows like butterflies.

Rather than dismissing Germaine’s comparison of babies growing to caterpillars as inaccurate or off-topic, Gallas reflects on her own response
Dimensions of Discourse and Identity

to Germaine’s answer. She writes about it: “I did not completely follow Germaine’s thinking, but I had a hunch that it made sense, and I asked if anyone could help expand the idea” (Gallas, 1995, p. 86). By waiting to see how Germaine’s idea unfolds in discussion, Gallas retroactively constructs his response as important. She also projects a future in which Germaine will continue contributing to discussion.

Teachers face interactional contingencies like this every day in classroom discourse and struggle with how to treat such departures. In traditional classrooms, more so than in conversation, there is the tendency to stick to the expected script. In inquiry classrooms, like Gallas’s, however, there is interactional space for students to consider and think about developing interaction and for the teacher to mull over apparent departures. How could this unexpected statement become a tool for thinking and learning? Gallas developed this ability to use such departures productively over years of recording and reflecting on discourse in her classroom. As Gallas writes, after having the breakthrough in which she reframed the science talk questions:

After 5 years of watching Science Talks, I was able to see from the development of this class as talkers that even the phrasing of a question, whether asked by an adult or a child, can silence (and thereby exclude) some children.

(1995, p. 95)

While Gallas has also tackled big-D issues like gender in the classroom, in this case classroom discourse analysis, and in particular analysis of little-d discourse involving sequences of questions and answers, gradually helped her to open up discussion so that everyone engaged in more productive talk.

The Third Dimension: Individual Agency

As the last two sections have emphasized, interactional context and social context play major roles in shaping classroom interaction. Students come to our classrooms with social and interactional histories that shape the way they hear us and the way they interact. On top of that, most classroom teachers in the United States are pressured by federal and state mandates to teach only in certain ways, to use only certain languages, to test only certain skills and ideas—or else. These social and interactional contexts are powerful, shaping dimensions of classroom discourse. But how do we change social or interactional contexts we feel are problematic? This section addresses
how teachers can use discourse analysis to gain greater control of classroom interaction.

As relationship experts advise, “you cannot change other people; all you can do is change the way you react to them.” This may be an apt approach for teachers as classroom discourse analysts too. In any set of social relations, we need to focus our energies on what we can control instead of battling forces and people we cannot. No matter how frustrated we are by mandated reading curriculum (or science, or math, etc.), we are often stuck with those textbooks for an entire year. No matter how much we want people to answer a question in a particular way, we cannot force them to produce that answer. No matter how much we want to control how our words are interpreted, people may hear them differently from what we intend.

This does not mean we are powerless as individual teachers. While day to day we may not be able to change the textbooks we use, the social histories of the people in our classroom, or the kinds of expectations people bring to interactions, we can change how we react to these contexts. Understanding the multiple dimensions of classroom talk can be a first step to gaining personal agency—and beginning to focus more on how we understand and react to administrators or our students and less on changing them. Understanding how powerful our discourse is in creating who we are, how we are understood, and how we understand our students is a lesson we can pass on to students as well.

**Do We Have Agency?**

By individual agency, I mean personal control, the ability to act in ways that produce desired outcomes or contribute to our own personal goals and projects. Having personal control seems straightforward enough. But, as we have discussed, social and interactional contexts control us far more than we usually notice. When you feel yourself cringing at the word *dude* on an essay, or a profane word shouted from the pulpit, how much of your response is your own, how much is dictated by society? In those interactions, social context seems to be in control. When someone asks, “How was your day?” at the dinner table and you blurt out “Fine!” even though your day was miserable, how much of your response is actually driven by interactional habit? The interactional context seems to be in control. However, just as social and interactional contexts affect our language in use, our language in use affects social and interactional contexts and how much we choose to have them influence classroom talk (see the diagram at the beginning of this section). The greater our awareness of these contextual dimensions, the greater force our individual agency can take in shaping the role these contexts play in classroom interaction.

**Augmented Agency Through Awareness of Social Context**

As discussed earlier, when people say something, what they look like, where they live, and their social history all affect how discourse functions. Sometimes the ways we read these cues become so much a part of our interactions that
we do not notice how they shape what we say and do. But the more aware we become of how we read features of social context when we listen to our students, the better able we are to choose which aspects of social context influence our classroom interactions. Often this is simply a matter of conducting interactions based on our own expectations for students, rather than society’s expectations. Think of these three scenarios:

**Scenario 1:** George (remember him from Chapter 1?) came to first grade with a bad reputation, already heading toward special education classes. His teacher faced a choice about how to listen to him—with the ears of the school context, which had already heard him as disruptive, or with the ears of her own perspective that all children have valuable contributions to make in her classroom. She chose to listen to him as a child with potential, and as a child who had the potential to reshape her curriculum. As a result the entire class engaged in an inquiry project about reptiles and amphibians in addition to the rudimentary curricular mandate of “Farm and Zoo Animals” (Souto-Manning, 2008).

**Scenario 2:** Chavo entered AP English his junior year and consistently earned mediocre grades. At first, his teacher used superficial features to explain it away: “He’s not a literature person.” In many ways, he was not. He spent much more of his time after school practicing for sports than doing schoolwork. However, at the end of the school year, he had the opportunity to infuse his interests into his final humanities project. Each student selected a contemporary thinker, artist, and activist and illustrated through a multimedia presentation how these figures have contributed to culture. Chavo’s project illustrated how Jerry Colangelo (an American sports mogul), Michael Jordan (a professional basketball player), and Chris Berman (a sportscaster) have contributed to the U.S. cultural reverence for sport. His project won the contest for best end-of-the-year humanities project. Fortunately, his teacher provided him an opportunity to be challenged and to illustrate the depth of his thinking, despite her initial impression of him as “not a literature person” (Young, 2004).

**Scenario 3:** Germaine was a quiet first grader in Karen Gallas’s classroom who initially struggled to make himself understood and “showed little interest in science work.” He also lacked many of the experiences the other children had as resources upon which to build scientific understandings. As students gave examples, he continuously ran up against his own limited experience: He had never been to the seashore, he’d never had a pet, he didn’t know that homemade bread has holes in it. However, by carefully controlling the format of science talks, initiating them with students’ genuine questions, and constructing an interactional environment in which students could voice their own theories—by creating a space for “correct and incorrect thinking”—Gallas bolstered Germaine’s interest in science, and his influence over scientific thinking
in the classroom grew. His curiosity was contagious. Often he contributed outrageous statements, like the following:

[The sun] coulda started in a box, or in a square shape.
[Babies grow] just like caterpillars.

He also began to spontaneously offer up more science questions, throughout the school day:

Why is grass green?
How is glass made?
How did the sun get that round shape?
How do butterflies grow when they’re in that cocoon thing?

Rather than stifle these comments or questions by offering more correct scientific narratives or approved scientific lines of inquiry, Gallas looked on as Germaine’s contributions not only fostered his own natural scientific curiosity but also brought other quiet children more fully into science talks.

Each of these scenarios exemplifies a teacher who is acting counter to interactional norms that students brought with them from previous social contexts or histories of classroom interactions. These teachers refused to let normative expectations created by social context exclusively control their classroom discourse. George’s teacher heard his statement “this is boring” apart from the context of the school, which had begun to label him a problem child. Sam’s teacher heard his request to create a literary, sports-based humanities presentation apart from the context of his status as “not a literature person.” Germaine’s teacher constructed an interactional environment in which his natural curiosities were translated into identification with scientific inquiry. Each of these teachers built on an awareness and deliberate rejection of how social context had been shaping their students’ identities. This awareness gave them the tools they needed to exercise personal agency and alter the learning outcomes for students in their classrooms.

Augmented Agency Through Awareness of Interactional Context

Sometimes those same features of discourse that seem to diminish our agency can, through our awareness, become tools that augment our agency. Because the teachers in the three scenarios just mentioned were aware of how social context influences talk and interpretation, they were able to choose to use or ignore features of social context. In the same way, while some features of interactional context seem to take away our personal agency—as when the power of an adjacency pair seems to force us to say we are “fine”—when brought to awareness, the force of adjacency pairs (and other predictable features of interaction) can be used as powerful tools in service of our classroom goals.
Using adjacency pairs mindfully means training ourselves to be aware of the effects in at least three ways: (1) by being aware of how we craft our first pair parts; (2) by being aware of how our expectations can prevent us from listening carefully to whatever response we get; and (3) by creating an environment in which we, as teachers, are not the only participants starting new classroom conversational sequences.

By carefully choosing a first part of the adjacency pair, teachers have tremendous power to shape what comes next and how students participate in classroom talk. As discussed in the previous section, Karen Gallas illustrated that by using science questions that originate with students and carefully phrasing them, participation in science talks grew and scientific curiosity flourished in her classroom. Similarly, in their book on Kidwatching (2002), Gretchen Owocki and Yetta Goodman illustrate how to carefully design first pair parts when responding to students’ work: There is an important difference between providing simple evaluative statements and providing questions that lead to more involved accounting. They provide these examples of praise statements that do not probe for more:

**Teacher:** I liked your demonstration.

or

**Teacher:** You listened well today.

or

**Teacher:** Your pictures are great.

Well-placed praise is good, but response to this kind of complement is usually only a perfunctory acknowledgment of some kind—maybe mild acceptance or, out of modesty, shy disagreement. As Owocki and Goodman point out, alternative forms of praise can turn complements like these into thought-provoking questions (2002, p. 52):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>I liked your demonstration.</th>
<th>. . . could be . . .</th>
<th>What kind of practice did it take to get ready for this demonstration?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>You listened well today.</td>
<td>. . . could be . . .</td>
<td>You seemed very interested today. What caught your interest?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Your pictures are great.</td>
<td>. . . could be . . .</td>
<td>Your pictures helped me enjoy your story. How did you think to include the little anchor?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

These alternative follow-up questions are an even greater compliment—because they tell students we expect them to keep talking and thinking. By consistently providing first pair parts like these that probe for thoughtful
responses, teachers can support students' development far more than through simple statements like "great picture!" that require only automatic replies like "thanks."

Asking thought-provoking questions, however, is only the beginning (or, in our new terms, only the first pair part of the adjacency pair). Mindfulness of interactional context also requires awareness of our expectations for certain responses, and being able to get past those expectations so that we can listen to all answers—especially those that do not conform to our expectations. In other words, certain students may provide answers that don't fit our own communicative repertoire. But, through mindful listening, we can begin to expand our communicative repertoire, building our capacity to hear and meaningfully interact with more of the class.

Listening to the unexpected also means carefully considering what silence means. How, for example, can we learn about the communicative repertoire of a student who always replies to even our most carefully crafted questions with silence? One way is to listen to that student when we are not asking questions and to take note of the contexts and kind of talk this child feels most comfortable producing. Germaine's teacher, in the example, found that listening to Germaine's questions that came up spontaneously throughout the day (not during official "science" time) provided insight into his communicative repertoire, including the kinds of questions he liked to ask. Later, allowing the class to explore these questions provided a point of repertoire overlap to help Germaine notice his own scientific ways of thinking. Once we have found interactional contexts in which students feel comfortable talking, we can also listen for the kind of questions or other first pair parts that get that student talking, thinking, reading, and writing. For Karen Gallas, this involved using as discussion starters questions that developed from students' own day-to-day curiosities, which were often voiced outside of science time. For other teachers, bringing students into interaction might start with an oblique comment about current events, a sports score, or a "wondering out loud" stance rather than a direct question. In any case, by analyzing our own communicative repertoire and that of our students, we can explore the effects of different kinds of first pair parts, rather than assuming a student is deficient (didn't do homework, is not a good writer, is not a literature person, can't speak English, etc.) for not responding.

While it is important to provide thought-provoking questions and to listen to unexpected curiosities and unlikely answers, as Gallas's work on science talks illustrates, it may be most important, for the life of our classrooms, to ensure that students are also asking the questions. Sometimes, expectations for how classes are run, for who does the asking, and who holds the knowledge, inadvertently exclude students from the learning process. To help students learn, teachers must provide opportunities for students to develop their own curiosities. The only way teachers find a project for the jock who is "not a literature type," inspiration for someone with little scientific experience outside the classroom, or a challenge for the bored "problem student," is by creating an
environment in which these students’ talk is taken up as important by both the teacher and other students. Often this means, for a teacher, learning engaging with an unfamiliar repertoire.

Ironically, developing individual agency as a teacher often means letting students do the talking, providing the opportunities for students to ask questions and provide each other with answers. By analyzing classroom discourse, it becomes possible to see which interactional contexts are facilitating student talk and making connections between ideas—and which are not—and to make changes accordingly. With a perspective on productive and unproductive sequences gained through a close look at talk in our classrooms, our institutional power as teachers can be harnessed to support our individual goals for students’ learning.

Agency and Identity

By learning about communicative repertoire and, through classroom discourse analysis, becoming aware of the effects of social and interactional contexts on how people understand each other’s repertoires, we can begin to harness agency in shaping classroom learning. This necessarily involves shaping the identities students have in classrooms. The framework developed in this chapter develops two paradoxically connected ideas: (1) each individual has a unique communicative repertoire, but (2) each individual’s identity is contingent on the way that repertoire communicates to others. Individual identity then, is fundamentally a product of social interactions. Consistent with this perspective, James Gee defines an identity simply as the kind of person someone is in a given situation. This “in a given situation” is an important add-on. Students in school may have very different identities in the lunchroom or on the bus than they do in reading groups. Even the problem child may be an “angel” in another class. As teachers, the language we choose, and the way we choose to understand the language used by our students, significantly shapes what “kinds of people” (clown, overachiever, troublemaker, jock) show up in our classroom. And, in turn, the different identities students take up in our classrooms can lead to very different kinds of learning.

New student identities, then, are by definition constructed through talk. Classroom discourse analysis—examining when our students speak, how we respond to them—provides a tool for considering our role in constructing identities for them: Interpreting a seeming non sequitur in the classroom as disruptive begins to construct the identity of that student as a disruptive student. Creating an interactional environment in which students draw connections between each other’s questions and theories (as Germaine’s teacher did) begins to construct a student’s identity as a creative, interesting, and thoughtful learner. As teachers aware of social and interactional contexts and their effects on language, classroom discourse analysts can use and listen to language carefully to collaboratively construct those creative, interesting, and thoughtful learners.
Putting It All Together: A Three-Dimensional Classroom Portrait

Having agency, running the show, and constructing bright and effective classrooms are all very appealing. But here comes the realistic refrain: The meaning and function of classroom discourse is built from social and interactional contexts as well as individual agency. Imagine each of these dimensions as gears in a classroom discourse machine (see Figure 2.2). Each gear pulls the others along, and no gear can move without affecting the others. Often it is difficult to know which gear is doing the most work. We would hope, in some situations, our own individual agency gear could drive the discourse machine. At times, however, the social context gear takes over. We may find ourselves at the mercy of a system that treats our knowledge and accomplishments as meaningless. Sometimes, no matter what we try to say to change the course of an interaction, our conversation moves in an unpleasant or unproductive direction.

This metaphor is rather more mechanistic than actual discourse is in the classroom. However, it illustrates that each of the dimensions of discourse contributes to its functionality. Also, being aware of the machinery of discourse potentially enables some tinkering with it, making adjustments without having to go to an outside authority or presumed expert who might be less familiar with the nuances of our own particular classroom discourse machine.

This tinkering could also be called reflective practice, a primary goal of classroom discourse analysis. Analyzing the intersecting levels of social context, interactional context, and individual agency aims to improve future classroom interactions and ultimately positively affect social outcomes in contexts beyond the classroom. To see what this tinkering looks like in practice,
the next two chapters will take readers through the steps to becoming a classroom discourse analyst: Recording real classroom interaction, viewing that interaction and making preliminary observations, transcribing the talk and action, and analyzing how social and interactional contexts as well as individual agency affect the direction classroom discourse takes.

Questions and Activities

Critical Reflection

1. Compare the effects of the words *dude* and *gravity* as discussed in this chapter. Are they both part of your repertoire? Are they both part of an average 6-year-old’s repertoire? How does their presence in students’ repertoires reflect social and interactional dimensions of language?

2. Write down examples of these typical adjacency pairs as they occur during a day in the life of your classroom: Greeting/Greeting; Question/Answer; Invitation/Acceptance; Assessment/Disagreement; Apology/Acceptance; Summons/Acknowledgment. Do these occur the same way in different students’ repertoires? What are some unexpected responses you have heard? What would happen if you or your students responded differently than usual? How could you use your adjacency pairs to change how classroom discourse proceeds?

3. How diverse and flexible is your communicative repertoire in the classroom? Consider these questions to get you started: Do you use multiple languages? Do you ever use profanity? Do you tell jokes? How do you use social media or the Internet? How do you address students (nicknames? formal titles?) and how do you have them address you? Compare your own repertoire flexibility with a peer’s.

4. What is an overdetermined word used in your classroom or school? Describe the contexts in which it is okay or not okay to use that word. For example, in many schools the word *bottom* is used frequently, as in “sit on your bottom.” However, the word *butt* would be considered offensive. What does this mean? Why is *butt* so much worse than *bottom*? Could you try talking about overdetermined words with your students?

Reflective Activities

1. Consider the following transcript from a kindergarten class learning Spanish (gathered by a graduate student, Megan Doyle). The Spanish teacher has just finished introducing a new song which prompts the children to say “*Cómo se dice?*” in Spanish, which translates to “How do you say it?” She and the students practiced the song using different words for body parts, like hand and foot. Despite indicating that this practice activity was over and the class would be moving on to using the song to describe objects around the room, the Spanish teacher and the regular
kindergarten teacher hear Dylan say that he hasn’t gone yet and allow him a turn at choosing a body part.

_Dylan:_ ((raising hand)) Wait I haven’t gone yet.
_Span. Tchr.: _((to D)) Do you want to, okay.
_Kndr. Tchr.: _Alright, Dylan.
_Span. Tchr.: _Alright, Dylan.
_Kndr. Tchr.: _What body part?
_Dylan:_ U::hhh, your butt.
_Students:_ ((laughter))
_Span. Tchr.: _O:h pompas.
_Students:_ ((laughter))
_Span. Tchr.: _My bottom ((smiling))
_Kndr. Tchr.: _((to Dylan)) That’s not really a nice word in school.

Think about how certain words in this interaction are overdetermined. How is the word _butt_ functioning as part of Dylan’s repertoire? How is _las pompas_ functioning? How do the two different teachers respond differently? What are the implications of this type of language use in kindergarten? For the children’s expanding communicative repertoires?

Consider the following transcript from a pre-K classroom (gathered by a graduate student, Hajra Kayani). The student teacher (Std. Tchr.) begins a discussion of “leadership” with a general question, which is then reframed by the classroom teacher (Clsrm. Tchr):

_Std. Tchr.:_ Okay kids. Can anyone tell me what does it take to be a good leader?

((silence and confused looks for 0.4 seconds))

_Clsrm. Tchr.:_ When you want others to follow you, you have to be a good leader, so what qualities should you have? Who is a good leader?

_Muhammed:_ A leader needs to be short.

_Clsrm. Tchr.:_ So, Muhammed, why do you think a leader needs to be short?

_Muhammed:_ Because short people stand in front of the line and I get the first turn yesterday.

_Clsrm. Tchr.:_ Muhammed, that was just a rule for deciding who gets the first turn, but you are right that you were first to lead the activity yesterday, which made you a leader, and Muhammed did a wonderful job as a leader. Muhammed, tell our Student Teacher what did you do as a leader yesterday.
Dimensions of Discourse and Identity

Muhammed: I make orders.
Asai: A leader is honest.

3. Compare this to the science discussions Karen Gallas created in her classroom (discussed in this chapter). How does this teacher reframe the question to foster student engagement in the conversation? What different meanings of “leader” are in play here? How does the teacher incorporate Muhammed’s interpretation of “leader” into the more conceptual discussion?

4. Spend a day or two paying attention to certain repeated or habitual language as it is used around you. Write down your examples in a chart like this:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Language Form</th>
<th>Contexts of Use (who said it, where, and when)</th>
<th>Function</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Example: “Good morning!”</td>
<td>1a. Spoken by teacher, as first student enters classroom</td>
<td>1a. Greeting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1b. Spoken by teacher after the bell has rung and students are still talking among themselves, a bit disruptively</td>
<td>1b. A bid for students to stop talking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1c. Spoken by teacher to student who seems to be dozing off in class</td>
<td>1c. An alarm to get student to wake up</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>2a.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2b.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2c.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>3a.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3b.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3c.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Use the “a-b-c” sections to record multiple contexts in which the same form is used to different effect. What forms do you hear repeatedly at your school? How does their function change according to context?

5. Between classes, or before the school day begins, observe students as they pass your classroom door. Are there certain language forms that you hear repeatedly? What are they? Write them down. Then listen to how they are functioning. Do students use these forms in your classroom? Why or why not?

6. Record one class session of your own teaching in which you are asking students questions, then go back and view it. How do you respond to students’ answers? Do you notice that you respond to certain students’ answers differently than others? Are you interpreting the function of some
students’ words differently? How is social context shaping your interpretations? How is interactional context shaping your interpretations?

Suggestions for Further Reading


Note

1 These nongrammatical meanings are not necessarily part of Whorf’s original specification of covert grammatical categories. However, they are in the spirit of Whorf’s writings on the tacit understandings behind everyday language use.