Proper Names in Second Language Classroom Interaction:
An Initial Investigation into the Use of First Names in Instruction Sequences

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Abstract

In this article, I present some initial results of a study on the use of first names in school interactions. I assume that first names are not only used to refer to persons, which is well established, but also to accomplish a variety of institutional, acquisitional and interactional actions. In my analysis, I first describe a provisional pattern used by teachers for gaining students' attention during school activities. Then, I argue that first names are context-sensitive and I show how they participate in the organisation of an instruction sequence. My analysis is based on a corpus of English-as-a-Second-Language lessons (ESL) in the German-speaking part of Switzerland. The data were video-recorded and transcribed.

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Introduction

In this paper I will document some uses of first names in talk-in-interaction from the perspective of interactional onomastics. My basic assumption is that first names are not only employed as a simple reference device but that they are used to accomplish a variety of socially and interactionally relevant activities. This study has two goals. Firstly, I will describe a provisional pattern used by teachers in second language classroom interaction for gaining students' attention during school activities. Secondly, I will argue that first names are context-sensitive and that they participate in the sequential accomplishment of the social order in school settings.

1. Interactional onomastics

Interactional onomastics (De Stefani 2006; De Stefani and Pepin to appear) tends to combine two different approaches in the study of proper names. On the one hand, onomastics classifies proper names by determining categories such as anthroponyms and toponyms, and by describing their types of denomination, their forms, and their evolutions. On the other hand, interactional linguistics, which applies methods and concepts developed in the field of conversation analysis from a linguistic point of view, describes how speakers use and categorise the linguistic resources they employ in interaction.

   The study of proper names was for many years a marginalised domain of research in interactional linguistics. Except for the important contributions of several researchers on person reference including Sacks and Schegloff (1979), Downing (1996), Schegloff (1996), Enfield and Stivers (2007), and Lerner and Kitzinger (2007), publications on the uses and functions of proper names in talk-in-interaction were sporadic (e.g., Schegloff 1972, Watson 1981, Auer 1983, Hopper 1990, Schwitalla 1995). Recent publications, however, show a renewed interest in the study of how proper names contribute to the accomplishment of interactional and social activities and how they participate in the categorisation of people (e.g., Goodwin 2003, De Stefani 2004, Mondada 2004, Schegloff 2007, Halonen 2008).

Interactional onomastics describes the uses and functions of proper names by (i) highlighting recurrent formal patterns and systematic characteristics, (ii) analysing them from a multimodal perspective that not only includes language but also prosody, gesture, gaze and sequentiality, and (iii) considering the use and categorisation of proper names as an endogenous process linked to the participants' activities.

2. Methodology and corpus

The methodology of interactional onomastics is grounded on:

1. Collecting audio- and video-tapes of human interactions in natural settings, that is settings that are neither experimental nor arranged by the researcher.
2. Making transcripts from recordings using conventions that allow the sharing and discussion of data.

The corpus consists of 150 hours of recordings collected between August 2002 and June 2006 in compulsory schools in the German-speaking part of Switzerland:

- approximately 100 hours were videotaped in eight different classes (English lessons and French lessons) in Basel (level 8 and 9, pupils are 13–17 years old);
- approximately 50 hours were audiotaped in 16 different classes (French lessons) in the canton of Aargau (level 6–10, pupils are 11–18 years old).

For this paper, only the English lessons of the corpus were analysed.

3. Second language classroom interaction

Classroom interaction can be seen as institutional talk (e.g., Mehan 1979, Bowles and Seedhouse 2007). Institutional talk (Boden 1992, Drew and Heritage 1992) concerns environments in which:

(i) the goals of the participants are more limited than in conversation and are institution-specific;
(ii) restrictions on the nature of interactional contributions are often in force;
(iii) institution- and activity-specific frameworks are common.

Recent studies in the organisation of second language school interactions show, e.g., that language, participation, turn-taking and repair sequences are organised in a specific manner in language classrooms (e.g., Seedhouse 2004, Mortensen 2008). Second language interaction is also characterised by the use of more than one language, the presence of code switching and frequent repairs (e.g., Kurhila 2006).

3.1. Three dimensions of social order in school settings

Three interlaced dimensions, more or less present at every moment of the lessons, construct the social order in the classrooms:

1) The institutional dimension concerns the participants' status, positions, and roles in school settings. It is intrinsically linked to specific rules and norms of behaviour and is grounded in an asymmetry of power, responsibilities and duties between teachers and learners.
2) The acquisitional dimension concerns the potential acquisition of competences in second language (linguistic structures, lexicon, pronunciation and so on). In principle, learners' and teachers' participation in classrooms is aimed at acquiring new knowledge and consolidating previously acquired knowledge. This fact is summarised by researchers in education under the notion of didactic contract (cf. e.g., Brousseau 1978, Sarrazy 1995). The didactic contract is linked to the asymmetry of language competences

between the teachers (considered as native or near native speakers) and the pupils (considered as non-native speakers).

3) The interactional dimension concerns every aspect of the organisation of talk-in-interaction, the process and the fluidity of interaction as well as the local coordination between speakers: turn-taking, recipiency, and so on. In a school context, this dimension relates to the asymmetry between the teacher as an independent speaker (he or she does not need to hold up his/her hand to be allowed to speak; moreover, he or she manages the development of interaction) and the students as non-independent speakers (they cannot talk when they want to, they need to be addressed or selected by the teacher as the next speaker).

4. The use of first names in instruction sequences

In the following chapter, I will look at the use of first names in second language classroom interaction.

In the domain of acquisition, studies on first names investigate how children or pupils acquire first names (e.g., Hall 1999, Marinis 2000) and how first names intervene in the acquisition of language (e.g., Durkin et al. 1982, Oshima-Takana and Derat 1996). In the field of onomastic studies, two recent publications highlight the relations between the study of names and the teaching of names (Franz and Greule 1999, Helleland 2004). However, little is known of how first names are employed to achieve school activities. In this section, I will address this gap by investigating how first names are interactionally used in a typical school activity, namely in instruction sequences. Instruction sequences usually occur at the beginning of a new task and as such can be considered as initial sequences. They can also appear in (pre)closing sequences; for example, at the end of a lesson, when the teacher explains the homework for the next lesson. Instruction sequences are also seen in transitions between two activities during the lesson (transitions from one activity to another generally provide instructions). Instructions can constitute extended sequences or be reduced to just one line of talk-in-interaction. They can be introduced by teachers as side sequences in the course of a main sequence (e.g., the instructions given during the course of an exercise) or can function as main sequences themselves. Instruction sequences are often initiated by the teacher but can also be given as a reaction to a pupil's action; for example, a pupil's question. As instruction sequences are not homogeneous and combine a great diversity of functions, such as gaining the attention of students, announcing the next activity, selecting the next speaker(s), scaffolding students' competence, calling the students to order, I restrict myself to the analysis of sequences initiated by the teachers when they aim to gain the attention of their pupils.

4.1. Extracting a provisional pattern

A first exploration of a sample of 175 occurrences shows the existence of a provisional pattern, that is, a configuration of different resources regularly used by teachers to catch the attention of the pupils and to manage various institutional, acquisitional and interactional aspects of instruction sequences.

Interactionally, the pattern is contextual and dynamic, that is it emerges from the configuration of the interaction and contributes to orient the interaction towards another configuration. Until now, I have used the term pattern, which implies the idea of a structure. It may, however, best be considered a gestalt, that is, a local adjustment of resources whose presence is recurrent but precise form is optional. Recurrency means that the pattern works as a quasi-systematic structure in such sequences. Optionality means that the pattern does not always take precisely the same form. The only formal element always present is in fact a pause or a

silence. Nevertheless, in general the pattern is expanded: it contains several elements as listed below (Figure 1) and not only one.

<u>Linguistic resources</u>
- Verbal structure(s)
- Person name(s)
- Reinforcement word(s) like "please", "ch:ut", …

<u>Paralinguistic resources</u>
- Prosody

<u>Non-linguistic resources</u>
- Gazes
- Head movements
- Hand movements
- Body position
- Pauses

Figure 1

Person names are used as recurrent resources of the pattern. They are, however, not compulsory as demonstrated by the absence of the use of a single name in 26 cases. They are often produced with rising intonation (158 occurrences), with a loud voice (137 occurrences) and/or emphasis (102 occurrences). Nevertheless, the preferred realisation of the pattern includes the presence of first name(s) produced with a specific intonation before and after a silence such as shown in Figure 2 (for a discussion about the notion of preference in conversation analysis, see Bilmes 1988).

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pause + *first name* voiced with rising intonation + pause

Figure 2

The discursive realisation of the pattern includes linguistic, paralinguistic and non-linguistic resources (see Figure 1). Linguistic resources are formal elements whose production depends on the timeline and the syntagmatic organisation of verbal talk. Paralinguistic resources typically include prosody, that applies to segments of talk that can be of different length, but that partly depends on the organisation of verbal elements. Non-linguistic resources are elements that can be produced without regard to the concatenation of words. For instance, gestures and gazes can be produced in a way completely independent of the verbal utterances. In the same way, body movements or positions are not subordinate to the speech flow. Since silences or pauses only appear when no word is uttered, they are closely linked to the verbal organisation of talk-in-interaction; but since they are not linguistic material at all, I consider them as non-linguistic resources. For brevity, I will focus my attention in this paper on linguistic and paralinguistic elements and on pauses, and will leave aside a discussion of non-linguistic resources.

4.2. Analysing a case

I will now turn to a single case analysis to illustrate how the pattern works and to exhibit some characteristics of the use of first names in instruction sequences. In this lesson, the activity is aimed at preparing a story or a brief play about what happens in a plane flying over the ocean when a problem suddenly emerges. The students' task is to invent the end of the story or, more precisely, what is to happen next. The extract starts when the teacher interrupts the course of the task.

<u>Extract 1. Mueller. 11-28-05 ((37:28-38:41))</u>

```
1       T:      ok/ can you stop/ for a (second)/
2       (1.5)
3       T:      +NADINE/ TAYA/ can you stop for a (second)
4       (4.1)
                +((teacher looks at Nadine and Tanya, then to the left before speaking again))
5       T:      it depends/ how good the stories a:re\ at the
6               moment/ if we go on (0.6) in the next if we go on
7               with this/ in the next lesson or not= I would like
8               to look (0.5) at your group please\ could you do
9               (0.5) your nice play/
10      (1.0)
11      T:      TANJA/ JANINE/ (0.4) please/ (0.8) come on/ you're
12              in the airplane ha/ you are in the plane so whats
13              going to -whats going to happen\
14      (1.9)
15      T:      can you tell me when you start who is who\
16      JAN:    i'm katy
17      T:      ya/
18      TAN:    i'm the man
19      E:      i'm sam
20      T:      yeah
21      CAR:    ehm [xxx]
22      MIC:        [xxx]
23      T:      co-pilote\ co-pilote\ ok/ and/ (1.9) and you a:re
24              (0.6) in the plane/at the (sky) in the air/ xxx
25              flying to rio\ good ok/ you start
26              +please\ hey CARMEN and MICHELE stop it
                +((teacher looks in Carmen's and Michèle's direction))
27      +(3.1)+
        +((teacher's circular head movement))
                +((teacher looks at Tanja's group))
28      T:      ok/
```

In this extract, three pairs of first names appear in three different places (lines 3, 11 and 26). The segments in which first names appear show a relatively formal resemblance (especially the first two, lines 3 and 11), such as the following:

- expressed by the teacher;
- with a loud voice;
- and a rising intonation;
- pauses/silences before and after;

- seem to address particular students.

In the next sections each segment and its immediate sequential environment will be highlighted by the use of a frame and followed by some comments of analysis.

4.2.1. Catching students' attention

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1       T:      ok/ can you stop/ for a (second)/
2       (1.5)
3       T:      +NADINE/ TAYA/ can you stop for a (second)
4       (4.1)
                +((teacher looks at Nadine and Tanya, then to the left before speaking again))
5       T:      it depends/ how good the stories a:re\ at the
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Figure 3

The teacher's turn follows a previous turn (line 1) where she asked students to stop their activity. After the pause that frequently follows such a request, the teacher repeats her turn by using the same linguistic structure ("can you stop/ for a (second)/") but opens the turn by using two first names (Nadine and Taya). This turn (line 3) is followed by a longer silence that permits all the students to orient themselves towards the teacher. What is important here from the teacher's point of view is to gain the attention of each and every student so that they are able to listen to what she says next (lines 5 and following), that is: 1) linking the content of the next lesson and the quality of the activity to be done ("this/") and 2) announcing/engaging the next activity (*doing the play*, lines 8-9). The use of the proper names targets two students, but the teacher's turn obviously targets all the students (see comment on the teacher's head movement and gaze under lines 3 and 4 in the transcript).

A function of this segment is to orient the students towards the teacher's next turn since she knows that her turn will provide some important information concerning the ongoing activity and the program of this lesson as well as the following lesson (with a reference to the evaluation of the activity, "it depends/ how good the stories a:re\""). Another function is to orient the students towards the next activity, that is, doing the play (see lines 8-9). In this case, the teacher's turn has to be considered as the first part of an elicitation sequence in the form of a question (for a presentation of the notion of "elicitation sequence" in a discursive approach, see Sinclair & Coulthard 1975). Sacks et al. (1974) have shown that a question is the first part of an adjacency pair, the second part being an answer. However in this situation, the teacher is not really waiting for an answer but for the students to prepare for the play. What is interesting in these lines is that the teacher does not address any specific students. She also does not use person names (on the videotape, we cannot see the precise direction of her gaze, but it is clear that she does not make any specific movement towards anybody). In such a case, one would expect that the teacher implicitly addresses the people she has previously targeted, here Nadine and Taya. But instead of that, in line 11, the teacher eventually targets two other students (as we can see in Fig. 3 below), which brings me to the next section.

4.2.2. Selecting the next speakers and orienting them to the next task

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8      T:       to look (0.5) at your group please\ could you do
9               (0.5) your nice play/
10     (1.0)
11     T:       TANJA/ JANINE/ (0.4) please/ (0.8) come on/ you're
12              in the airplane ha/ you are in the plane so whats
13              going to -whats going to happen\
```

Figure 4

The teacher's turn (line 11) addresses Tanja and Janine and not the other students and selects them for the activity. The segment containing the first names is followed by other linguistic material addressing Tanja and Janine. In particular the segment "come on/" is stretched, implying that the two girls (from the teacher's point of view) are not working fast enough, they are not yet oriented to the new task (*enacting the play*) and therefore not ready to deliver it to the classroom. That is why the following part of the teacher's turn is oriented towards the play, ascribing its place in the scene to the group of students ("you are in the plane" voiced twice) and asking the students about what will happen afterwards (in the story).

In this segment, the main interactional function is to anticipate the second part of the adjacency pair opened by the turn in lines 5-9, and reformulating the first part of the elicitation sequence in another way (describing the scene and ascribing the students in it). The students have to know when to apply their part of the sequence structure at the right moment. Here, the use of "your" and "you" (line 8) is not interpreted by the pupils as targeting one of them. Actually the teacher's turn is followed by a relatively long pause and no students are about to do the play now. At the acquisitional level, the teacher profits from having to relaunch the girls to set the stage and to give additional instructions relevant to a successful course of the activity since the students will take on roles: "can you tell me when you start who is who\" (line 15). Finally, at the institutional level, the silence in line 10 could be analysed as an emerging problem about the rhythm of the lesson. In producing the segment "TANJA/ JANINE/ (0.4) please/ (0.8) come on/", the teacher would activate her role as a person of authority by engaging the students to start.

4.2.3. Calling students to order

```
25              flying to rio\ good ok/ you start
26              +please\ hey CARMEN and MICHELE stop it
                +((teacher looks in Carmen's and Michèle's direction))
27     +(3.1)+
       +((teacher's circular head movement))
                +((teacher looks at Tanja's group))
28     T:       ok/
```

Figure 5

In the extract shown in Figure 5, the segment containing first names appears to be relatively different from the two previous utterances: there is no rising intonation and no pauses just before and just after the segment (the ensuing pause is in line 27). Moreover the segment appears inside the teacher's turn. This segment is used to call Carmen and Michèle to order, who continue talking together in low voices (lines 21-22), demanding silence and obliging them to obviously

focus on their new task (one could paraphrase it as looking in silence at their colleagues working on the play). Here, the segment clearly makes a selection among the students categorising the two girls as something like disruptive students. Afterwards, silence is used by the teacher to verify that everybody is ready for what will follow, the assessment in line 28 permitting this side sequence (calling the students to order) to be closed and the interactional floor for the group play to be opened.

At the interactional level, the use of proper names in this segment allows the continuation of the lesson according to the conversational rule *one speaker at a time*. At the institutional level, the allocation of turn-taking is guided and controlled by the teacher and has to be respected by the students; the use of first names in line 26 explicitly targets the disruptive students and identifies them as such.

4.3. Discussion

The emphasis of first names in the pattern presented in section 4.1. strongly suggests that such names are important to the teacher (and the students) for managing certain situations, even though they are not important in themselves but are rather relevant as components of the gestalt.

Now, what about the referential function of proper names, which is what proper names supposedly do best, in the gestalt? Do first names refer to the people addressed by corresponding utterances? Not only and not always, as the sequence analysed shows. The use of first names in instruction sequences is not overtly oriented to person reference but serves to manage the coordination between participants and the common orientation to what happens next. From this point of view, their main function is not to point to a student but to point to a switch in the stating or in the achievement of the activity. Even when it points to a problem in the behaviour of some students (e.g., example 3, cf. section 4.2.3.), the pattern is also used to make all participants aware of the fact that something wrong is happening. In other words, voicing first names then permits the teacher to point to some specific aspect of the current situation and to alert participants that something is changing or has to be changed in the development of the situation.

In the case analysed above, we also see that the use of first names is a dynamic activity that realises different functions through a variety of devices. It is noticeable that the first names do not appear outside the context of their use where they are integrated and participate in a sequence in which other resources are exhibited. In this sense, one can say that the first names are context-sensitive because they are linked to the process of interaction. When isolated, they do not fulfil functions related to specific (i.e., school) activities but their recurrent presence in the gestalt seems to be important for the organisation and successful progress of such activities. This is how these names are exploited, particularly by the teacher, during turn-taking; for example, when categorising students with respect to their inappropriate behaviour. This possesses various functions that occur at the same time at an interactional, acquisitional and institutional level.

5. Conclusion

In conclusion, several generalities can be made from employing an interactional perspective on onomastics. Such a perspective:

– highlights the necessity to investigate and to document the uses of proper names in spoken language (cf. Pepin and De Stefani, in press);
– shows the relevance of using a methodological approach based on recordings and transcripts of interactions in natural settings;
– displays the importance of analysing proper names not in themselves but as components of bigger units, such as turns and sequences;
– exhibits the potential of connecting different levels of analysis (multimodal analysis);

– contributes to seizing the multifunctional nature of proper names and not only their referential nature.

This initial investigation on the use of first names in second language school interactions can be considered a seminal attempt to apply interactional onomastics in multilingual and institutional settings. The provisional pattern highlighted in this paper, that the use of first names is related to gaining the students' attention, has to be confirmed and developed in future investigations. Already, however, this study underlines the importance of first names for opening and managing instruction sequences, orienting students from one activity to another, categorising participants and realising the social order in the classroom.

Transcription symbols

T	Teacher
E	Unspecified student
JAN, MIC, …	First letters of the students' first names
[ ]	overlap
(1.0)	numbers in parentheses indicate pauses in seconds and tenths of a second
&	turn continues in the next line
\	indicates falling intonation contour
/	indicates rising intonation
><	the utterance units between these symbols are rushed or compressed
WOrd	use of upper case indicates loud voice
°word°	indicates low voice
word	indicates emphasis, stress
(word)	indicates uncertainty on the part of the transcriber
(x)	indicates unclear talk (each x represents a syllable)
h	indicates laughter particles
li-	truncating term
(( ))	material between double quotes provides extralinguistic information, e.g., about body movements
+	symbol used to describe gestures or actions, synchronized with corresponding stretches of talk

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