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# “Something for Linguists”: On-the-fly Grammar Instruction in a Dutch as Foreign Language Classroom

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This article examines grammar instruction produced on the fly by a teacher in response to students' questions in a Dutch as foreign language classroom. Such sequences merit attention because they present teachers with the opportunity and the challenge to provide unplanned instruction on an aspect of grammar to which a student has shown herself to be attending. Using the tools of conversation analysis, we examine two sequences in which a student initiates talk about Dutch grammar and the teacher constructs a mini-lesson using talk, gesture and writing on the blackboard. In first, the teacher produces a paradigm, a practice used widely in linguistics and L2 education. In the second, he produces a contrastive pair, a common practice in linguistics. We consider tensions entailed in on-the-fly grammar instruction produced in response to students' questions.

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## INTRODUCTION

Nassaji and Fotos (2011) observe that, “over the past few decades [there has been] a fundamental shift in the teaching of grammar from one in which grammar instruction was central, to one in which grammar instruction was absent, to the recent reconsideration of the significance of the role of grammar instruction” (p. vi). With a growing consensus that explicit attention to form can facilitate foreign/second language (L2) learning (Norris & Ortega, 2000), researchers and practitioners of L2 education are asking not whether or not to provide grammar instruction, but rather when and how. Recent discussions of the role and nature of grammar instruction in the foreign language classroom have focused on instruction that is either planned by the teacher in advance (e.g. Batstone & Ellis, 2009; Scheffler, 2011) or initiated by the teacher in response to linguistic problems that arise during communicative interaction (e.g. Basturkmen, Loewen, & Ellis, 2004; Loewen, 2005; Lyster & Saito, 2010; Nassaji, 2010).

Sometimes students are the ones to initiate talk about L2 grammar, and this talk may concern grammar topics not anticipated by the teacher. This article examines grammar instruction produced on the fly by a teacher in response to a student's question about L2 grammar. We use the phrase on-the-fly to describe these episodes because we want to emphasize the unplanned nature of the talk that unfolds after a learner asks about form.<sup>1</sup>

Using the tools of conversation analysis (CA), we examine two expanded question-answer (Q-A) sequences in which a student initiated talk about Dutch grammar and the teacher produces a spontaneous mini lesson, using talk, gesture and writing on the blackboard. Such sequences have not been examined in detail in prior research, and they merit close analytic attention because they have the potential to be productive moments in L2 classroom interaction. Research indicates that conscious attention to form plays an important role in L2 learning (Doughty, 1991; Tomlin & Villa, 1994; VanPatten, 1989; Williams, 2001), and in asking a question about grammar a student clearly signals her attention to some formal aspect of the L2. From a sociocultural perspective, student questions about grammar may be seen as moments in which a student takes the interactional floor and demonstrates agency as a learner (Hall & Walsh, 2002; Jacknick, 2011).

Student questions about L2 grammar present teachers with the opportunity and the challenge to produce unplanned instruction on an aspect of L2 grammar to which a student has explicitly shown herself to be attending of her own volition. However, research indicates that such opportunities are infrequent and potentially problematic. Students do not often ask questions in L2 classrooms (e.g. Antón, 1999; Banbrook, 1987; Brock, 1986; Lörcher, 1986; Markee, 1996; White & Lightbown, 1984; Williams, 1999; Wintergerst, 1994), and they ask questions about L2 grammar far less frequently than they ask about vocabulary (Ellis, Basturkmen, & Loewen, 2001; Harley, 1994; Loewen, 2004; Markee, 1995; Mortensen, 2011; Williams, 1999). A student may ask a question about a grammar topic that the teacher feels is too complex for the learners at that point in their L2 development. A question may lead to a departure from the teacher's lesson plan and thus take time away from preplanned activities and learning objectives (Bailey, 1996; White & Lightbown, 1984). If the teacher has not planned to explain a particular grammatical point, he may not be able to construct a coherent explanation on the fly, for even highly proficient foreign language speaker-teachers do not have declarative, pedagogical knowledge of every aspect of the L2 grammar. Even teachers who are normally quite at ease with student questions may be unsettled by a question they are not prepared to answer (Borg, 1998). Learners' questions may discomfit a teacher because they reverse the usual pattern in classroom communication, making the teacher responsible for answering the student and shifting control of the "moment by moment teaching/learning agenda in the classroom" (Markee, 1995, p. 68).

In this article we examine in micro-interactional detail two sequences in which a student asked a question about L2 grammar and the teacher produced improvised instruction in response. Our goal in analyzing these sequences was to understand how participants use speech, writing, and embodied actions to communicate about L2 grammar. In particular, we sought to answer two questions: How does the teacher construct L2 grammar instruction on a moment-by-moment basis, using multiple semiotic resources? What does close sequential analysis of participants' talk-in-interaction reveal about their orientations toward the unfolding grammar instruction and toward language as a system that may be talked and written about? In providing detailed analyses of the sequential context and organization of classroom talk about L2 grammatical form, we hope to illuminate learner-initiated talk about L2 grammar as potentially productive but also perilous moments in L2 classroom interaction.

## THE STUDY

### A Conversation Analytic Perspective

CA is concerned with the local production and management of talk-in-interaction analyzed from the participants' own perspective, which is displayed turn by turn in their vocal and non-vocal behavior (for reviews of the methodology, see Hutchby & Wooffitt, 2008; Markee, 2000; ten Have, 1999). CA has been employed by L2 researchers to provide "a realistic idea of what actually happens in language learning talk and to enable a process account of language learning through interaction" (Sert & Seedhouse, 2011, p. 8). Conversation analysts have demonstrated that the microanalysis of even a single episode contributes to our understanding of L2 teaching and learning by revealing the intricate and layered organization of "a particular aspect of interaction previously unnoticed by but important for professionals working within a specific (institutional) context" (Waring, 2009, pp. 801-802).

The two episodes analyzed in this article come from a larger collection of student-initiated Q-A sequences from a Dutch as foreign language classroom. These two episodes stood out because the students' questions were about grammar and the teacher responded to them at length, whereas the other student-initiated Q-A sequences in the larger collection concerned vocabulary and were very brief (for CA studies of talk about vocabulary, see Markee, 1995; Mortensen, 2011). Our selection of these sequences was also motivated by their resonance with our own L2 teaching experiences and those of many colleagues: student questions about grammar are appreciated and responded to by teachers as signs of engagement and opportunities to talk about L2 grammar, but our efforts to respond to such questions are not always successful.

The two sequences are both examples of a question-answer adjacency pair with post-expansions. A core concept in CA, an adjacency pair is composed of two utterances that are adjacent, produced by different speakers, ordered as a first part and a second part, and categorized, such that a particular first pair part requires a particular second part or range of second parts (Schegloff & Sacks, 1973). Speakers orient to the adjacency pair structure during talk-in-interaction, expecting the first pair part to be followed by an appropriate second pair part (Heritage, 1987). For example, an answer is expected to follow a question. An adjacency pair may be expanded before, during, and after its completion, with one or more turns before the first pair part or after the second pair part or in-between the two, yet still as part of the same sequence (Jefferson, 1972; Robinson, 2001; Sacks, Schegloff, & Jefferson, 1974; Schegloff, 2007; Wong & Waring, 2010). A post-expansion may be minimal, designed to be finished with a single turn and not projecting any further talk (also referred to in CA as a sequence closing third), as in this example (from Stivers, 2013, p. 197):

- |   |      |                            |                        |
|---|------|----------------------------|------------------------|
| 1 | Gio: | You don't want a beverage? | First-pair part        |
| 2 | Lan: | <u>NO!</u>                 | Second-pair part       |
| 3 |      | (.)                        |                        |
| 4 | Gio: | Okay.                      | Minimal post expansion |

Or, a post-expansion may be non-minimal, designed to project at least one further turn, as in this example (from Stivers, 2013, p. 198):

- |   |      |  |                 |
|---|------|--|-----------------|
| 1 | Dad: | Now how often does she do the double step thing? | First-pair part |
|---|------|--|-----------------|

- |   |  |                                |
|---|--|--------------------------------|
| 2 | Mom: .hh ^Uh::m ( . ) almost every time now. | Second-pair part               |
| 3 | Dad: Oh really?                              | Non- minimal<br>post expansion |
| 4 | Mom: Mm hm,                                  |                                |

Schegloff (2007) observes that “very long stretches of talk can be understood as elaborate structures built around a single underlying adjacency pair” (p. 27), and that is what we see in the sequences analyzed in this article. In each, there is a base adjacency pair, the first pair part being a question posed by a student to the teacher, making relevant the second pair part, an answer to the student’s question that is provided and then expanded upon by the teacher, as seen below (modified from Robinson, 2001, p. 26):

Student:	Base first-pair part (e.g. question)	Pre-expansion
Teacher:	Base second-pair part (e.g. answer)	Insert-expansion
Teacher:		Post-expansion

In both sequences discussed below, the teacher produced a non-minimal post-expansion (NMPE), topicalizing the grammatical issue raised by the student (for discussion of different NMPE practices, see Schegloff, 2007). The teacher’s post-expansions were projected to be extended turns (for a review of expanded sequences, see Liddicoat, 2011; Schegloff, 2007), and in both cases he took several turns at talk while the students said little or nothing. The teacher’s multiple turns were courses of action, “sequences of actions that have some shape or trajectory to them” (Schegloff, 2007, p. 2) and were recognizable as on-the-fly grammar instruction.

## Data Collection, Site, and Participants

The data come from a larger study in which the first author video-recorded classroom interaction in an intensive, beginning level Dutch as foreign language course at an American university. The researcher had taken this course series two years before doing this study and so was already familiar with the instructor and how he taught. The teacher organized the course around *Code Nederlands* (Kuiken & van Kalsbeek, 1997), a communicative task-based series that included textbooks, workbooks, audiotapes, and software. He supplemented these with assigned readings in an English-language Dutch reference grammar (Shetter, 1994), hand-outs of his own design, and print and television media from the Netherlands. A native speaker of English and an advanced non-native speaker of Dutch, the teacher taught courses on linguistics and published linguistic research on Dutch and other Germanic languages. The class consisted of seven female students with L2 learning experience prior to beginning their study of Dutch.<sup>2</sup> Classroom talk was mostly in Dutch and predominantly teacher-fronted while the first author attended the class, and this observation was member-checked during follow-up interviews with the teacher and email contact with the students.<sup>3</sup> Students sat in desks that were arranged in rows facing the front of the classroom and bolted to the floor. The camera was set up on a tripod in a corner of the classroom that allowed for filming of all participants most of the time, and the researcher took time-indexed contextual notes during recording sessions.

In addition to video recording classroom interaction, the first author conducted two interviews and two stimulated recall sessions with the instructor. Also, the students responded to an email questionnaire after each video recording session, in which they were asked to answer the following questions:

- Was there anything that you did not understand prior to or during today's class that was addressed in class? Please describe the point(s) of confusion.
- Do you now understand that point (better)? If yes, what helped you to understand it? If no, why not?

Most learners responded to the questionnaires the same day, and all responded within two days. In several cases, students followed up on their questionnaires with additional emails in which they discussed their experiences in the course in response to follow-up questions from the researcher.

Before presenting our analysis, we provide some introduction to our transcripts. In transcribing talk we follow the conventions of CA (Jefferson, 2004). Vocal and non-vocal actions that co-occur share a line number. In addition to descriptions of non-vocal action, we have incorporated graphic representation of the teacher's writing on the blackboard. Black script indicates that the writing is produced at that point in the interaction, while grey script marks writing as having been produced in a prior turn. We include these elements because the temporal unfolding of speech and writing on the blackboard is central to the teacher's production of spontaneous grammar instruction.

## SEQUENCE 1: THE PARADIGM

The first student-initiated question-answer sequence arises at the end of a pre-planned lesson on impersonal passive constructions (for discussions of such constructions, see Kirsner, 1976; Verhagen, 1992). In the lesson, the teacher explicitly drew students' attention to subject-AUX agreement in impersonal passive constructions, referring to a handout he had produced for the lesson and given to the students. A student, Nina (N), who has been looking down at the worksheet, asks a Wh-question about the tense of one of the passive auxiliary forms on the worksheet, *werd*, the singular past tense form of the auxiliary verb *worden* (line 2). The teacher (T) answers by providing the specific information requested: the tense of an auxiliary in passive constructions (line 3). Nina produces a sequence closing third (Schegloff, 2007), repeating the answer (line 5) and signaling her acceptance with a nod (line 6). T then calls for attention (line 7), while Nina subvocalizes an expanded repetition of the answer while writing in her notebook (line 8).


### *Segment 1a*

- |   |    |   |                         |
|---|----|---|-------------------------|
| 1 | T: | It's a kind of default (.) like het regent.<br>it's raining.                    |                         |
| 2 | N: | (( <i>looks up from notebook</i> )) Welke tijd is werd?<br>which tense is werd? | ← Base First Pair Part  |
| 3 | T: | Verleden tijd.<br>past tense.   | ← Base Second Pair Part |
| 4 | N: | (( <i>looks down at notebook</i> ))   |                         |
| 5 |    | Verleden tijd.<br>past tense.   |                         |

- 6 ((*nods head*))  
 7 T: Ja (.) // let op.  
 yes watch out/pay attention.  
 8 N: // ((writing in notebook)) °Werd is verleden tijd.°  
 °'werd' is past tense.°

Despite the fact that Nina has signaled the sufficiency of his initial answer, the teacher expands on his answer. In a stimulated recall session, he explained that he wanted to “seize the moment” and revisit Dutch passive constructions because, in his experiences, most students had trouble with the auxiliary verbs. In this non-minimal post-expansion, he produces in speech and writing on the blackboard an exemplar passive sentence with three other auxiliary verb forms lined up in a column under the AUX in the sentence (for discussion of the production of examples in L2 instruction that is not focused on grammar, see Lee, 2004). Mortensen (2011) notes that “writing during a turn-at-talk that includes the written version of the verbal talk ... projects an activity in which the written words are relevant to the ongoing activity rather than related to just one of the students” (pp. 146-147). In this sequence, the students display their understanding that the teacher’s expanded answer to Nina’s question is intended for them as well: all of them watch the teacher and write in their notebooks as he writes on the board (lines 10, 14, 17, 23).

*Segment 1b*

- |    |  |   |
|----|--|---|
| 9  | T: (( <i>writes on blackboard</i> ‘het boek wordt gelezen’))   | <i>Het boek wordt gelezen</i>   |
| 10 | Ss: (( <i>writing</i> ))   |   |
| 11 | T: (( <i>reading from blackboard</i> ))<br>Het boek <u>wordt</u> gelezen<br>The book is (being) read |   |
| 12 | (( <i>looks at Ss while writes</i> ‘werd’ below ‘wordt’))  | <i>Het boek wordt gelezen</i><br><b>werd</b>  |
| 13 | <u>werd</u><br><u>was</u>  |   |
| 14 | Ss: (( <i>writing</i> ))   |   |
| 15 | T: (( <i>looks at Ss as he writes</i> ‘was’ below ‘werd’))   | <i>Het boek wordt gelezen</i><br>werd<br><b>was</b>   |
| 16 | // <u>was-</u><br><u>had been</u>  |   |
| 17 | Ss: // (( <i>writing</i> ))  |   |
| 18 | N: // Ja.<br>Yes.  |   |
| 19 | T: no (( <i>erases what has just written, writes</i> ‘is’))  | <i>Het boek wordt gelezen</i><br>werd<br><b>was</b>  |
| 20 | <u>is</u> (( <i>smiles</i> ))<br><u>has been</u>   | <i>Het boek wordt gelezen</i><br>werd<br><b>is</b>  |

21 ((looks at Ss while writes ‘was’ below ‘is’))

<p>Het boek wordt gelezen werd is <b>was</b></p>
--

22 was.  
had been.

23 Ss: ((writing))

The teacher links his expansion to the relevant reading in the Dutch reference grammar (Shetter 1994, Ch. 24) that had been assigned earlier that week (line 24). Nina acknowledges the teacher’s making this link (line 25). The teacher then marks the transition from one activity to the next by producing *Okay* (line 26), displaying “a state of readiness for movements to next-positioned matters” (Beach, 1993, p. 329).

### Segment 1c

- 24 T: ((moves toward open book on table, looks at it))  
Daar gaat Shetter over.  
That is discussed in Shetter.
- 25 N: Ja.  
Yes.
- 26 T: Okay.
- 27 (0.5)
- 28 T: Uh::fv::
- 29 Oh. (0.2) Heeft iemand naar de cassettes geluisterd?  
Has anyone listened to the cassettes?

Focus on Form (FonF) researchers might label this NMPE as pre-emptive FonF, an instance in which instructors call students’ attention to some formal aspect of language when there has not (yet) been communicative trouble (Ellis, 2001). For English speakers, it can be difficult to master the passive voice in Dutch because Dutch has two passive auxiliaries, *worden* and *zijn* ‘to be’, and it is necessary to switch from one auxiliary verb to another to express shifts that are expressed in English with just one verb, BE (for discussion of Dutch passive voice, see Cornelis, 2000; Verhagen, 1992).

In his expansion, the teacher brings the two passive auxiliaries of Dutch to the students’ attention by producing a paradigm in speech and writing. Paradigm can be defined as a “set of substitutional relationships a linguistic unit has with other units in a specific context” (Crystal, 1997, p. 277). The paradigm is “the most widespread format for linguistic data presentation” (Penton et al., 2004, p. 1), and it is common practice in L2 education, showing up in textbooks, grammar books, lessons, and examinations. In producing his paradigm, the teacher presents the two AUXs in their present and past tense forms in the third person singular. He makes visible (by writing the AUXs in a column) and hearable (by vocalizing the AUXs with emphasis and a slightly rising intonation) a structural slot in the exemplar passive sentence wherein different auxiliary verb forms may be used. His intonation marks his talk in lines 11, 13, and 20 as hearably incomplete, while the falling intonation on line 22 marks it as the end of the production of the paradigm. The teacher’s self-repair of his ordering of these verb forms (lines 19 and 20) suggests that there is a canonical order for these form, and the teacher’s final ordering does in fact match that of the textbook’s presentation of the passive voice construction (Kuiken & van Kalsbeek, 1997, p. 67, with English glosses provided by us):

Het formulier <b>wordt</b> ingevuld.	‘The form <b>is (being)</b> filled in.’
Het formulier <b>werd</b> ingevuld.	‘The form <b>was (being)</b> filled in.’
Het formulier <b>is</b> ingevuld.	‘The form <b>has been</b> filled in.’
Het formulier <b>was</b> ingevuld.	‘The form <b>had been</b> filled in.’

Overall, the teacher’s expansion in Sequence 1 proceeds smoothly. The teacher produces his spontaneous grammar instruction without hesitation and with just one minor hitch, his self-repair of his ordering of the AUX forms. The students and the teacher signal the adequacy of the teacher’s expansion multiple ways and times. Nina signals her acceptance of the teacher’s expansion and reference to the grammar book, and she and her classmates all display acceptance by writing in their notebooks, apparently copying what the teacher has written on the blackboard. The teacher also leaves his writing on the blackboard after the sequence ends. In their post-recording email questionnaires, Nina and four other students wrote that they found the teacher’s instruction on this point helpful. One student expressed dissatisfaction, indicating that she still did not understand how and why Dutch used both *worden* and *zijn* in passive constructions.

## SEQUENCE 2: CONTRASTIVE PAIRS

Sequence 1 shows the teacher’s deployment of the well-known and widely used practice of paradigm to produce unplanned L2 grammar instruction. In Sequence 2 we see the teacher’s use of another practice for talking and writing about grammar: the presentation of exemplars, in particular coupled, contrasting exemplars known as contrastive pairs.

Whereas Sequence 1 occurred at the end of a form-focused lesson, Sequence 2 was initiated by a student as the teacher transitioned from one meaning-focused activity (discussion of a reading passage about the expansion of the Netherland’s largest airport) to another (brainstorming of interview questions for future visitor to the classroom). Jacknick (2011) points out that students sometimes use such activity transitions to create “wobble room” in which they may deviate from discursive norms of the classroom, including asking the teacher questions (p. 33).

As this sequence begins, the teacher has fallen silent and is looking down at the book in his hand. A student, Chris (C), raises her hand. When the teacher (T) begins a new activity, Chris claims a turn at talk by producing a “preliminary to preliminaries” (Schegloff, 1980), stating that she has a question (line 3). After receiving a go-ahead from the teacher (line 4), Chris produces more preliminary work, providing more information before initiating her main course of action (asking a question about form): she looks down at her notebook and states that she has something there that “we can say” (line 5), then reading that something aloud (line 6). She then produces a yes/no interrogative (YNI) that is a genuine request for information (as opposed to other social actions that can be done with YNI; see Raymond, 2003) about what is done with an adposition in the sentence she has just read aloud (a sentence that appeared in the homework assignment for that day) (line 8).

The teacher starts speaking before Chris has completed her question, creating a brief overlap as he co-completes her question.<sup>4</sup> He then gives a minimal answer to the question: no (line 10). As Nina did in Sequence 1, Chris repeats the teacher’s answer (line 11). Unlike Nina, she does not produce a sequence closing third that signals her acceptance of the answer. She continues to look at the instructor, eyebrows raised, and holds the /e/ lip-shape

for almost a second after she stops producing sound. The teacher's next utterance displays his understanding of Nina's turn as signaling that his initial answer was not sufficient (line 12).

*Segment 2a*

- 1 C: ((holds right hand up, looking at notebook on her lap))  
 2 T: Nou (.) ik wil iets zeggen over morgen.  
       So I want to say something about tomorrow.  
 3 C: Ik heb een vraag.  
       I have a question.  
       ((turns gaze toward T as starts turn, turns gaze back to notebook))  
 4 T: Ja?  
       Yes?  
 5 C: Um (.) ik heb uh (.) er staan er gezegd dat (.) we kunnen zeggen  
       I have it says here that we can say  
 6 Jij jij hij is de kamer ingelopen.  
       You you he has walked into the room.  
       ((reading from textbook, beats with right index finger))  
 7 T: Ja  
       Yes  
 8 C: Kunnen we dat met al: (.) prepo // (sities)? ← Base First Pair Part  
       Can we that with all prepo(sitions)?  
 9 T: // met alle voorzetsels doen?  
       do with all prepositions?  
 10 Nee. ← Base Second Pair Part  
       No.  
 11 C: Nee. ((looks at teacher, eyebrows raised, holds /e/ lip-shape 0.8))  
       No.  
 12 T: Maar in (.) uit (2.0) um: (1.0)  
       but in out

The student's question and the teacher's expansion touch on multiple, intersecting grammatical features of Dutch. The two features of interest here are (1) the variable placement of some Dutch adpositions as a strategy for signaling that the adpositional phrase is either directional or locative and (2) the selection of auxiliary in periphrastic past constructions, given a split AUX system (for detailed discussion of these issues, see den Dikken, 2006; Zwarts, 2010). As we present our analysis of the talk-in-interaction of this sequence, we provide some explanation of these grammatical features in order to facilitate the reader's understanding of the sequence and to make visible that teacher and student are displaying through their talk an orientation to language as a system of rules and structures.

The student's question displays an orientation to language as a system of rules for what speakers may and may not do. In the teacher's initial reply and at various points in his expansion, he displays this same orientation. After providing a minimal answer, the teacher names the adpositions *in* and *uit* (line 12), two adpositions that can affix to the past participle in periphrastic perfect constructions with motion verbs, as is the exemplar read aloud by Chris. After naming these two adpositions (line 12), the teacher says "Okay" twice (lines 13 and 15), and Chris writes in her notebook (line 14). The teacher requests permission to erase what is on the board (line 16), Chris grants it (line 17), and the teacher begins the NMPE grammar instruction. The researcher (R) asks the teacher if "this is in the book" (referring to *Code Nederlands*) (line 18), to which the teacher replies no as he is writing on the blackboard.

As in Sequence 1, all the students display through their gaze and writing their understanding that the talk and writing that follow are for all of them.

*Segment 2b*

- 13        Okay
- 14    C:    *((writes in notebook))*
- 15    T:    °Okay°.
- 16        Mag ik dit uitwissen?  
          May I erase this?
- 17    C:    Um hmm
- 18    R:    Staat dit in het boek?  
          Is this in the book?
- 19    T:    Nee.  
          No .  
          *((writes on blackboard 'hij heeft gelopen,'  
          erases 'gelopen,'*
- 20        *writes 'gelopen' about a foot to the right of 'heeft',*
- 21        *then writes 'is' about six inches below 'heeft',*
- 22        *writes 'in de kamer' above and between 'hij heeft' and  
          'gelopen',*
- 23        *and writes 'ka' below and between 'his heeft' and  
          'gelopen',*
- 24        *then writes 'de' before 'ka',*
- 25        *writes 'mer in' after 'ka'))*
- 26        *((writing in their notebooks as T writes on board))*
- 27    Ss:    *((writing in their notebooks as T writes on board))*

Hij heeft gelopen

Hij heeft ~~gelopen~~ 

Hij heeft gelopen

Hij heeft gelopen  
*is*

*in de kamer*  
Hij heeft gelopen  
*is*

*in de kamer*  
Hij heeft gelopen  
*is ka*

*in de kamer*  
Hij heeft gelopen  
*is de ka*

*in de kamer*  
Hij heeft gelopen  
*is de kamer in*

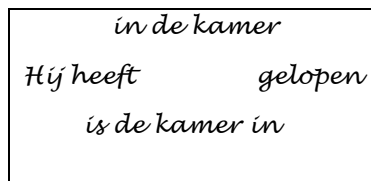
In the segment above, the teacher sets up for talk about grammar by first writing on the board, projecting an extended turn at talk and setting up a shared visual field for the students and him. Batstone and Ellis (2009) note the importance of blackboard use in raising grammar awareness, and Mortensen (2011) points out that the blackboard is an important sociocultural artifact in the classroom, but its use by participants “to organize their ongoing courses of action” has been largely overlooked (p. 146). The temporal unfolding of the teacher’s writing makes evident that he is presenting two different periphrastic past constructions that share most elements but differ in two important respects: the auxiliary verb and the placement of the adposition. He first writes *hij heeft gelopen* (line 19), then erases *gelopen* (line 20) and writes it further to the right (line 21). He then writes *is* below *heeft* (line

22). Above the space between *beeft* and *gelopen*, he writes *in de kamer* (line 23). Below the space he writes *ka* (line 24), then does a self-repair, inserting the article *de* between *is* and *ka* (line 25), then completing *kamer* and writing *in* (line 26).

What the teacher has written on the board is a contrastive pair. The presentation of contrastive pairs is a common practice in linguistics for proving the significance of a language feature. This practice was first used in phonology to show that in a given language a phonetic difference was phonemic, that is, it made a difference in meaning, as in the pair lip/rip (Pike, 1947). The ideal contrastive pair is a minimal pair, in which the only difference between the two forms is the feature that makes the difference in meaning. The practice of contrastive pairs was later extended to other subsystems of language, including syntax (Di Pietro, 1971). Whereas contrastive pairs are common in linguistics, their use is more restricted in L2 pedagogy, limited mostly to teaching pronunciation (Celce-Murcia et al., 1996). In linguistics, the conventional way of presenting a contrastive pair is as two separate sentences with a gloss that makes explicit the difference in meaning between the two exemplars, as in

<i>Hij heeft in de kamer gelopen</i>	‘He walked around in the room’
<i>Hij is de kamer ingelopen</i>	‘He walked into the room’

In this segment, the teacher presents a contrastive pair by writing on the board a diagram of two sentences that share four forms (*Hij, gelopen, in, de kamer*) and have two forms that differ (the AUXs *heeft* and *is*). He writes two of the shared forms (*in, de kamer*) in two different orders: one with *in* in pre-position (*in de kamer gelopen*), the other with *in* in post-position (*de kamer ingelopen*).



He makes visible that these two orderings can fill the same structural slot by creating a gap between ‘*Hij*’ and ‘*gelopen*’ (lines 20 and 21) and then writing one ordering above that gap (line 23) and the other below (lines 24-26).

Once the teacher has finished writing on the board, he connects his writing to the student’s question (line 8, the first pair part of the sequence’s base pair), using the same metalinguistic term he used before in his co-completion of Chris’ question, and referring to his writing with the deictic pronoun *dit* (line 28). He does not vocalize any of what he has just written. Mortensen (2011, pp. 146-147) identifies two different ways of using writing on the blackboard, and we saw the first way in Sequence 1: “writing during a turn-at-talk that includes the written version of the verbal talk”. In Sequence 2 we see the second way, the “use of what is already on the blackboard by including it in the ongoing course of action, for example, by *pointing*”. The teacher glances at the researcher (line 29), then produces another exemplar (line 30), vocalizing and acting out a sentence that has the same subject and main verb as the exemplars he has written on the board, but this time with the main verb in the present tense and the adposition *uit* in postposition.

*Segment 2c*

- 28 T: Met sommige voorzetsels kun je dit doen.  
With some prepositions you can do this.  
*((points to writing as he says 'dit'))*
- 29 *((glances at the researcher))*
- 30 Hij loopt de kamer uit.  
He walks out of the room.  
*((walks 2 steps toward the students))*

Next the teacher produces another exemplar (line 32), first marking it explicitly as an example of something you cannot say (line 31). Using speech and gestures, the teacher indicates that this ungrammatical exemplar entails conflict (lines 33 and 34). He indicates that the conflict concerns direction (line 35) and expands on this with a figurative description of the consequence of the conflict (line 39). He continues to gesture (line 37), upgrading his gesture by combining previously separate lateral and circular motions with his index fingers (line 38) (for discussion of gesture in the L2 classroom, see Lazaraton, 2004; Taleghani-Nikazm, 2008).

*Segment 2d*

- 31 Bijvoorbeeld je kunt niet zeggen (.)  
for example you can not say
- 32 hij heeft de kamer ingelopen.  
he has walked into the room.  
*((moves hands up and down several times))*
- 33 Ja?  
Yes?  
*((moves hands in circles with index fingers pointing toward each other))*
- 34 Dat is tegenstrijdig  
that is conflicting  
*((glances at researcher))*
- 35 Richting niet richting  
direction not direction  
*((repeats hand gesture))*
- 36 *((looks back at students, glances at researcher))*
- 37 *((moves hands laterally with index fingers pointing toward each other))*
- 38 *((spins index fingers crisscross, and then moving them laterally))*
- 39 T: Dan krijg je een botsing  
then you get a collision

As noted above, Dutch has a split AUX system: some verbs take HAVE in the periphrastic perfect, some take BE. Speakers generally use HAVE with motion verbs when referring to a locative motion, and BE when referring to a directional motion. Dutch speakers also use the placement of adpositions to signal that an adpositional phrase is directional or locative, and they do not affix the adposition of locative adpositional phrase to the past participle of the main verb. Thus, there is a grammatical conflict in the teacher's exemplar above (line 32): the use of *heeft* as AUX marks the adpositional phrase in this sentence as locative, making the affixation of *in* to *gelopen* "something you cannot say".

After a long silence during which the teacher scans the students (line 40), who look down or write in their notebooks, the teacher returns to the student's question (line 41). He then reformulates the exemplar he produced in line 30, using the first person singular and the simple past (line 42). In line 43 he reformulates his reformulation, producing a

periphrastic past construction using HAVE instead of BE and thereby producing another exemplar of something you cannot say.<sup>5</sup>

*Segment 2e*

- 40 (6.0) ((T scans the students, who look down or write in their notebooks))  
 41 Um welk voorzetsel (.)  
     which preposition  
     ((glances at researcher on pause))  
 42 Ik liep de kamer uit.  
     I walked out of the room.  
 43 Ik heb de kamer uit gelopen.  
     I have walked out of the room.  
     ((looks into the air))

The teacher struggles to produce another exemplar, his “Um:” in line 44 signaling that he will take another turn but is not yet able to produce it. He then produces a second contrastive pair. In the first exemplar of this pair, he uses the verb *lopen*, this time in present tense and with the adpositional *op* in postposition. He describes this exemplar as “something other than” the next example (line 45), in which *op* is in preposition, a claim that he immediately hedges (line 46). Following another silence (line 47), the teacher produces a try-marked exemplar (try-marking is the use of upward intonation to signal that one is trying to achieve recognition of a language form) (Schegloff, 2007) that does not share any lexical elements with the exemplars in lines 42-45 (line 48). After a long silence during which the teacher scans the room/students (line 49), the teacher gives an account for his grammar instruction (and its lack of success), referring to it as a fun problem for linguists (line 50).

*Segment 2f*

- 44 Um: Ik ga: ik loop de straat op (.)  
     I go I walk onto the street  
     ((glances at researcher on ‘loop’ and pause))  
 45 is iets anders dan ik loop op straat.  
     is something other than I walk on the street.  
     ((glances at researcher on ‘anders’))  
 46 Maar niet in alle gevallen.  
     but not in all cases.  
     ((glances at researcher on ‘niet’))  
 47 (2.0)  
 48 T: Hij fietste het bos door?  
     He cycled through the woods?  
 49 (4.0) ((teacher scans Ss))  
 50 T: Het is een een een probleem een leuk probleem voor taalkundigen.  
     It is a a a problem a fun problem for linguists.

The teacher uses the membership category (Sacks, 1972a, 1972b) of linguists to refer to the category of people for whom the prior talk would be “a fun problem”. As Hutchby and Wooffitt (2008) note, membership categories provide not only convenient labels but also “a set of inferential resources by which we can come to understand and interpret the behavior of persons so designated” (p. 36). The teacher does not explicitly identify himself or anyone else present (students or the researcher) as belonging to the category ‘linguists’, but he

invokes the category and thereby the conventional knowledge about people in it to explain (away) his non-minimal post expansion.

After another longer silence during which the teacher scans the students, the teacher produces an exemplar, explicitly marked as such (line 52), this time speaking and writing his exemplar on the board (line 53) just above the writing he produced at the start of his expansion. He vocalizes and points to what he wrote (line 55) and describes the exemplar as ambiguous (line 56). In Dutch the adposition in a locative adpositional phrase is always prepositional, but the adposition in a directional phrase is not always postpositional. This can give rise to ambiguity with respect to the nature of the adpositional phrase (locative or directional), such as in the exemplar in line 55. After a three-second silence (line 57), the teacher explains the two possible meanings of the exemplar (lines 58 and 59), gesturing downward for the second, locative meaning.

*Segment 2g*

51 (5.0) ((teacher scans Ss))

52 T: Bijvoorbeeld  
For example

53 ((writes on blackboard 'hij viel in het water'))

<b>Hij viel in het water</b>	
	<i>in de kamer</i>
<i>Hij heeft</i>	<i>gelopen</i>
	<i>is de kamer in</i>

54 ((glances at researcher))

55 Hij viel in het water  
He fell in the water  
((pointing to 'Hij viel in het water' on board))

56 Dit is ambigu.  
This is ambiguous.  
((still pointing to 'Hij viel in het water'))

57 (3.0)

58 T: Dit kan betekenen hij viel het water in (.) maar ook hij was in het water (.)  
This can mean he fell into the water but also he was in the water.

59 hij stond in het water en hij viel.  
He stood in the water and he fell.  
((moves hands downward))

Having broken down this ambiguous exemplar into two possible meanings, the teacher begins to close down the expansion sequence. After a pause (line 60), he reformulates his prior account for his expansion (line 61), again invoking the membership category of linguists. He describes the grammar issue/explanation as “a bit subtle” (line 62), an assessment that gets neither agreement nor disagreement from the students. After a four-second silence, he produces a new, downgraded account for his expansion (line 64), prefacing his statement that students know that this subtlety exists with the disjunctive discourse connectors “but” and “in any case”. The teacher then projects the beginning of a new activity with “Okay” (line 65) (Beach, 1993), erases his writing on the blackboard (line 66), and begins a new activity (line 68).

*Segment 2h*

60 (1.0)

- 61 T: Iets for taalkundigen.  
Something for linguists.  
*((paces back and forth))*
- 62 Het is een beetje subtiel.  
It is a bit subtle.  
*((paces back and forth))*
- 63 (4.0)
- 64 T: Maar in ieder geval weten jullie dat dit bestaat.  
But in any case you-PL know that this exists.  
*((gestures with both hands toward blackboard))*
- 65 Okay.
- 66 *((erases all writing))*
- 67 (4.0) *((T holding chalk to his mouth))*
- 68 T: Ik wou iets voorbereiden voor morgen.  
I would like to prepare something for tomorrow.

The teacher's expansion lasts two and a half minutes as he struggles to produce a self-explanatory case, a sentence or pair of sentences that will make evident what he wants students to notice and understand (without English glosses or explanation in Dutch). After Chris' sequence closing third in line 11 there are no signals of student acceptance or understanding of the teacher's talk, and there are several long silences. The teacher's understanding of these silences is that his expansion is not yet adequate (cf. Lee, 2004), so he continues to produce exemplars, most with a hesitation, hitch, or hedge. There is a stepwise downgrade in the teacher's accounts for his expansion: first it is "a fun problem for linguists", then it is "something for linguists", then "a bit subtle", and finally something that the students now know exists. At the end of the sequence, he erases his writing on the blackboard, creating empty space of which he makes no subsequent use.

The presence of the researcher, a member of the category "linguists", may have influenced the teacher's actions in this sequence. During a stimulated recall session conducted a week after the recording, the researcher pointed out to the teacher that he glanced in her direction eight times during this sequence, and she asked if her presence had affected his decision to give the mini-lesson and/or his production thereof. The teacher said it might have, but that he had "done this sort of thing" many times before, usually with more success. He expressed embarrassment at not having asked students if they understood (see Koole, 2010 for analysis of a teacher's elicitation of displays of understanding from students), saying that he probably had not asked if they understood because he "knew full well they didn't" and that his explanation was not going well. The teacher also stated that he "went too far" in his attempt to explain this complex aspect of grammar to a group of students that included only one student with training in linguistics, Chris, who posed the Sequence 2 question.

Chris, the learner who asked the question, indicated in her post-recording questionnaire that while the instructor's initial answer to her question had been clear, she had not understood his expansion: "I had a question about the usage of preposition, specifically which preposition can be moved behind the noun in conjunction with 'zijn' to indicate direction. [The instructor] clarified the point of confusion to the extent of supplying me with three prepositions (*in, uit, op*) that can follow instead of proceed the noun in the above mentioned context." Her classmates' questionnaires all indicated that they had been confused by the teacher's answer.

During the stimulated recall session, the teacher said that he had been reluctant to discuss in class the issues raised by Chris' question because he felt that it would only confuse most of the learners. Despite his misgivings, the teacher reported that he answered because he did not want to discourage learners from asking grammatical questions. Moreover, he thought that Chris, a native speaker of German and a graduate student in the linguistics program in the Germanic Languages Department, would be interested in further explanation. However, as reflected by Chris' questionnaire and suggested by the fact that none of the learners wrote in their notebooks after line 40, much of the teacher's explanation response was not comprehended by the learners. This lack of comprehension of a teacher's explanation may discourage further questions (Aston 1986; Hawkins 1985).

## DISCUSSION

Students' form-focused questions make relevant "more or less formal instruction", which may then be produced without pedagogical preparation (Mortensen, 2011, p. 136). In this article we have examined how such unplanned instruction unfolded in two cases of student-initiated talk about grammatical form. In the first expansion, the teacher built on his answer to a student's question about a passive auxiliary verb by producing in speech and writing multiple verb forms in paradigm format, a practice used widely in linguistics and L2 education to (re)present language patterns. In the second expansion, the teacher built on his answer to a question about the placement of an adposition in a periphrastic perfect construction by producing a contrastive pair of sentences, followed by several other exemplars, including a second contrastive pair.

Our account provides a first, fine-grained look at what actually happens in L2 classrooms when students ask questions about grammar, as well as insight into the practices deployed by a teacher in responding to such questions. In our analysis of these expanded question-answer sequences, we examined the unfolding of talk, writing, and gesture in order to understand these cases as sequential courses of action that are constructed as expansions on the adjacency pair structure. In producing on-the-fly grammar instruction, teachers may use a variety of practices for talking about and graphically representing language. We endeavor to show how the teacher constructed his spontaneous instruction through the use of speech, writing, gesture, gaze, and established practices for talking and writing about language as a system.

As we pointed out in the introduction, student questions present teachers with the opportunity and the challenge to provide unplanned instruction on L2 grammar. Such questions also present teachers with a quandary. Ellis, Basturkmen, and Loewen (2002) write,

Students, especially motivated adult students, are likely to ask questions about form ... How should the teacher deal with them? There are three possibilities - answer them immediately, ignore them, or deflect them (i.e. until later). Clearly, the strategy a teacher adopts needs to be informed by social as well as psycholinguistic considerations. Teachers cannot afford to antagonize their students by refusing to address their questions but equally whatever they do must be motivated by a concern for what will aid learning. (p. 431)

Ignoring a student's question about grammar is a problematic option because, in the moral order of the classroom, a teacher does not dismiss a legitimate question from a student. A

teacher may deflect a question, explaining that s/he needs to look into it or that answering the question would take the class too far from the business at hand. The teacher in this study opted to answer immediately. In interviews and playback sessions, he stated that he was reluctant to deflect grammar questions for fear of discouraging students from taking an interest in grammar, which he felt received too little attention in most foreign language instruction. However, as Sequence 2 shows, answering immediately and non-minimally entails risks for the teacher: digressing from the business at hand, going beyond what students are capable of comprehending and assimilating at that point, and/or providing an inadequate and/or confusing answer (that may, in fact, discourage students from asking questions about grammar).

These sequences raise questions about whether and how to respond to student questions about grammar, particularly when those questions concern complex linguistic phenomena. Deborah Poole (personal communication, March 2012) observed, “there is a line, and once you’ve crossed it, you aren’t teaching language anymore, you’re teaching linguistics.” While a spontaneous mini-lesson on the (variable) placement of an adposition in periphrastic past constructions may be fun for linguists, for most L2 learners in a first-year course it is unlikely to contribute much to their ability to use Dutch for meaningful expression and interpretation. Even if the teacher’s expansion in Sequence 2 had been more coherent, it might still qualify as what van Lier (1996) calls “the dissection of linguistic cadavers” (p. 65).

We see potential value for L2 educators in the study of sequences like those presented here. Observation of and reflection on L2 classroom interaction can help teachers learn to manage the classroom on a moment-by-moment basis “thoughtfully and knowledgably” (Waring, 2013, p. 18; for discussion of the contributions of CA research to L2 teacher education, see Sert & Seedhouse, 2011). As noted above, student questions about grammar are potentially productive but also perilous moments in L2 classroom interaction. Illustrative sequences could be used with pre- and in-service teachers to help them reflect on real classroom discourse and engage with the practical issues raised by student questions (Walsh, 2011). The sequences analyzed here may be particularly suitable for teachers who have training and interest in linguistics. These teachers have available to them practices for talking/writing about language that are specific to that discipline. While such practices are potential resources for a teacher in producing impromptu instruction, students may not readily recognize the course of action the teacher is pursuing. Moreover, such practices and courses of action may not provide students with information or insights that are relevant to their language learning in that moment, lesson, or course.

Explicating a fundamental difference between the “CA mentality” and the “linguistic mentality”, Seedhouse (2011) stresses that CA does not treat language as “an autonomous system independent of its use” (p. 345). However, as we have shown, participants in L2 classroom talk sometimes do just that, displaying an orientation to language as a system of rules (for what speakers may and may not do) and structures (to categorize and distinguish among linguistic forms). In our analysis we used the tools of CA to make sense of how the teacher constructed his grammar instruction on a moment-by-moment basis. In analyzing language use as social action, we also made use of prior linguistic accounts of Dutch that treat language as an autonomous system. In examining the exemplars produced by the teacher in these sequences, we were primarily concerned with the “details of their discursive production” rather than their formal properties (Lee, 2004, p. 117). However, we found the integration of linguistic accounts necessary in order to interpret the sequences, explain them to others,<sup>6</sup> and to answer the core question of CA: Why that, in that way, right now? We

propose that unplanned classroom talk about L2 grammar is a rich site not only for the study of L2 teaching/learning processes, but also for further exploration of the synergies between CA and linguistics in L2 teaching/learning research (cf. Schegloff et al., 2002; Sert & Seedhouse, 2011; Wong, 2002).

### Notes

1. We borrow the phrase from Mortensen (2011, p. 135).
2. Two students were native speakers of German and advanced non-native speakers of English. One student was a native speaker of Korean and an advanced non-native speaker of English. Four of the students were native speakers of English.
3. The teacher occasionally used pair-work, but he said during the interview that pair and small group work was not very appropriate for such a small class.
4. The teacher's co-completion includes two embedded corrections (Jefferson, 1987) of the learner's question: the correctly inflected adjective *alle* ('all') and the traditional Dutch grammatical term *voorzetsels* ('prepositions') (line 9).
5. During a stimulated recall session, the instructor confirmed that line 43 was intentionally ungrammatical, a reformulation of the prior ungrammatical exemplar.
6. We thank the members of the Ethnomethodology Reading Group at our university for being a critical audience as we worked through our accounts of these sequences.

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