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Social Positioning, Participation, and Second Language Learning: Talkative Students in an Academic ESL Classroom

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Guided by positioning theory and poststructural views of second language learning, the two descriptive case studies presented in this article explored the links between social positioning and the language learning experiences of two talkative students in an academic ESL classroom. Focusing on the macro- and micro-level contexts of communication, the article describes how one of the two talkative students became an accepted member of the class whereas the other one was excluded. Qualitative data and classroom talk were analyzed recursively. The findings suggest that social positioning has implications for developing useful classroom interactions that benefit all learners.

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Betsy (all names are pseudonyms), the English as a second language (ESL) teacher in the Oral Skills class, asked students to form pairs for an activity. Ahmad was still walking around desperately, looking for a partner, when others had already formed groups. He finally turned to Betsy and said, "Teacher, I don't have a partner." Betsy asked Martina to work with Ahmad. Martina moved her chair to the other side of the room, unwillingly, to work with him. As soon as the activity was over, Martina went back and sat next to her friends, leaving Ahmad alone. While I was observing Martina and Ahmad, I thought about Ahmad's social status in this classroom, how his classmates have *positioned* him as an outcast over the course of the semester despite his efforts and constant negotiations for inclusion.

Ahmad started attending this class on the fourth day the class met. During the first month, he listened to others when they were speaking, collaborated well with his peers, and asked and answered questions appropriately, thereby showing participation behavior typical of other students in the class. However, a month later, his participation

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behavior shifted and Ahmad took turns more frequently and maintained the floor too long whenever he began talking. Over the 8 final weeks of the semester, I watched as the class pushed Ahmad further and further out of the group. In contrast, despite similar problematic participation behavior from the very first day, Tarek, the other talkative student, was accepted by the other class members.

Although similar positionings can take place every day in most classrooms, very few researchers have investigated positioning acts in language classrooms and their possible consequences for second language (L2) learning and use (Martin-Beltrán, 2010). This study aims to address this gap by exploring positioning in an L2 classroom. In this article, I use classroom discourse and qualitative data to describe Ahmad and Tarek's reflexive (self) and interactive (other) positionings in their shifting social status and language learning experiences in a classroom. Drawing on positioning theory (see Davies, 2000) and poststructural approaches to L2 learning (see Pavlenko, 2002), I aimed to understand how these two students occupied conflicting positional identities in the classroom hierarchy despite their similar participation behavior and positioning acts. I also aimed to understand how their fluctuating social status impacted their access to learning opportunities in the class. My research questions were as follows:

1. What factors contribute to students' social status in an ESL classroom?
2. How do positionings of ESL students interact with their English language learning in a classroom environment?

Because my focus shifted over time from the whole class to two students, I am not seeking a general explanation or answer for those questions. I still address these questions, but focus on particular students.

BACKGROUND

Positioning refers to locating oneself and others with rights and obligations in and through talk (Davies & Harré, 1990). Through positioning people take on various positions and deny or give rights to others to do or not do or to say or not say certain things. For instance, when one person positions another as stupid, he or she denies that person the ability to correct one's cognitive performances (Davies, 2000).

Positioning has consequences for micro and macro levels of communication and social practices. Lewis (1997) describes the link between positioning and local context:

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> In the hypothetical case of a sixth-grade voracious reader discussing a text with a fifth-grade reluctant reader, the positions each student takes up may change as the discussion progresses.... Let's imagine that the sixth grader begins the discussion by performing the role of a teacher, and the fifth grader dutifully conforms. Later in the discussion, however, the older student shifts to an engaged stance in relation to the text and the discussion, causing the younger student, a reluctant reader, to become disruptive and avoid interaction. (p. 165)

How these two students position themselves and each other in this particular context depends on moment-to-moment interactions and possibly, as Lewis argues, on their relationship in and out of the classroom. Each student's social status, gender, race, and culture may also impact the positioning acts. Indeed, as Davies and Harré (1990) argue, one's positions are influenced by shared histories and cultural practices or differences (Moghaddam, 1999). However, certain cultural practices or histories do not lead directly to specific positions. Positions are fluid and continuously constructed in and through talk.

Positioning occurs in the moment of interaction but it is also contextually tied "across interactions or scales of activity" (Anderson, 2009, p. 292). The same individual can manifest any of his or her identities or be assigned new identities in the form of positions in different contexts. Taken over a period of time, some positions become more dominant in one's mode of self-presentation (Adams, 2011). For example, being a silent student is a positional identity and one of the multiple identities one has. What makes a student silent is the positions that the student takes up and the behaviors he or she displays in relation to other people over a period of time. It is through the accumulations of positions that *positional identities* are formed and shaped. The person becomes, in a sense, a compound noun (e.g., silent student) or a label (e.g., troublemaker) that he or she may internalize to act or not act on in the future. Positioning therefore closely interacts with who we are, thereby affecting how we behave and communicate.

In a classroom, interactions and behaviors form the social make-up and hierarchy of the classroom, while the very social make-up influences the interactions that occur within it (Stone & Kidd, 2011). As members in any social setting, members of a classroom shift their identity positions to become a member of and be recognized by particular social groups (Miller, 2000). Miller (2000) argues that "if students cannot be heard representing themselves and enacting social roles in ways that other students can recognize, a degree of exclusion from social interaction seems inevitable" (p. 73). Therefore, the way students position themselves and others in a classroom setting is important, especially given that positioning has consequences for the social

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interactions that are essential for L2 learning and development (Lantolf, 2000).

Positioning has been used in a small number of the recent articles that have explored race (Maloch, 2005; Zacher, 2008), gender (Clarke, 2005; Ritchie, 2002), classroom participation (Martin-Beltrán, 2010; Yoon, 2008), and identity development (Anderson, 2009; Reeves, 2008). The findings of these studies indicate that social positioning affected the nature of students' interactions and their access to learning opportunities in classrooms. However, few studies have examined positioning in English as a second or foreign language (ESL/EFL) classrooms, and even fewer have examined positioning longitudinally and how positions change over time. One of the first researchers to explore positioning in an ESL classroom was Miller (2007), who illustrated how positioning as good or poor language learner or teacher was made possible in moment-to-moment interactions. One of the student participants, Song, managed to be positioned in relatively powerful ways as a competent language learner by using her knowledge of basic grammar terms, rules, and vocabulary. In contrast, another student, Tenzin, seemed slower to catch on in the language activities. Other students seemed to notice his difficulty and consequently positioned him as less competent. These students' classroom participation, language learning experience, and access to learning opportunities were constantly shaped by the positions that they took on. In a similar study, Stone and Kidd (2011) categorized students according to their social positions (e.g., outsider, loner, pair, invisible) in the two EFL classrooms in a Japanese university, illustrating how the classroom social make-up impacted students' interactions. For example, students identified as pairs were more likely to dominate discussions. Likewise, Menard-Warwick (2008) analyzed how social positioning was manifested in ESL classroom discourse and appeared to affect language learning. In her study, the participant teacher did not assess students' prior knowledge and experiences before preparing class materials to teach employment skills. In providing them with predetermined skills and roles, the teacher essentially assigned them a particular identity as homemakers. The students, for the most part, could not resist this interactive positioning, and when they were unable to reposition themselves, they were not empowered to speak.

The current study builds on previous L2 positioning studies by closely examining the links between social positioning and language learning in an academic ESL classroom. It seeks to examine how positioning mediates learners' access to classroom interactions. This study adds another dimension to understanding the impact of social positioning on second language learning and use by focusing on both

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micro and macro levels of communication. Unlike the majority of studies on positioning that focused only on the moment-to-moment interactions, this study looks at positioning not only within particular local contexts but across interactions. Perhaps the greatest value in this current study is that it describes the process of how learners' positional identities are constructed and reconstructed across contexts and interactions.

THE STUDY

Participants and Setting

This study took place in an ESL (low advanced) oral skills (listening and speaking) class in an academic intensive English program at a university in the United States. The nine students who participated in this study came from different countries, representing a wide range of ethnic and sociocultural backgrounds. One additional student, Takumi, agreed that his statements from class could be used in the analysis, but declined to keep diaries or be interviewed. Two other students who declined to participate in the study accepted my presence in class and allowed me to audio- and video-record classroom events, but their utterances were not used in any way. However, early in April, one of these students (JJ) expressed a desire to participate in the study. I included JJ's classroom interactions during the last month in my ongoing analysis. Table 1 presents further self-reported information about the student participants.

In the class, the students sat in self-selected groupings. Over time, the Asian students, JJ, Chen, and Kwong, formed their own group. They always sat together in class (see Figure 1), seemed to have fun during breaks, and spent time together outside of class. As they shared cultural and linguistic histories, they developed a sense of solidarity and formed cohesive friendships. Like the Asian students, Fareed and Martina became good friends in a short amount of time. Tarek was able to join this mini group around mid-semester as he often and spontaneously sat by Martina to serve as her helper, guide, or peer-teacher. I provide further background information on Ahmad and Tarek below, who were the focal participants in this study.

Betsy, the classroom teacher, had been teaching ESL for more than 30 years at the time of this study. She was a White American in her late 50s. Betsy's classroom involved a variety of classroom events, including student-led discussions on daily and academic topics, formal lectures on grammar and vocabulary, listening and note-taking, student presentations, and numerous communicative activities.

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TABLE 1
Demographic Information About Participants

Pseudonym	Age	Gender	Region of origin	Highest level of education	Mother tongue	Other languages studied	Date of arrival in the United States	Previous work experience
Martina	18	Female	South America	High school (HS)	Spanish	Portuguese	1/10	None
Tarek	25	Male	North Africa	BS civil engineering	Arabic	Italian, French	1/10	Yes
Chen	22	Female	East Asia	BA French	Chinese	French	7/09	None
Esmeralda	21	Female	Central Africa	HS	Spanish	French, Fang	3/09	None
Ahmad	19	Male	Central Africa	HS	French	Arabic, German	1/10	None
Kwong	22	Female	East Asia	HS	Chinese	—	7/09	Yes
Takumi	23	Male	East Asia	BA law	Japanese	Chinese	1/10	Yes
Fareed	20	Male	Western Asia	HS	Arabic	—	3/09	None
Viresh	22	Male	South Asia	BS computer science	Telugu	Hindi, Tamil	1/10	None

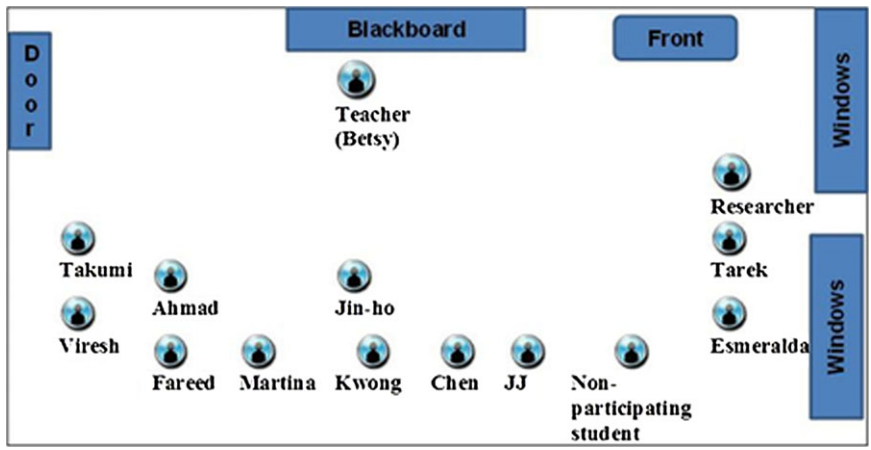

FIGURE 1. The oral skills classroom (January–March).

Tarek

Tarek was the oldest student in the oral skills class. Before coming to the United States, he had worked as a construction project manager in the United Kingdom, Germany, France, Saudi Arabia, Italy, and Switzerland. His stay in Europe gave him the opportunity to become

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familiar with other languages, particularly Italian. Tarek's work and study abroad experience in various countries provided him with cultural and symbolic capital (Bourdieu, 1986) that most of the other students in the oral skills class did not possess. After completing his language studies, his aim was to complete a master's degree in construction project management and become a college professor.

Ahmad

Ahmad, one of the two youngest students in the oral skills class, was living with his uncle and his uncle's family. He spoke French and English at home—English with his cousins who were born in the United States. His interaction with his cousins seemed to have a positive impact on his English; he sometimes used vocabulary that other students did not know. Ahmad's aim was to attend medical school in the United States.

DATA SOURCES AND ANALYSIS

The data sources for this project included extensive observations, field notes, audio and video recordings of classroom events, student diaries, three semistructured interviews with the teacher, and 14 interviews with student participants. I interviewed eight student participants (Tarek, Ahmad, Kwong, Chen, Esmeralda, Viresh, Fareed, and Martina) individually early in the semester. I conducted final interviews with the same participants, except for Viresh and Fareed, just before classes ended. Because Fareed unexpectedly left town 3 weeks before the semester ended, I could not meet him to interview. Due to some scheduling conflicts, I could not interview Viresh, either. I observed the class for 15 weeks, audio- and video-recorded each class session, and used the constant-comparative method (Merriam, 2009), cross-case analysis, and discourse analysis (Wood & Kroger, 2000) to explore social positioning across classroom events. I chose to do a descriptive *two-case case study* (Yin, 2009) of Ahmad and Tarek to gain an in-depth understanding of the complexity and peculiarity of their positioning, participation, social status, and language learning experiences in their *bounded system* (Yin, 2009), which included classroom activities. After spending some time in the research setting, I deliberately and inductively selected these two students as cases. I made the decision after approximately 8 weeks when I became convinced by my data that two student participants could be focal, because their classroom participation differed in terms of both quality and quantity from

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that of the other students. They took more turns than other students, interrupted their teacher, and provided unrequested feedback to classmates. Each represented both an extreme and a distinctive case and offered contrasting situations at some times (Yin, 2009). I chose two cases instead of a single case because these two cases differed in negotiating membership in the class.

Guided by interpretive/constructive perspectives (Merriam, 2009), my data analysis was ongoing and inductive. I reviewed my expanded field notes weekly and noted related segments to transcribe later. This initial stage included multiple reviews of data. After I transcribed related segments, I formed three groups to organize my transcripts: (1) Ahmad, (2) Tarek, and (3) Others. I then started to code each segment within each group. In each segment, a number of categories (e.g., repositioning, long turns) emerged from codes, and based on these categories, I formed at least one hypothesis for each segment. The second phase included cross-case analysis. After I analyzed Tarek's and Ahmad's data individually, I compared the two cases to identify similarities and differences. The discourse analysis of classroom talk enabled me to see who dominated classroom conversations and how students positioned themselves and each other. In the next phase, I used student diaries and interview transcripts to interpret my findings. I also coded these supplementary data and used emerging themes to make better sense of classroom transcripts. Comparisons were also made in this phase both within and between data sources. Recursive review and analysis of data helped me confirm or revise my findings about two focal participants.

FINDINGS

The oral skills class was a learning community where students built relationships over time. During my data analysis, I tried to understand and review my understanding of the classroom hierarchy, observing where each of the students stood relative to the others. During and following classes, I took notes about what kinds of participation behavior or competence marked the social status and positioning of the students in the class. Here, I provide mini case studies of two talkative ESL students and then use the cases to draw conclusions.

Tarek as a Case

Tarek acted like a teacher in his interactions with his classmates during pair or group work and even in his interactions with Betsy

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during much of the time observed. He took on teacher-like positions by either telling his classmates what to do via assertive direct commands, paraphrasing their questions for the rest of the class even at times when it was not necessary, or providing feedback on their language usage. Tarek also differed from the other students with his continual display of knowledge and previous experience and negotiation of competence. Although students normally raised their hands to bid for a turn, Tarek often blurted out comments or answers without waiting to be called. I provide one representative example of his participation in group work to show how he dominated the conversation and denied others the opportunity to participate. The students had listened to a lecture about four types of high-level sensation seekers and written inferential questions based on the lecture. Before the following conversation began, Betsy asked students to work in groups and share their questions. Once Esmeralda, Kwong, and Tarek sat together, Tarek started the conversation:

Excerpt 1[1]

1. Tarek: Okay, I just want to discuss with you what did you understand from the
2. lecture. And what did you ((0.3)) did you enjoy to listening to the lecture?
3. That's it.
4. Esmeralda: That's it?
5. Tarek: That's it. Come on. ((0.3)) What did you for, uhmm, you know the levels?
6. At what ages would like to measure the levels of high ways of
7. sensation seeker. He mentioned four points. Did you write that four
8. points? Did you write that? The first one I like owing convertibles. [
9. Kwong: [Before marriage.
10. Tarek: Yeah before marriage. The worst to be poor, well, what does that mean?
11. Kwong: No no no no.
12. Tarek: The [fourth point
13. Kwong: [The worst social thing is to be bored.
14. Tarek: What about at the last? She said that [

[1] Please see the Appendix for an explanation of transcription notation.

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15. Kwong: [You speak too fast. A little slow down. A little.
16. Tarek: So:::: so:::: Is that fine for you? ((They all laugh.)) Come o::n! Two
17. children jump an above Brooklyn Bridge. ((Tarek continues to speak
18. at the same rate as before.)) Why did he mention that example at the end?
19. Kwong: I mean [
20. Tarek: [Does that mean there were two children they are jumping above the
21. Brooklyn?
22. Kwong: [No no no no. They just give a example
23. Tarek: [One died and one just alive [
24. Kwong: [They just gave example for the age.
25. Esmeralda: Age.
26. Kwong: Yeah, the two. The two. The two is. One is the sex, the man or woman
27. Tarek: And two types is? ((0.4)). That's fine. Okay, we're done. I'll see you.
28. Thank you.

Assuming the leadership position, Tarek was strictly in control of the conversation. He not only shared all the questions he wrote, but also answered them all by himself. He did not allow others to expand their answers or modify their output. Although Kwong tried to join the conversation, Tarek ignored her contributions (lines 12, 14, 16, 23). Esmeralda joined the conversation only twice with minimal contributions. Tarek's speech was incomprehensible for the group members and Kwong asked him to slow down. Yet he didn't cooperate.

In another incident, after an activity in which Betsy focused on pronunciation, Esmeralda raised her hand:

Excerpt 2

1. Esmeralda: Betsy, I have a problem to say indiscriminately.
2. Betsy: Yeah, yeah. That's the challenge. [Let's let's
3. Tarek: [You just say it. That's it. ((Esmeralda directs a gaze to Tarek for 2
4. seconds and frowns. She then turns to Betsy to hear an answer. Tarek
5. ignores Esmeralda's gaze.))

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6. Betsy: Let's go back to (0.3) here's (0.3) remember that our verb is to
7. discriminate.

Esmeralda's difficulty with pronunciation had become an opportunity for Tarek to show his competence. By his unrequested advice, "You just say it. That's it," Tarek positioned himself as superior to Esmeralda. I did not observe Tarek being playful or humorous here. He looked quite serious and there was no laughter in his utterance. His intention, however, might have been more complex. Perhaps he meant to tease Esmeralda because of her word choice: *saying* and *pronouncing* are different. Shapiro, Baumeister, and Kessler (1991) argue that "teasing is an expression of status dominance" (p. 459). Therefore, in any case, whether Tarek meant to tease Esmeralda or not, he appeared to position himself as more competent. Apparently, Esmeralda was not pleased with Tarek's self-positioning. Her dissatisfaction was clearly visible in her gestures.

In whole-class interactions, Betsy usually allowed Tarek to take the floor whenever he interrupted to say something. Most of the time, she confirmed Tarek's reflexive positionings and contributions by either (a) thanking him after his turn, (b) answering his off-topic questions, or (c) making comments on what he said. Tarek's participation behavior was consistently described as disruptive by his classmates during the initial interviews. However, his classmates changed their attitudes toward Tarek over time. Tarek's identity in the peer group shifted from outsider to insider as he built friendships, used humor more, and became less disruptive in class.

Use of humor. Toward the middle of the semester, Tarek started to use humor more often as a conversational strategy; he could thus communicate his intentions, yet still be funny. He monitored the mood of the class and lightened it when he himself or the class atmosphere seemed too serious. The following excerpt exemplifies how Tarek integrated humor successfully while at the same time assigning a strong position to himself. On this particular day, Chen was the discussion leader. Several students shared their opinions regarding the question, "Do you think men should help women at home?" Fareed and Ahmad supported the idea that men should work outside whereas women should stay at home, cook, and take care of children. Soon after, Chen called on Tarek:

Excerpt 3

1. Chen: How about you, Tarek?
2. Tarek: In fact at the beginning, I was just like you guys ((pointing at

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3. Ahmad and Fareed)), but after that I traveled and spent time in
4. Italy, Switzerland, and England, so I has changed differently. (0.3) Now
5. I would be the woman and she would be the man, I think.
6. ((Class laughs.))
7. Tarek: I mean, I don't care. I just. ((Class laughs more)). Come on. I
8. don't mean that. I mean we can negotiate that in our house. It's not
9. big deal, I mean.

In discussing gender roles, Tarek differentiated himself from Fareed and Ahmad by bringing up his work and study abroad experience and therefore establishing his superior intercultural status. He concluded his position with a joke: He could be a woman. Tarek positioned himself as a clever communicator who both demonstrated his sense of humor and his own experience and status. His superior status was not disturbing because the class seemed to focus on his joke.

From his positional identity as an *outspoken student*, Tarek took up another positional identity through the end of the semester: *funny classmate*. Indeed, in the final interviews, all students explicitly positioned Tarek as a "funny" student and none of them complained about his dominance or interruptions. Even Kwong, who had complained about Tarek's participation style and was quite critical of him in the initial interviews, had a completely different opinion about Tarek when I interviewed her in April.

Excerpt 4: Final Interview With Kwong

Kwong: Tarek (0.2) ((laughs)). Tarek is funny. He is more funny in the class, presentations or discussion or something. I think he's like getting better than before.

Researcher: What do you mean by that?

Kwong: Before, he wasn't that funny. Maybe he didn't know people that much, so he sometimes sit alone. But now he involved in everybody.

According to Kwong, Tarek was able to gain membership in class as he got to know his classmates better and began to build informal relations with them.

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Acquiring classroom participation norms. Although Tarek did not use the appropriate participation norms at the beginning of the class, he was able to at least partially acquire them over time and his disturbing participation behavior steadily decreased. The realization he experienced is well described in his own words:

Excerpt 5: Final Interview With Tarek

Tarek: I discovered like Betsy said we ask to play basketball, football, rugby, or bowling. So she means that you can't participate until she gave you right. I mean, you cannot paraphrase; you cannot say anything straight away. I mean that is related to my culture and Mediterranean culture. I mean you can interrupt straight away and say your opinion, but here you have to rise your hand and stuff like that. And I didn't know that.

Researcher: And how did you like it? Did you like it?

Tarek: No, of course. I found it hard, so the best thing I did that I stopped. I didn't speak at all, I mean. The best way to do it. Yeah. That's it. This is the right thing.

Researcher: Wow. And how did you notice it?

Tarek: At the beginning I didn't know.... And then I noticed twice, once like Ahmad, he was participating like he likes to say something. But she really clever, Betsy, she interrupt with friendly way, kindly way. I noticed that.... And she mentioned like Spanish and Mediterranean, they can't participate and here is different and stuff like that. So I was wo::w I was making mistake. I mean for the first time of the semester.

Tarek eventually accepted Betsy's role in classroom participation. He learned, for example, that he had to raise his hand to speak in class. This norm was inconsistent with his cultural way of speaking in which interruptions were accepted. Although Tarek did not seem happy at all that he had to adapt to the rules, he adjusted and followed them over time.

Ahmad as a Case

Although Tarek was able to build friendships in class, Ahmad became an outcast over time. Interestingly, Ahmad's participation and positioning were not disruptive at the beginning of the semester. In the following interaction, both Ahmad and Esmeralda contributed to the conversation equally, scaffolding each other.

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Excerpt 6

1. Esmeralda: I don't have a pet or dog. The kind of animal I like ((0.3)). I like dolphins.
2. Dolphins? ((Confirming pronunciation.))
3. Ahmad: Yeah, dolphins. Female dolphins?
4. Esmeralda: Yes, female dolphins. I went to Corpus Christi. Last Christmas with my
5. friends we went to an aquarium. It was like a show. With dolphin, oh it
6. was, and they're kind of intelligent animal. They were like 10 feet and
7. jumping on the water. I just saw that on TV. I saw it with my eyes.
8. Ahmad: You fell in love with them? ((Laughs.))
9. Esmeralda: Yes! ((Laughs.)) And when the show ends, they just said goodbye.
10. ((Laughs)) It was very good.
11. Ahmad: Very interesting.
12. Esmeralda: How about you? You have any pets?

As the days went on, however, Ahmad became more talkative and dominant during classroom events, especially in the whole-class, student-led discussions. For example, in the following conversation, Ahmad and Takumi had finished their final presentation and were answering the questions. During the presentation, Ahmad took frequent turns to repeat what Takumi said or to share his own opinion. Ahmad had already answered the first four questions before Tarek directed a question to Takumi:

Excerpt 7

1. Tarek: I've got just one question to Takumi specially. If I give you the opportunity
2. to make competition between Hollywood and Japan, would you guarantee
3. your winning in this competition or not and why?
4. ((Class laughs.))
5. Takumi: We can win. Yeah.
6. Tarek: Why? Would you give me the reasons?
7. Takumi: Because we have ability of drawing style and content and we have
8. confidence about it.

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9. Tarek: Would you give me some examples? For example, which one is
10. more popular, Slum Dog or Tom Jerry?
11. ((Class laughs.))
12. Tarek: ((To the class)) Come o::n ((inaudible))
13. Betsy: We are laughing with you.
14. Takumi: I think Slum dog is for younger mens. These three animation got an award
15. in Japan, because this contest is for [adults.
16. Ahmad: [I would like to add something about your question. If you want to
17. compare Japanese and American animes like you are saying, we cannot
18. compare something that concerns humor and something that concerns
19. sports. We have to compare them from the same paradigms. If an anime
20. follows a pattern of sport and other one follow the pattern of humor, we
21. cannot compare them. We have to compare them accordingly.
22. Tarek: Thank you.
23. Ahmad: Yes.

Ahmad joined the conversation and positioned himself as knowledgeable on the topic like Takumi. He then challenged Tarek, saying that Japanese and American anime were two different areas and they should not be compared to each other. Although Tarek elicited more information from Takumi several times, he did not further the conversation with Ahmad. Others did not respond to Ahmad, either.

One possible reason for the change in Ahmad's participation pattern was Tarek. Because Betsy usually welcomed and encouraged Tarek's contributions, Ahmad perceived Tarek as a good student. Indeed, in the final interview, he made this clear:

Excerpt 8: Final Interview With Ahmad

Ahmad: I like the way Tarek expresses himself. He is always confident. He has something natural to catch people's attention. Maybe it's a gift he has. He's gifted with that. He is gifted with that. Me, you know I know many jokes, but I don't

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like saying jokes in class. Because in class, you have to be serious. And I am a guy who don't know when to stop, so I had better not start saying jokes ((laughs)).

In the initial weeks of the semester, it seems that Ahmad carefully mirrored the actions of Tarek, such as Tarek's expression of himself, gaining the teacher's attention, and his contributions that were accepted, confirmed, and even valued by Betsy. Ahmad seemed to learn how to be a student in this class by observing Tarek, who had developed a unique participation behavior. Ahmad therefore positioned Tarek as a "gifted" student and a successful communicator. As he continued to observe Tarek's classroom participation, he himself experienced significant personal transformation as a student in class. He increasingly contributed to class discussions and gradually gained more confidence.

Ahmad's isolation. Ahmad's isolation in class started to appear more clearly during classroom tasks and activities. For example, in one instance of pair work with Ahmad, Martina clearly indicated her unwillingness to work with him, as the following excerpt shows. In this class session, students were going to review their notes they took at home after listening to a lecture. Betsy asked Martina to work with Ahmad.

Excerpt 9

1. Ahmad: There was a part of the lecture that I didn't understand. I think it
2. was the end and I just left a blank there. Because one of the
3. women, I don't remember her name.
4. Martina: Brian and Lauren.
5. Ahmad: I think she was talking about Japanese company which started in
6. USA. Did you remember that part?
7. Martina: Yeah.
8. Ahmad: I didn't really understand, so I don't figure out how to write it
9. down.
10. Martina: I think she was studying about American management.
11. Ahmad: Yes. They are encouraging the doing initiative and they separate

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people who is moving from those who aren't. Oh, then she told the
four steps.
Ahmad: Yes, I think that was about invasion of Japanese products.
Martina: American business?
Ahmad: Yeah, American business. I think he was saying that American
business needs four steps to improve their business something like
that. Did you write them down?
((Continues to read more from his notes (0.6)))
Ahmad: Do you have the same thing? ((Looks at Martina's notes.))
Martina: Yes.
Ahmad: And then [
Martina: [Then she said three things. Advertisement and decision making.
Ahmad: That was about after women talked about. After that there was a
man talking. Who was that?
Martina: Brian.
Ahmad: Brian, okay. I thought he was the journalist.
Martina: No. They were two people talking.
Ahmad: So, he was the American expert. Brian, talking explaining.
Ahmad: What was the last part when she was talking
about ((incomprehensible)). Do you remember that part?
((Ahmad attempts to look at Martina's notes. Martina takes them back.))
Ahmad: Just before the journalist talked about short break and after that
opened up the audience. Before that short break, the woman
started talking. What was she talking about? Do you remember
that part?

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37. Martina: ((Shakes her head to mean no.)) I don't know what you are talking about.
38. Ahmad: But I think that it was really important, you know. It was about
39. Japanese companies started in the America. I think that it will be
40. really interesting to have information about because during the test
41. a question might come up.
42. ((No response from Martina. Martina keeps looking at her own notes. It seems she
43. has stopped communicating with Ahmad.))
44. Ahmad: Yeah, thank you. It was very interesting to share our ideas.
45. Betsy: Okay, everybody put your notes where you cannot see them.
46. Martina you are welcome to go back to your chair or stay there.
47. ((Martina leaves.))

In this example, Ahmad shared what he thought was significant in the lecture by asking questions of Martina and repeating Martina's responses throughout the conversation. However, Martina did not seem to be genuinely interested in the conversation, because she almost never asked him questions. Her body language also indicated her lack of desire to communicate (Figure 2). She made almost no eye contact with Ahmad, which was very atypical of Martina's communication style. Her typical posture while communicating with other students in class can be seen in Figures 3 and 4. (The figures are presented as photo negatives to protect identities.) Once the time was over, Betsy told Martina that she could either stay where she was sitting or go back to her seat. Martina immediately chose to leave.

What is interesting here is Ahmad's strategic self-positioning. Initially, he positioned himself as a student who could not fully comprehend the dialogue (line 8). He therefore provided the floor for Martina to answer the question. Yet as soon as Martina started to provide an answer (line 10), Ahmad continued to supplement her answer for the question, which he had acknowledged at the beginning that "he did not understand." Obviously, he was asking questions to which he already knew the answers. While Ahmad seemed to provide space for Martina, he did not allow her to actually express herself. Martina's resistance to Ahmad's competent student position in the dialogue included withdrawing almost completely from the discussion.

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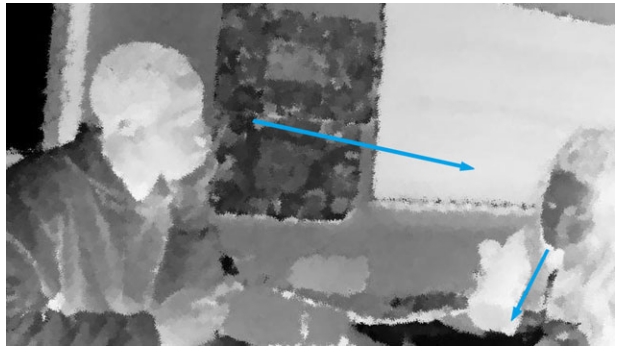

FIGURE 2. Pair work – Ahmad and Martina.

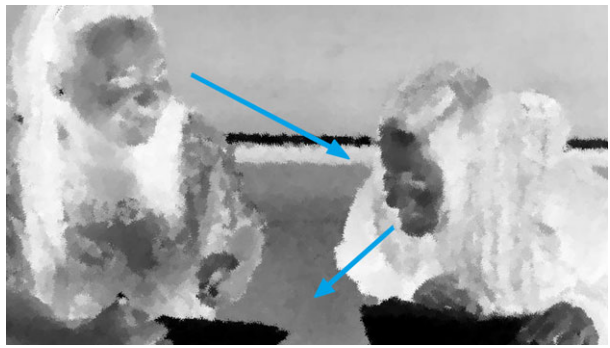

FIGURE 3. Pair work – Esmeralda and Martina.

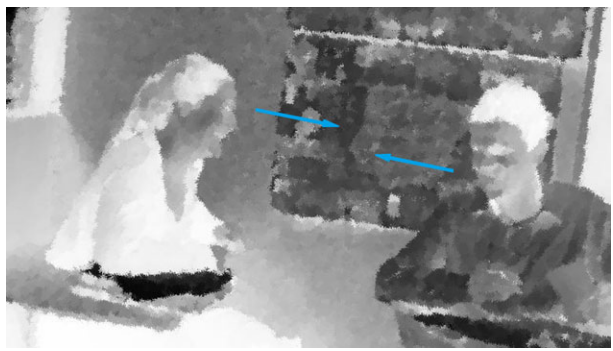

FIGURE 4. Pair work – Tarek and Martina.

The power of *teacher talk*. The analysis of classroom discourse in this study has shown that the classroom teacher may also invest in particular identity positions for students. Betsy was a wonderful teacher

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who cared about each student. My analysis and conclusions about her instruction here do not indicate a lack of ability to teach or any weakness. They only show how positioning can go unnoticed in classrooms.

Betsy had differentiated attitudes to Tarek's and Ahmad's participation behaviors. Although she seemed to be very supportive of Tarek's contributions, laughed at his jokes, seemed to enjoy his contributions, and encouraged his turn-taking, she did not show the same flexibility toward Ahmad's participation. In contrast, she stopped Ahmad from participating several times, as she herself acknowledged:

Excerpt 10: Final Interview With Betsy

Betsy: Ahmad, again I would say there was some interaction and that was just more of just trying to get him to contain himself. The way I tried to deal with that was talking to him individually by himself and communicating that. And then sometimes using, I remember there were some times when I would just use my hands and it goes like "quit" "stop" and he of course did not like to respond to that.

Betsy, as she acknowledged later in the interview, was trying to give others more of an opportunity to participate by getting Ahmad to "contain himself." Whereas Betsy's attitudes toward Tarek's participation advanced his own self-positioning, her attitudes toward Ahmad clearly contributed to other students' positioning of Ahmad as an arrogant student. Especially because most of the students described Betsy as their favorite teacher and respected her very much, it is possible that her reactions to Ahmad's participation might have impacted other students' opinions about him. Indeed, in describing her relationships with Ahmad and Tarek, Esmeralda referred to Betsy to confirm interactive positioning of Tarek as an accepted classroom member:

Excerpt 11: Final Interview With Esmeralda

Esmeralda: Uhmm, Ahmad! Ahmad is, I don't know how to say that. He likes to talk a lot. Sometimes, we feel like, please shut up. But he's a good guy. But he likes to show off like "I'm here. Don't forget me!" and Tarek ((Laughs.)), he likes to make jokes and for Betsy it's like normal and for us. He likes to say, "Oh, I'm sorry, I'm sorry." He's very good and he's a classmate that can help you when you have any trouble or problem.

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Esmeralda also expressed dissatisfaction with Ahmad's dominant participation behavior. She also interpreted Ahmad's contributions as showing off. Interestingly enough, Esmeralda then started to talk about Tarek and positioned him as a funny classmate. In order to confirm the interactive positioning of Tarek, she said that Tarek's jokes were accepted by everybody, including Betsy. It is important to note here that Betsy did not purposefully help others to position Ahmad in the ways they did. Her goal was simply to provide opportunities for everybody to participate.

Proficiency. The discrepancies in participatory and proficiency levels in this class contributed to the development of "differential identities of competence" (DaSilva Iddings, 2005, p. 176) between Ahmad and other students, putting Ahmad into a higher, yet negative status in the classroom hierarchy. Most of the students in the oral skills class were at a lower level than Ahmad in terms of linguistic proficiency. Over the course of the semester, most of them stated that they were not able to contribute to class discussions as much as they desired due to their limited speaking ability, fear of making mistakes, and their feelings of inferiority to their teacher and classmates. Indeed, all of the students made more grammatical mistakes while speaking than Ahmad did. Additionally, Ahmad used vocabulary that was not taught in class and used more complex vocabulary than others did. Betsy described his proficiency level:

Excerpt 12: Final Interview With Betsy

Betsy: I mean, his spoken English just took off. And it seems he was able to speak from the beginning. I think he got put in this class and this happened before and it's one of the issues with the oral skills. A person can be in this class, will be maybe one of the very best speakers but have bad note-taking skills or not have done very well, and so whoever is doing the placement will look at those skills and go, "This person may not—we don't know what their TOEFL scores are gonna turn out to be—so we definitely are gonna make it possible for them to be here two semesters. So we don't wanna put them in 5500 based on their speaking; we're gonna put them in 4500 based on their listening." So you get that mix in here. And I could say that that was a challenge too. I mean, he's speaking!

Everybody in the class was aware of Ahmad's more advanced speaking skills and vocabulary. While participating orally, Ahmad frequently checked with his classmates if they knew the meanings of particular words he used or if they understood what he said. Most of the time,

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the students did not seem to understand him, which sometimes resulted in their frustration. This frustration was clearly visible in Kwong's reaction to Ahmad's participation:

Excerpt 13: Final Interview With Kwong

Kwong: Just keep talking. Let him talk. I don't like to stop people's talk. It's not that good but okay talk. And waiting for the next chance. He just talk talk talk and always "you know" "you know." And I ask myself, "I know what? I know what?" "You know blah blah blah." "You know." "I don't know." ((laughs)) "You know blah blah blah. You know"(0.3) "I don't know." It's like a little embarrass and you all say (0.3) to be polite (0.3) "yeah, uh-huh uh-huh." And inside "I know what? I don't know!" He keeps saying "you know." "I don't know anything!"

Kwong's repetitions of Ahmad's *you know*, which he used frequently to check their understanding, were quite frustrating for Kwong because she did not understand the content of his talk most of the time. She only pretended that she understood to save face because it was "embarrassing" for her. Kwong and other students did not want to be construed as less competent by not participating as much as Ahmad or by not being able to communicate with him, nor were they able to construct a more equal competent position. Ahmad was definitely more articulate and advanced. Instead of positioning themselves as less competent members, particularly in terms of linguistic competence, they positioned Ahmad as an arrogant student who dominated classroom conversations. Perhaps it was the fear of being viewed as less competent or less intelligent because of limited English or silence that made these students position Ahmad as an arrogant or inconsiderate student. By assigning him a negative position, they could be *legitimately* silent, which could be perceived as a strength rather than a weakness.

CONCLUSION

Through a recursive micro-analysis of classroom interaction and qualitative analysis of other data sources, this study described how two talkative students came to occupy polarized positions in an ESL classroom. One of these students, Tarek, engaged in teacher-like positions, displayed his knowledge and experience whenever possible, and often challenged the authority of his teacher by criticizing her methodological choices. However, by building friendships with particular students and using humor frequently as a communication strategy, he was able to become an accepted member. Tarek was also able to learn and

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internalize participation norms over time. The second focal participant, Ahmad, who mirrored Tarek, displayed his competence and dominated classroom conversations by producing long turns. However, unlike Tarek, he was not able to be *in the group* because his participation behavior was not accepted by his classmates, who positioned him as an outsider. When Ahmad was copying Tarek, Betsy had almost stopped focusing on Tarek. It was interesting to observe how things flipped but worked against Ahmad.

Because Ahmad was outside the group socially, he needed and demanded attention. He was articulate, and perhaps others did not see him as fitting in because they were less so and because they did not understand him well. They all attributed a character to him because his proficiency level was strong and this led to a position of arrogance. Whereas interactive and reflexive positionings of Tarek created learning opportunities for him, positionings of Ahmad did not allow him to benefit from those opportunities because his peers avoided interacting with him as much as possible. Similar to Stone and Kidd's (2011) findings, the social positioning of students in the oral skills class impacted the level and nature of their communication with each other.

In this study, positioning theory (Davies & Harré, 1990) helped me understand the complexity connected with positioning and L2 learning. Ample evidence has been provided documenting the necessity and importance of social interaction for L2 acquisition. The majority of second language acquisition theories discuss and highlight this importance. For example, in interactionist theories (see Norris & Ortega, 2003), interaction is believed to provide opportunities for language learners to (a) notice gaps in their linguistic competence, (b) negotiate meaning, (c) receive comprehensible input, and (d) produce modified output, which are all assumed necessary and crucial for L2 acquisition to occur (van Compernolle, 2010). In sociocultural theories (see Lantolf, 2000), learners with limited linguistic resources are able to participate in conversations more effectively as they receive linguistic support or scaffolding from more proficient speakers during the interaction. Communicative language teaching, which draws on interactionist and sociocultural theories, emphasizes authentic communication in language classrooms (see Spada, 2007) and encourages teachers to provide learners with opportunities to purposefully interact in L2. These student-centered classrooms, as described in the literature, allow students to communicate and share their voice. However, as Lewis (1997) argues, "speech communities are not linguistically or socially unified" and "social conflict and difference are often masked" in classrooms (p. 165). In language classrooms, students bring "existing practices (ways of talking, thinking, and acting) constituted

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through such conditions as gender, class, race, ethnicity, and peer status" (Lewis, p. 167). Such differences closely interact with how students position themselves and are positioned by others. Given that positioning allows or limits others to say and do things, it has substantial consequences for language use and learning. In a language classroom, positioning either limits or gives learners access to language experiences or opportunities that are believed to foster language learning in the classroom (Kayi-Aydar, 2012). When students have limited access to classroom interactions, there will be less modified input or output.

In this study, the two focal participants created learning opportunities for themselves or were able to gain access to learning opportunities, whereas this access was often denied to other students. For example, Tarek frequently interrupted his teacher to ask questions and was able to receive comprehensible input by getting answers. The other students did not appear to benefit from his interactions because the conversations usually developed between Tarek and the teacher, and other students were not involved. Those students had difficulties in taking turns or extending their talk. In short, positioning can lead to more and better language acquisition experiences for some students, and to fewer and poorer such experiences for others. In other words, various categories of students receive differential learning opportunities in the same class because of positioning.

Supporting the findings of Miller's (2007) study, this study suggests that positioning not only shapes interactions but also contributes to one's identity over time across various conversations. Constant indication of one's expectations of others, acceptances, or resistances suggest particular identities for individuals. As Rex and Schiller (2009) argue, "others recognize these identities because they are displayed over and over again" (p. 20). Indeed, Tarek did not become a "helpful," "funny" classmate in a single day, nor did Ahmad become an outsider all of a sudden. They took up these positional identities because of the ways they positioned themselves and the ways they were positioned by others during the semester.

The findings of this qualitative study are not intended to be generalizable. The social dynamics and interactions described herein are unique. However, the findings offer implications for teachers, who play an important role in learners' reflexive and interactive positionings. First, teachers can create more effective classroom talk through which learners can create positive selves. Teachers have greater power than students in classroom settings (Buzzelli & Johnston, 2002; Reeves, 2008). Therefore, the positions assigned by them, implicitly or explicitly, are more difficult for students to resist (Reeves, 2008). Furthermore, as the findings of this study show, teacher talk and behaviors

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might shape how students position their peers. If classroom teachers become more aware of positioning, they may invent strategies to shape classroom discourse to help learners position themselves in ways beneficial to their identity development and language learning. For example, Ahmad's contributions were rich and on topic, but they seemed to offer more than Betsy expected and delayed the lessons. Many classrooms have outspoken, dominant students like Ahmad. Instead of trying to minimize their classroom participation, teachers can assign new roles to these students. As Lewis (1997) argues, "new ways of constructing a self in the classroom may lead to individual growth as well as growth in the classroom culture" (p. 200). Students like Ahmad can be in charge of turn-taking in group work, which might teach them how to give opportunities to others to talk. In this way, teachers can help students work through inequalities related to classroom participation.

Second, teachers can lead students in meta-discussions of classroom participation as early as possible. Betsy discussed a number of participation rules on several occasions with the students. In one case, for instance, she drew attention to how turn-taking should occur in classroom discussions. Such explanations were helpful for students, especially for Tarek, who acknowledged how the discussions of classroom participation helped him understand Betsy's implicit rules and expectations. Although Betsy always encouraged everyone to participate, she rarely talked about participation rules during the first 2 months of the class. For instance, when Ahmad's classroom participation shifted and he started to dominate classroom talk, Betsy did not point this out to him. Ahmad and others had already established various positional identities and certain status and had to renegotiate them when Betsy started to discuss the rules for participation. Teachers need to provide direct instruction regarding the participation rules and norms in the target setting early in the academic year or semester by presenting a discussion of a full range of language learning opportunities. It is not enough to expect that learners will internalize the rules through observations. Similarly, introducing rules in the middle of the semester upon realizing inappropriate participation behavior may discourage active learners from participating. Yet if all learners know the rules and norms at the beginning, adjustment will be easier for everyone. Crabbe (2007) argues that

> learning opportunities are available to learners everywhere at all times —in classrooms, on the bus, in the community, alone. The take-up of private learning opportunities requires a degree of self-direction and so it follows that the take-up of learning opportunities needs modeling. (p. 119)

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If ESL teachers want learners to succeed in the new social setting outside of the class or in their academic and work environments, then guiding them toward using learning opportunities is essential. As Crabbe further suggests, "when learners are engaged in managing learning opportunities in classroom tasks, they are better equipped, and therefore more likely, to manage learning opportunities outside the classroom" (2007, p. 120).

Third, teachers can introduce strategies for students to use while interacting with outspoken peers (Kayi-Aydar, 2013). For example, students can be taught how to shift the turn-taking when one student starts to dominate the conversation. They can use statements such as "I think what you are saying is good, and I want to add that…" or "Right, so you are saying that…. In fact, I have an example on…." By revoicing and expanding, students would not only indicate that they, as active listeners, value the contributions of the dominant student(s) in the group but also gain the right to speak and manage turn-taking. Nonassertive and quiet students might find these turn-taking strategies challenging at first. However, they should be able to acquire and use them over time if there is frequent modeling by the teacher, self-reflections and class discussions regarding the use of strategies, and multiple opportunities to practice in small groups. Watching various classroom videos and identifying turn-taking strategies can also be helpful. When Ahmad and Tarek dominated talk in group or pair work, their peers either failed to negotiate knowledge or participation or chose to not negotiate at all. Especially with Ahmad, as Kwong said, they chose to "let him talk." It might have been different if these students had been taught turn-taking or conversational strategies to use to create a more equitable group talk. Van Langenhove and Harré (1999) suggest that,

> first, people will differ in their capacity to position themselves and others, their mastery of the techniques so to speak. Secondly, they will differ in their willingness or intention to position and be positioned. Thirdly, they will also differ in their power to achieve positioning acts. (p. 30)

The task of the classroom teacher should be to diagnose these differences, look for ways to handle differences, and help each student use them to his or her advantage.

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APPENDIX

Transcription Notations

[	the onset of overlapping talk
(0.2)	pauses in seconds (e.g., 2 seconds of pause)
:	lengthening of the previous sound or syllable
(())	transcriber's comment as well as contextual or explanatory information
…	talk omitted from the data segment

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