

Navigating Collaboration: A Multimodal Analysis of Turn-Taking in Co-teaching

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In a number of educational contexts, it is common for two or more teachers to *co-teach*, or collaborate on-site together in a classroom. Despite the popularity of this arrangement, the body of discourse-analytic literature on co-teaching remains small. A good number of the studies that have been done have analyzed the *participation structures* of the collaborative interaction, examining the nuanced ways the teachers participate in and adhere to various aspects of turn-taking protocols while teaching (Bloome, Carter, Christian, Otto & Shuart-Faris, 2005). In the English as a foreign language (EFL) classroom, where a native English-speaking teacher and a local English teacher co-teach, a handful of studies (e.g., Butterfield & Bhatta, 2015; Lee, 2016; Luo, 2013) have looked at how two instructors navigate the well-known Initiation-Response-Feedback (IRF) sequence. This work has shown that the collaboration can add both complexity and versatility to the ways IRF unfolds. Other work looking at interaction between novice teachers paired with expert cooperating teachers (e.g., Roth, Tobin, Carambo and Dalland, 2005) has revealed that two instructors can make use of spatial resources to facilitate more seamless turn-taking.

Nearly all prior discourse-based work on co-teaching considers teacher pairs in the *hierarchical* co-teaching paradigm (Johnson, Musial, Hall, Gollnick, & Dupuis, 2005), where the instructors have distinct roles. Studies on the *collegial* arrangement (Johnson et al., 2005), where co-teachers share equal roles, are notably rare. In an effort to contribute to the work on co-teacher interaction and, more specifically, to an understanding of the virtually unexplored collegial co-teaching context, this paper will examine turn-taking in a classroom in which two teachers share the same role. In particular, I use a conversation analytic lens to examine two instances in which one instructor ends up with the floor to do an extended telling. The analysis will demonstrate how both verbal and nonverbal resources are used to facilitate turn-taking and enhance primary speakership in this collaborative interaction.

The data come from a graduate-level course on Discourse Analysis. The participants are co-teachers Caitlyn (C) and Sandra (S) and their 24 students (Ss). Of the various co-teaching models, this pair consistently operates in what Friend and Cook (1996) identify as the “team teaching” model of co-teaching, meaning they are generally both “on” and participating in instruction at all times.

Prior to Extract 1, Caitlyn and Sandra have been working jointly to explain various “housekeeping” topics. They are both standing in the “Instructor Space,” which denotes the area at the front of this classroom where the two spend most of their time while teaching. We join them as they move from “housekeeping” into the academic content, a discussion of philosopher of language Paul Grice’s Maxims.

Extract 1: Grice's Maxims

- 01 S: ((gazing at students, in Instructor Space, standing between chalkboard and table))
 02: C: ((gazing at screen, in Instructor Space, leaning against chalkboard))
 03 so what we'd like to do is {((gestures to screen))-finish up with Grice}=
 04 S: ((gazes at screen))
 05 C: =((gazes at students))-because you [know you can=]
 06 S: [((gazes at students))]
 07 C: =\$finish up with Grice in [two >class sessions<\$-((smiles))=]
 08 S: ={{(smiles, gazes at students, [snapping hand gesture))-}\$°like that°\$}}
 09 C: heh heh ((gazes at students)) (.)
 10 {((gazing at screen))-HH and then [we'll move o:n to:=] }
 11 S: [((gazes at screen))]
 12 C: [=the really] {((gazing at students))-I thought both,} (.)
 13 S: [((gazes at C))]
 14 quite different and yet both compelling (.)
 15 articles for today. ((gazes at screen))
 16 S: °mhmm°-((gazes at students, nods))
 17 C: °alright°
 18 (0.2)
 19 S: alright {((circular hand gestures around head, gazing at students))-so Grice.}
 20 C: ((gazes at S))
 21 S: →you all ready {((steps forward toward table))-to kind of (.)}
 22 →[{{(picking up bag on table)}-[shift] our] brai::ns into}}
 23 C: →[{{(steps forward, 'framing face' gesture))-[\$shift frame.\$] }}
 24 S: {((sets bag on chair to the side))-Grice (.) mo:de?}
 25 ((centers teaching notes on table))
 26 (0.5)
 27 C: →[((reordering papers on front table))]
 28 S: [we started to talk about some of the:: (.)]
 29 {((gazing at students, circular gestures in front of face))-cross-cultural questions?}
 30 that Grice [might (.) um]bring into focus? but-
 31 C: → [((adjusts chair))] ((moves to side of Instructor Space))
 32 S: last week and[>I wanna continue< that] but before we go the:re, (.)
 33 C: → [((sits))]
 34 ((gazes at S))
 35 S: {((body positioned over notes))-let's just go over the maxims.}



Figure 1 (lines 07-08)



Figure 2 (lines 27-28)



Figure 3 (lines 34-35)

Both instructors do work to explicate and even embody the topic shift. Caitlyn announces the new subject in line 03 and does a two-handed gesture framing her face on “shift frame” (line 23). Sandra joins her in joking about the feasibility of “finishing up” Grice quickly (lines 05-09). As much as they collaborate to execute the transition, however, the instructors’ actions begin to contrast as the extract goes on. At line 19, Sandra becomes decidedly engaged with the students, gazing at them as she talks while enacting “thinking” with hand movements around her head. Moving forward in the Instructor Space (line 21) and removing her large bag from the table (line 24), Sandra eliminates some distance and a physical obstruction between herself and her student audience. By line 35, we find her positioned intently over her teaching notes on the table as she eases into an extended telling about Grice’s Maxims.

While her co-teacher is verbally and nonverbally “gearing up” to teach, Caitlyn’s actions have her “wrapping up.” After her “shift frame” comment in line 23, Caitlyn stops contributing to the teacher talk. She quietly reorders her papers on the table into a neat pile in line 27. Then, she moves to the side, pulls a chair at the table’s edge slightly closer to the Instructor Space, and sits. By line 34, she is seated and gazing quietly and attentively up her co-teacher as Sandra launches into the Maxims. Figures 1-3 show the change in the co-teachers’ physical positions over the course of Extract 1.

On the one hand, we see here how the exchange of the floor around Sandra’s extended telling is largely achieved through conventional turn-taking systematics outlined by Sacks, Schegloff and Jefferson (1974) — Caitlyn’s silence after line 23 leaves the floor open for Sandra to step in and start the new topic. While this is relevant to an understanding of how co-teachers navigate turn-taking during instruction, it is their nonverbal behavior that is more striking. Goodwin (2000, 2007) notes that, in functioning as visual places of mutual orientation between participants, nonverbal elements of interaction (e.g., participant location, body posture, objects in the surrounds) work in tandem with verbal features in creating meaning and action. On one level, this applies to the way nonverbal behavior embodies and highlights the topic shift that is being conveyed verbally. On a more intriguing level, this applies to the visual hierarchy that results between the two teachers. Caitlyn removes herself from the Instructor Space, fostering a temporary likeness of a single-teacher classroom. Moreover, her posture and gaze by the end of the extract are similar to that of the students in the room as she is seated, silent, and gazing at the speaking teacher. Meanwhile, Sandra’s body movements, adjustments of objects near her, and animated gestures as she begins the academic talk are clearly aligned with her role as teacher. Juxtaposed, each co-teacher’s string of actions works to highlight Sandra’s primary speakership as she moves into her extended telling, thereby underscoring the importance of the impending event — the discussion of Grice.

Where the first instance takes place during what was likely a planned shift from the “housekeeping” topic into material on the syllabus for that day, the next example appears to be an unplanned extended telling. Prior to this instance, the class has been talking about Speech Act Theory. Caitlyn and Sandra are standing in the Instructor Space, and they have been working jointly to explain “felicity conditions,” things that must be true for a statement to actually “do” something in the world.

Extract 2: Mock Wedding

- 01 C: ((drinking out of her bottle, gazing at screen))
02 S: ((gazing at class))
03 and {((gesturing with hands in circles))-those are the felicity conditions}
04 ((beat gestures))-{for that statement, } (.)
05 to:: make somebody married. }
06 C: ((puts down drink))
07 ST1: for bequeath >would it be:=<
08 S: ((gazes at ST1))
09 C: ((gazes at ST1, picks up keyboard, walks toward screen))
10 ST1: =like I bequeath my car, (0.2)
11 I don't know if this is: wrong,
12 but would the condition be that you have a car.
13 S: ((gazing at ST1, nods))
14 m↑hmm ((gazes at C))
15 C: ((gazing at ST1, nods))
16 ↑yeah I mean, ((gazes at screen))-well that- that wouldn't be
17 necessarily f- the felicity condition would be that (.)
18 you put it in some sort of document that would be
19 considered ↑legal,=
20 S: ((gazes from C to ST1))
21 ((12 lines omitted))
22 cuz it happened to my stepmother?
23 \$um she: >before she met my< father,
24 apparently got- had a lot to drink one night,
25 and had a mock wedd↑ing with somebody? (.)
26 Ss HEHEHEHE
27 S: → ((blinks, quickly leans upper body in toward C))
28 C: where there was no::-
29 S: → ((quickly turns away from C, steps toward chair at the side))
30 C: ((turns to S)) ((gestures to her))-[{↑\$you never ↑knew this }] did you,\$
31 S: → [((sitting, gazes quickly at C))]-\$noho:::\$
32 Ss HEHEHE
33 C: {((facing S, smiling))-it was in the Philadelphia Daily News\$ back in like
34 nineteen seventy three or seventy four,}
35 ((faces students)) my Dad brings home like the new girlfriend.
36 it's like ↑o::h her, okay,
37 → ((steps forward, puts keyboard down, facing students))
38 u:m she::- she had- I guess one night with whoever
39 her ((wide arm gestures))-↑partner ((gazes at S))- was
40 had said ((gazes at students))-marriage vows in ((gazes at S))-front of
41 people, but there was ((gazes at students))-no::
42 ((gazes at S))-minister present.



Figure 4 lines 12-13



Figure 5 line 27



Figure 6 lines 30-31



Figure 7 line 39

In lines 02-05, Sandra concludes an explanation of the felicity conditions of the statement “I do” in the context of a wedding. A student self-selects in line 07 to test out her understanding of the conditions for another example on the Power Point, “I bequeath my cars to my daughter and her wife.” Both instructors provide evaluation of the student’s comments. Sandra’s “mhhh” and nod in lines 13-14 gives positive feedback. Caitlyn also gives an affirmative nod and a token “yeah” before initiating a more detailed response, pointing out the fact that a legal document (a will) is actually the relevant condition this case. In the omitted talk, Caitlyn remarks that sometimes it is unclear whether felicity conditions have been met. She then brings up the personal family anecdote of a mock wedding (lines 22-25) to provide an example. The mention of pseudo-nuptials taking place during a night of drunken festivities incites laughter from the students and apparent surprise from Sandra, who blinks her eyes and suddenly leans forward toward Caitlyn in line 27.

At line 29, Sandra begins a series of nonverbal actions that abruptly changes the visual dynamic of the co-teachers (see Figures 4-7 below). As Caitlyn moves to continue the anecdote in line 28, Sandra suddenly turns away from her and steps toward a chair at the side of the Instructor Space. As she sits in line 31, she turns her head very quickly to reestablish her attention on Caitlyn. Upon seeing Sandra’s dramatic reaction, Caitlyn cuts herself off to recognize in a dyadic sidebar that her longtime colleague is about to hear a new story. Sandra, now off-screen, amusedly confirms her unfamiliarity with the mock wedding tale in line 31, prompting laughter from all. Caitlyn then launches back into the story.

That Caitlyn ends up with the floor and the space to do a story-telling event is unsurprising. The student’s question warrants some elucidation, and Sandra’s gaze (line 14) and lack of an attempt to take the floor herself implicitly put the onus on Caitlyn to handle it. These interactional features, like the coordinated performance we saw earlier during the co-constructed transition into Grice, are merely indicative of how these two gracefully manage the floor as they work jointly during instruction. What is again remarkable is the physical manner in which Sandra orients to the unanticipated story-telling event. The mock wedding story event arises organically in response to a student inquiry and Caitlyn’s seemingly impromptu decision to use a personal anecdote to illuminate some of the murkier aspects of felicity conditions. The nonverbal behavior on Sandra’s part that results in her sitting is therefore categorically unplanned. Nevertheless, when Sandra whisks herself away from the teaching area to sit quietly to the side, there is a comparable effect to the first instance. Once again, a visual hierarchy between the co-teachers is created, clearly demarcating one as the primary speaker. Caitlyn embraces this role wholeheartedly. First, she puts the keyboard down on the table (line 37), hinting at a slight detour from the academic talk. Then, using gaze and animated nonverbal behavior to engage her audience (lines 39-42), she tells the story of her stepmother’s mock wedding, which famously resulted in a legal battle when the groom considered the felicity conditions to have been met since vows and cohabitation were involved.

On a more basic level, these two instances show that the conversational floor around extended tellings in this co-teaching context is, to a great extent, managed by conventional turn-taking systematics. While a seemingly mundane observation, this is important to note since the “both on” collegial co-teaching arrangement creates added complexities and relevant turn-taking challenges the instructors must continually navigate.

Something more impressive about these instances, however, is illuminated when we widen the lens. In one of the rare studies that looks at co-teacher interaction in a collegial arrangement, Wassell (2005) found that, even without a predefined distinction in teaching roles, co-teachers may consciously or unconsciously enact a systematic “division of labor” that, in turn, “foster[s] a particular structural arrangement” (Wassell, 2005, p. 121) in the interaction. While the data reveal few overt distinctions between Caitlyn and Sandra in terms of what and how they teach, the instances presented here reflect one of them. Throughout the data, Sandra takes principle responsibility for explaining Grice whenever it is part of a lesson, and Caitlyn even cites Sandra’s superior “expertise” on this topic elsewhere in the data on multiple occasions. Distinctly, Caitlyn often employs humorous and entertaining anecdotes from her life or pop culture to facilitate understanding of complex topics. With this in mind, the visual hierarchy the co-teachers unconsciously create in these examples is noteworthy in the way it corresponds to one of the few distinctions between them — that one is the “Grice expert” and the other is the “story-teller.” This becomes a more powerful observation when we note that it is uncommon in the data for one teacher to sit, particularly in the middle of the other’s extended telling like we see in the second example.

This analysis has shown that while floor exchange around extended tellings in this context is accomplished primarily through conventional turn-taking devices, nonverbal behavior that co-teachers display *relative to each other* during these transitions can become an important meaning-making resource. Here, we see the teachers exploit nonverbal resources to establish a temporary distinction between them, which serves to implicitly highlight one of them at that moment. While this behavior is largely unconscious, how it plays out as the co-teachers step into these smaller roles in the interaction is relevant to an understanding of how collaboration in this context is both a complex and multimodal affair.

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