Language Learning in the Wild

Thanks to
Soren W. Eskildsen
Teresa Caderno
Guðrún Thóðórsdóttir
Brendon Clark
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Gudrun Theodórsdóttir
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Søren W. Eskildsen

Teresa Cadierno

Gudrun Theodórsdóttir

Brendon Clark


Some ethnomethodological reflections

Over the last decades, our understanding of language learning has moved from an inner state perspective (Burr) to a sociological understanding (Garfinkel). Does this move have consequences for how we envision second language learning and teaching?

Harold Garfinkel

Language is a tool for social action.
Language is a sense-making capacity.
Semiotic resources: embodied behavior and linguistically packaged social actions.
Interaction is foundational to social life.
It is the primordial site of sociality.
Learning behavior is socially displayed and observable.

Social organization comes out of accidental actions — which may become the way to do this action and eventually a social fact. So, action is before meaning and explanation.
Social action is in principle unexplainable, but self-organizing.
It is the sense given to actions post-factum which lingers on.

For language: this means that words when they are spoken are not just the property of the speaker, but the speaker has to figure out the sense which is given to them in situ.
For learning: this means that it is embedded in the mundane practical activities in which speakers engage.
Speakers do primarily whatever they do as social action, secondarily they can take this as a learning environment.
Newcomers move from overhearing to appropriating semiotic resources through use. This can take a long time.
Learning a language is the process of creating one's own social biography.
Over the last decades, our understanding of (language) learning has moved from an inner state cognitive theory to a sociological understanding.

Does this move have consequences for how we envision second language learning and teaching?

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*Harold Garfinkel*

...there is no reason to look under the skull since nothing of interest is to be found there but brains. (Garfinkel, 1963: 190)
Language is a tool for social action.

Language is a sense-making capacity.

Semiotic resources: embodied behavior and linguistically packaged social actions.

Interaction is foundational to social life. It is the primordial site of sociality.

Learning behavior is socially displayed and observable.
Social organization comes out of accidental actions – which then may become the way to do this action and eventually a social fact. So, action is before meaning and explanation.

Social action is in principle unplanable, but self-organizing.

It is the sense given to actions post factum which lingers on.
For language this means that words when they are spoken are no longer the property of the speaker, but the speaker has to figure out the sense which is given to them in situ.

For learning this means that it is embedded in the mundane practical activities in which speakers engage. Speakers do primarily whatever they do as social action, secondarily they can take this as a learning environment.

Newcomers move from overhearing to appropriating semiotic resources through use. This can take a long time!

Learning a language is the process of creating one’s own social biography.
For the record: Usage Based Linguistics

Language structure emerges from language use in particular contexts:

Language learning is exemplar-based. From recurring multi-word expressions (MWEs) to increasingly schematic representation.

Language derives from repeated use of related particular and concrete linguistic utterances in “similar” situations.

Linguistic knowledge consists of the memories of all of the utterances in a learner’s entire history of language use and the frequency-biased abstraction of regularities within them. (Ellis)
User-driven Design

Interaction Design

Experience Design
Interaction Design

Experience Design

ID works closely with users. ID is not the work of an inspired artist but design is a process in which users are involved or. In the Scandinavian tradition the design process is driven by users. ID works with material artifacts, tangible materials in the design process. Among these are tinkering activities, sketches, paper prototypes, mock-ups etc.
Usability Goals
Effective to use
Efficient to use
Safe to use
Having good utility
Easy to learn
Easy to remember

Fields
User Driven Innovation
Interaction Design
Experience Design

Process
Establishing requirements
Designing alternatives
Prototyping
Evaluating

Design Principles
Visibility
Feedback
Constraints
Consistency
Affordance
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The basic model

The Classroom

Activity Cards

Facebook/Web Cloud

The Village

Icelandic Village Posters & Leaflets

Photograph & Record

Practice Cafe

Tangible technologies: passport, the cube

Recording technologies: mobile phones, recorders, notebooks

Digital technologies: web, apps, Facebook, Cloud

Talking
Personal Learning Environment

Cloud sharing
The acquisiton of 'under'

25.10.2001
Extract 1 TEA repairs 'under' in CAR's picture description. Teacher's embodied vocabulary teaching

29.10.2001
Extract 2 CAR responds to the teacher's elicitation Teacher's embodied vocabulary teaching

1.11.2001
Extract 3 CAR uses 'under' as a spatial descriptor in group work

5.11.2001
Extract 4 CAR uses 'under' to compensate for the missing word 'basement' touched off teacher vocabulary teaching

5.11.2001
Extract 5 CAR uses 'under' to compensate for the missing word 'basement' touched off teacher vocabulary teaching

11.1.2002
Extract 6 CAR uses 'under' in a joke Teacher asks 'where is' questions

01 TEA: and now number five (1.0) where does he look?
02 CAR: he’s looking down the table
03 AND: he’s ( ) at=
04 MAR: la::h:: eh () eh s- ( 
05 AND: =the table>
06 MAR: = )
07 (0.3)
08 TEA: uhh
09 MAR: left hand still, palm up; moves right under left hand
10 TEA: in sweeping movement
11 MAR: Lunder mh*m
12 MAR: *nods
13 TEA: unde:*;r>
14 MAR: *repeats gesture
15 TEA: unde::r=
16 MAR: *under
17 TEA: *repeats gesture slowly
18 MOD: he looks under the table
19 TEA: he looks under the table
19 TEA: good* ( .) yes* okay how about number six
20 TEA: *points at MOD
01 THU:   eh under
02 TEA:   unde: r
03 THU:   l° under° (.) unde: de
04 AND:   l un::
05 TEA:   under° (.) put your glasses under the table Modesto
Lines omitted
08 TEA:   under
09     (0.7)
10 TEA:  "put your glasses-
11 UNI:  l xxx
12 MAR:  "put (.) "put
         *puts l. hand down, hand slightly bent
13 TEA:  l put your glasses-
14 CAR:  l put your glasses *ah under l the table
         *stretches arm forward, palm open, moves hand slightly back and forth
15 TEA:  
16 CAR:  your glasses
17 GAB:  l glasses
18 AND:  l your glasses
19 TEA:  under the table *under-
         *knocks under table
20 MOD:  holds glasses under the table
21 TEA:  =very good

01 TEA: whe::re i:s (0.4) a:::h (0.4) the washing machi::ne
(2)
03 TEA: in ye- in your apartment,
04 TEA: where is the washing machine→
05 UNI: ehm hh eh hh hh hhe
(0.7)
06 UNI: e:a hhm hhm
07 UNI: hehn→ is in *under my pa-

*Carlos repeats “under”-gesture, r. hand under desk
08 CAR: no→ ba::sement
09 TEA: °'ts° in::: the °base(.) ment° →
11 UNI: [in the basement]
12 CAR: 'n the base[ment]
13 TEA: [yeah ]


01 TEA: where’s °olivia
01 TEA: where’s olivia
02 OLI: ( )
03 TEA: where’s andres
04 CAR: shifts position *she:
        begins pointing backwards
05 TEA: where’s alexander
        begins shifting gaze towards Carlos, then points at him
06 CAR: still pointing backwards is sit n:
        she is where
        behind*
        *abandons pointing gesture
07 TEA: huh
08 CAR: she: (1.2) she is
09 TEA: she is* uhuh
10 CAR: sit "behind"
11 TEA: behind yeah
12 CAR: un- *under the table
        *gestures; extends and swings arm slightly forward, open upward palm
13 TEA: under the tahheble hah hah
14 OLI: no: talks in spanish
15 TEA: where are you
16 CAR: un- *under the table
17 TEA: under the tahheble hah hah
18 MUL: hah hah hah
19 TEA: okay
Extract 2 from MN 20120419 Kushman

The interaction is in the wild.

1. EN: "Excuse me, do you sell hot pantas? I like cappuccinos."
   DE: "Entschuldigen Sie bitte, gibt es hier Kaffee?
   Ich möchte einen Cappuccino.

2. EN: "Small.
   DE: "Gleich?
   Ich möchte einen Cappuccino.

3. EN: "I'll have a small.
   DE: "Ja, ich möchte eine kleine Größen.

4. EN: "What size?"
   DE: "Was für eine Größe?"

5. EN: "Small or double?"
   DE: "Klein oder verdoppelt?

   DE: "Klein, bitte."

7. EN: "Does she get what she wants?"
   DE: "Die bekommt es?

8. EN: "Yes.
   DE: "Ja."

9. EN: "Größte!
   DE: "Größe!"

10. EN: "Größte!
     DE: "Größe!

11. EN: "(0.6)
     DE: "(0.6)

12. EN: "Double.
     DE: "Doppel.

13. EN: "(0.5)
     DE: "(0.5)

14. EN: "(Half) had it.
     DE: "(Halb) hatte es.

     DE: "Einfach.

     DE: "(Halb) einfach Jak.

17. EN: "(1.2)
     DE: "(1.2)

18. EN: "(Four hundred and sixty-eight francs)"
     DE: "(Vierhundertsechsundachtzig Franken)

19. EN: "(4.3)
     DE: "(4.3)

     DE: "Kassengeräusch, Klang der Münzen.

21. EN: "Here you go.
     DE: "Hier geht's Ihnen.
The interaction in the wild

1  SHL: "daginn" u::h ég ætla að panta:: lítinn: cappuccino
    morning uh I intend to order a small cappuccino
2  Bar: lítinn cappuchino
    small
3    (0.5)
4  She: "*já*"
    yes
5    (3.5)
6  Bar: single or double
    (0.3)
8  Bar: espresso
    (0.3)
10 SHL: U::hm ↓já
    yes.
11  (0.6)
12 Bar: double
    0.5
14 SHL: U::h ☕ nei ↓takk.
    No thanks
15 Bar: [single]
16 Bar: (that) single já
17  (1.2)
18 Bar: "fjögur hundruð sjótíu og ↑fimm"  
    four hundred seventy and five
20  (6.3)
21  (2.3) sound of cash register, sound of coins
22 Bar: ??gjörðu svo vel??  
    here you go
• Bring learners into contact with the language environment.
• Use the language environment for usage practices.
• Use daily life routines as model for teaching.
• Model daily life routines.
• Redesign the wild.
• Reflect the social issues.
• Center on users' social needs.
• Create social anchorpoints.
• Share and bring back.
Observations on debriefing

- Even very mundane interactions in the wild are challenging! Students complain about being unprepared.
- The trouble seems to be the insertion sequence itself. Procedure of cappuccino production.

- Remembering is unsecure.
- The recording is in many respect new data for the participants.
- Listening to data – and even to recognize a language – can be very challenging.

- The trouble travels from the original interaction into the debriefing
- Debriefing is time consuming but helps understanding the world.