

# The dynamic and contingent nature of language-learning tasks: An empirical study of learners of French and English

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# Task-design & Task-implementation

- **Tasks are not performed identically** (Coughlin & Duff, 1994; Harris, 2005)
- **Tasks foster unplanned learning** (Eckerth, 2008)
- **Research has begun to explore interactional mechanisms that constitute tasks** (Mondada & Pekarek Doehler, 2004; Mori, 2002; Seedhouse, 2005)

# Methods from Conversation Analysis to understand task

- Ethnomethodological Conversation Analysis
  - Language is locally organized in interaction  
(Drew, 2005)
- What language practices do participants use to co-construct their task interactions?
- How do learning potentials emerge from turn-by-turn collaboration in tasks?

# Learning as process

- Learning is ‘built in’ to interactional processes (Hellermann, 2008; Kasper, 2008)
  - ‘Members’ hold one another accountable to maintain progressivity of interaction (Garfinkel, 1967)
- Interaction is improvisatory (Erickson, 1982) and learning can be seen in adaptations to contingencies in task interactions

# Our goals today

- Show some co-constructed methods for dealing with the contingencies inherent in tasks
  - Co-construction of transitions into directions-giving tasks
  - Recipient design
  - Use of language, gesture, gaze, text for organizing task interaction
- Data from work in progress

# Data

- Non-elicited data from classrooms
- 2 similar tasks (directions giving)
- Different settings
  - U.S. adult learners of English
    - Beginners
    - Teacher-supplied dialogue frame
  - Switzerland: German L1 teenagers learning French
    - Intermediate level
    - No language frame provided

# Data set 1

- **Beginning adult learners of English** (Reder, Harris, & Setzler, 2003)
- **Dyadic task interactions in classroom**
  - Directions-giving task with script

‘Andrea’ and ‘Jorge’



# Materials for the task

- The model dialogue written on the board and on students' worksheets:

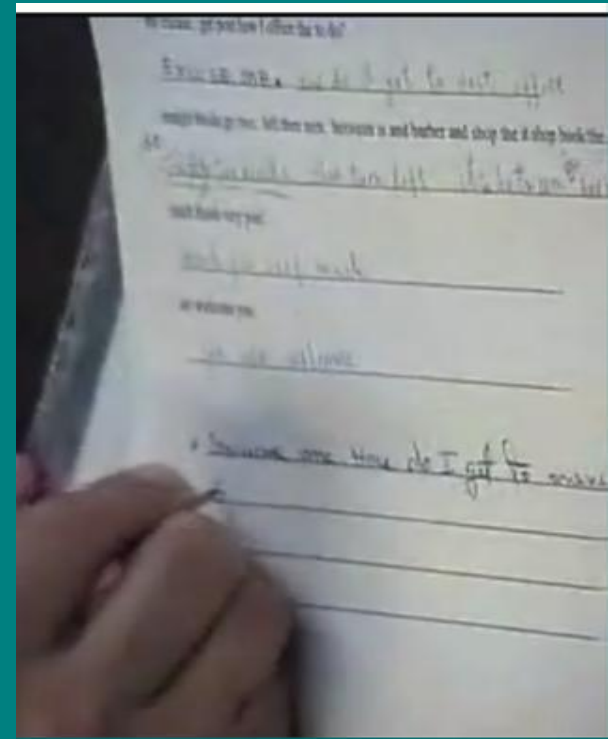
*A: Excuse me. How do I get to the post office?*

*B: Go straight two blocks. Then turn left. It is between the barbershop and the book shop.*

*A: Thank you very much.*

*B: You're welcome.*

student worksheet →



# Task outcome for Andrea and Jorge

- Brainstorming local place
- Devising new instructions
- Crafting a written dialogue



# Co-construction of transition into the task

40 Te: °okay°

41 A: O santo dios. no tengo ( ) para poner ( )  
*Oh my holy God, I don't have ( ) to use.*

42 (6) ((A is writing first line of dialogue))

43 A: ¿Qué hay cerca de aquí? ((writing))  
*What is near here?*

44 (3)

45 J: ((raises right hand index finger, 'thinking face'))

46 °( ) La tienda, la tienda, el hotel. No sé.°  
*( ) The store, the store, the hotel. I don't know.*

**41: Andrea orients to the task as difficult**

**42: writes the first line of dialogue**

**43: invites collaboration/brainstorming**

# Co-construction of transition into the task

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41 A: O santo dios. no tengo ( ) para poner ( )  
*Oh my holy God, I don't have ( ) to use.*

42 (6) ((A is writing first line of dialogue))

43 A: ¿Qué hay cerca de aquí? ((writing))  
*What is near here?*

44 (3)

45 J: ((raises right hand index finger, 'thinking face'))

46 °( ) La tienda, la tienda, el hotel. No sé.°  
*( ) The store, the store, the hotel. I don't know.*

45: J displays a thinking stance

46: J lists some generic 'places' as he thinks

# Co-construction of transition into the task

77 A: L( ) no son como  
( ) *it's like around*

78 quince cal(h)les ((laughs))  
*15 streets*

79 (.5)

80 A: ¿Algo más cerca?  
*Something closer?*

81 J: L( )

82 J: No, está bien.=está bien. ( ) para practicar.  
*No, it's ok. It's ok. ( ) for practice.*

83 A: \$pues le digo que tome el bus\$  
*Well, I'll tell him to take the bus*

84 J: ((laughs))

85 A: ((laughs))

86 J: No está mal. Está bien.  
*It's not bad. It's ok.*

77 & 80: A  
comments on  
distance to  
destination

83: A jokes about  
suggesting taking  
the bus

86: Jorge  
proposes it is a  
good suggestion

## Co-construction of the task

100 A: Ok. A ver, ¿cómo le dirías entonces?  
*Ok. Let's see. How would you say it then?*

101 J: Bueno.  
*Ok.*

102 A: Take the bus. Toma el camión derecho.  
*Take the bus straight.*

103 J: Go. Take the bus.

**100:** discourse marker to mark start of task

**100:** question about formulating directions with bus

**102:** candidate directions and Spanish version

# Co-construction of the task

108 A: Toma el camión para el centro.    ¿Cómo se dice Take the  
      *Take the bus downtown.*                    *How do you say*

109        bus?

110 J: Take the bus and the take the bus take the bus no take  
111        the bus go go to downtown the Portland to downtown  
112        Portland tómate el camión y vas al centro de Portland  
              *Take the bus and go to downtown Portland.*

113        take the bus and the take the bus take the bus no take the  
114        bus go go to downtown the Portland

115 A: Entonces take the bus to downtown  
      *Then,*

**113-114: J offers a candidate phrase for directions**  
**115: A reformulates to something more succinct**

# Summary for English data

- Display of uptake of teacher instructions
- Mutual posture alignment
- collaboratively co-constructing possible destinations in the area
- Use of Spanish for this planning
- Focus on finding real places in the area as destinations for the task as instructed by the teacher
- Not speaking through or performing the dialogue
  - task becomes an exercise to craft a written routine for asking and giving directions via bus, which the teacher did not model in this lesson

# Data set 2

- More advanced learners
  - Intermediate learners of French in Switzerland
- Different orientations to the task by participants in the same interaction

# Data set 2

- Video recordings
- Lower secondary school, intermediate learners of French
- task interaction in class
  - Give a tourist directions to local landmarks



# Instructions for the task

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## Dialogue

You are in Basel at the Market-square. A charming lady asks you about how to get to

- d) Market-square – Cathedral
- e) Cathedral – the Basel Fair
- f) The Basel Fair – St. Jakob

Each of you provides the itinerary to go to one of these places and tells the lady what there is to see

Time: 15 minutes for preparing and rehearsing the dialogue

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# Task outcome for Peter, Hugo, and Thobias

- Mutual alignment to task during transition
- Different orientations to meaningfulness of the task during performance

## Co-construction of transition into the task

- 53 Ugo: [ich nimm 'f' \*eh?  
I'll take 'f' ((referring to the letter ,f'))  
(ugo) \*poits at Peter's instruction sheet
- 54 Tho: ja=jo, (.) denn nimm i:ch 'e' (.)\*'D' (.) (°meini i°).  
yeah well then I'll take 'e' 'd' I mean  
(tho) \*points at his instruction sheet
- 55 Tho?: >°(das da)°<  
this one
- 56 Tho: =\*wo isch 'd'? (isch das xneimedsexx)  
where is 'd' (is this xsomewherexx)  
(tho) \*bends over map, puts his hand on map with index extended as if searching

53-54: Hugo and Thobias complete the selection of task itineraries

56: Thobias attempts to locate his destination ('d') on a map.

## Co-construction of the task

```
56 Tho: =*wo isch 'd'? (isch das xneimedxxx)
        where is 'd' (is this xsomewherexx)
        (tho) *bends over map, puts his hand on map with index extended as if searching

57 Pet: *xxxxxxxxxxx h. ((laughing))
        (pet) *leaning over map and gesticulating

58 (.)

59 Tho: eh VOUS LAUFE JETZ *DO [DURE?
        uh you go now this way
        *deictic gesture'', indicating path

60 Ugo: [(vous allez) pren/e/ le tram, (.)
        you go take the tram
```

59: Thobias' first formulation of the task; deictic shift to imagined context

60: Hugo co-constructs the phrase using French

## alternative version of 'task'

57 Pet: \*xxxxxxxxxxx h. ((laughing))  
(pet) *\*leaning over map and gesticulating*

58 (.)

59 Tho: eh VOUS LAUFE JETZ \*DO [DURE?  
uh you go now this way  
*\*deictic gesture'', indicating path*

60 Ugo: [(vous allez) pren/e/ le tram, (.)  
you go take the tram

61 [eh: (x)

62 Pet: [(vous allez) pren/e/ le tram(h).((laughing))  
you go take the tram

63 (sie gehen nehmen) das t(h)ram. ((laughing, to Ugo))  
you go take the tram

59: Thobias' first formulation of the task; deictic shift to imagined context

60: Hugo co-constructs the phrase using French

## alternative version of 'task'

```
57 Pet: *xxxxxxxxxxx h. ((laughing))  
      (pet) *leaning over map and gesticulating  
  
58  (.)  
  
59 Tho: eh VOUS LAUFE JETZ *DO [DURE?  
      uh you go now this way  
      *deictic gesture'', indicating path  
  
60 Ugo: [(vous allez) pren/e/ le tram, (.)  
      you go take the tram  
  
61 [eh: (x)  
  
62 Pet: [(vous allez) pren/e/ le tram(h).((laughing))  
      you go take the tram  
  
63 (sie gehen nehmen) das t(h)ram. ((laughing, to Ugo))  
      you go take the tram
```

57: Peter's stance shows lack of seriousness  
about the task

## alternative version of 'task'

57 Pet: \*xxxxxxxxxxx h. ((laughing))  
(pet) \*leaning over map and gesticulating

58 (.)

59 Tho: eh VOUS LAUFE JETZ \*DO [DURE?  
uh you go now this way  
\*deictic gesture'', indicating path

60 Ugo: [(vous allez) pren/e/ le tram, (.)  
you go take the tram

61 [eh: (x)]

62 Pet: [(vous allez) pren/e/ le tram(h).((laughing))  
you go take the tram

63 (sie gehen nehmen) das t(h)ram. ((laughing, to Ugo))  
you go take the tram

62-63: Peter mockingly repeats Ugo's  
formulation of task language, translates it into  
German

## alternative version of 'task'

## 69, 73, 74, 78: Peter continues to orient to task non-seriously

69 Pet: \*ich find das tiptop? ((to Ugo))

*I find this perfect*

(pet) \*looking at Ugo

(ugo) \*looking at map

73 Pet: =was meine sie-

*what do you think ((?))*

74 \*[was meinsch kieg'mr geld für dass das mer de de weg beschibe,  
*what do you think are we going to get money for describing the  
itinerary*

(pet) \*looking at Ugo

(ugo) \*looking at map

75 (..)

76 Tho?: \* (°xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx°°)

(tho) \*still leaning over map

77 (..)

78 Pet: \*so fünf franke pro w(h)äg. ((jokingly))

*like five franks per itinerary*

(pet) \*looking at Ugo

(ugo) \*looking at map

66 Tho: (\*vous vous was heisst ((laufe))?  
you you how do you say walk  
(tho) \*still leaning over map

67 Pet: [\* (oh das isch xxxxx)  
oh that is xxxxx  
(pet) \*touching Ugo's arm  
(ugo) \*looking at map

68 Ugo: \*(ja)  
Yes  
(ugo) \*momentarily turns toward Pet

69 Pet: \*ich find das tiptop? ((to Ugo)).  
I find this perfect  
(pet) \*looking at Ugo  
(ugo) \*looking at map

78 Pet: \*so fünf franke pro w(h)äg. ((jokingly))  
like five franks per itinerary  
(pet) \*looking at Ugo  
(ugo) \*looking at map

79 Tho: ich sag ich weiss(h) es ni(h)d. (.) \*I DON'T KNOW(h).  
I say I don't know I don't know  
\*lifts head,gives Pet a short glance

80 Pet: (\*°°hey xmegax gnärvt eh°°)  
totally unnerved  
(pet) \*looking at Tho, pointing with his chin towards Tho

# Summary for French data

- Transition into the task is cooperative coordinated verbally and nonverbally
- Differentiated orientation to the ‘meaningfulness’ of the task
  - accepted as worthy dealing with by Hugo and Thobias, rejected as non-serious by Peter
- Differentiated rationalizations of the tasks complexity (see for instance Thobias’ qualifying it as difficult through his ‘I don’t’ know’).
- Learning potentials (word searches, trying out language) are available but not taken up

# Summary for the talk

- Task is locally managed, learning potentials emerge from turn-by-turn collaboration
- Transitions into task are rich sites to investigate the task-plan becoming task-process
  - Participants' perspectives are uncovered
    - Orientation to difficulty of the task
    - Strategies for task performance

# Summary for the talk

- Some learning potentials are epiphenomena of interaction
  - English data: a joke becomes meaning making ('take the bus')
  - French data: word search ('how do you say walk' line 66)
  - Orientation to sequential structure of talk
    - Recipient design
    - Joint action, co-constructed
- Considering learning as an embodied and cooperative process

# Future directions

- Incorporation of learning theory with CA methods?
- Mining CA's ethnomethodological roots to understand learning as a social process?
- More use of longitudinal data to show change in practices over time
  - Hellermann, (2008); Markee, (2008); Wooton, (1997)

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