

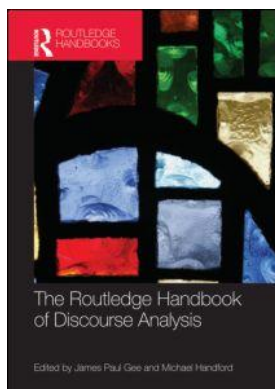
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Ethnography and classroom discourse

Amy B. M. Tsui

Classroom discourse research has always been central to educational research. As Cazden (2001) pointed out, the basic purpose of schools is achieved through communication. By studying discursive activities in the classroom, researchers gain insights into the complex and dynamic relationships between discourse, social practices, and learning. An ethnographic approach to L1 (first language) classroom discourse studies was first adopted in the 1960s. However, the use of this approach in L2 (second language) classroom discourse studies is a relatively recent development. This chapter provides a brief account of the nature of ethnography and of the characteristics of ethnographic approaches to classroom discourse, along with a discussion of the major themes that have emerged in the studies so far and some of the issues that the field needs to address.

What is ethnography?

Ethnography originated in Western anthropological studies of non-Western human societies and cultures in the nineteenth century, and is primarily concerned with field research. The word “ethnography” is derived from the Greek words *ethnos* (race, people, or cultural groups) and *graphie* (writing or representation). In order to produce representations or descriptions of cultural groups, events, or phenomena, the ethnographic researcher usually spends an extended period of time in the community under investigation, participating either overtly or covertly in people’s lives, observing, listening, and asking questions in the data collection process to gain insights into the issues being studied. This approach to research has been adopted in social sciences and educational research as a reaction against positivistic research, which emphasizes the importance of rigorous measurement and highly structured empirical research, where extraneous variables are controlled for hypothesis testing. Ethnographic researchers have argued that positivism fails to recognize the complexity of human social life and the importance of meaning and interpretation in the research process.

However, since ethnography has been used in different disciplinary contexts in association with, as well as in opposition to, different methodological approaches, there is no standard definition of the term. LeCompte and Preissle (1993) pointed out that, apart from being a product, ethnography is a process—a way of studying human life. They emphasized the fluidity of the ethnographic process and cautioned against rigidifying it as a specific research model. Nevertheless, they also outlined four characteristics of its investigative strategies. First, ethnography aims to represent the worldview of the participants; second, it is empirical and naturalistic;

third, it aims to construct a holistic description of a phenomenon in its context; and, fourth, its data collection strategies are eclectic. Hammersley and Atkinson (2007) observed that ethnography “plays a complex and shifting role in the dynamic tapestry that the social sciences have become in the twenty-first century” (p. 2). Therefore, instead of defining ethnography, they outlined the characteristics of what ethnographers do, which largely converge with the characteristics outlined by LeCompte and Preissle (1993): first, the investigation is conducted in naturalistic, as opposed to experimental or highly structured, settings; second, data are collected through a range of sources, including documentary evidence, but mainly through participant observation and informal conversations with participants in the study; third, the data collection process is largely unstructured in that it does not involve following a rigid predetermined design or using a set of pre-determined categories; fourth, the analysis of data is mainly qualitative (quantitative analysis plays a supplementary role), involving the interpretation of meaning in context; and, finally, the data set usually consists of only a small number of cases, sometimes even a single case, so that in-depth analysis can be made.

In other words, one could say that ethnographic studies are exploratory in orientation and, as such, typically adopt a relatively open-ended approach to investigation. Instead of having a *definitive* set of well-defined research questions with associated hypotheses to be confirmed or disconfirmed, ethnographers typically refine and even change their research questions as they respond to the data collected, and this, in turn, directs them to collect further data to address these refined questions.

Despite the variations in the interpretation of ethnography, one major feature that distinguishes it from other research approaches is the role of the researcher as a participant in the lives of people and a community, one who immerses him- or herself in a specific cultural setting in order to gain an understanding of the phenomenon under investigation. The phrase “participant observation,” as Wolcott (2008) has pointed out, is used to capture the first-hand experience of the researcher in naturally occurring events. It should be noted, however, that this expression has been used in some cases as an umbrella to encompass all the activities that the researcher performs in the field, whereas in other cases a distinction has been made between “participant” and “non-participant” observations, the latter referring to instances in which the researcher acts as an observer rather than as a participant and collects data mainly through interviews. For example, Wolcott (2008) distinguishes between participant observation, interviewing, and archival research and describes what the researcher needs to do to accomplish each of them as, respectively, experiencing, enquiring, and examining.

Characteristics of ethnographic approaches to the study of classroom discourse

As I have mentioned, an ethnographic approach to L2 classroom discourse studies is a relatively recent development. Early L2 classroom discourse studies, in the 1970s and 1980s, focused mainly on observable linguistic behaviors in the classroom. A plethora of classroom observational schedules and discourse analysis tools were devised and the analysis was done largely from an *etic* (outsider) perspective. However, since the late 1980s, the importance of interpreting the data from an *emic* (insider) perspective has been pointed out by a number of researchers. Kumaravadivelu (1991), for example, made a good case for this by showing the mismatches between the teacher’s intended meaning and the learner’s interpretation, as well as between the teacher’s and the learner’s intention and the observer’s interpretation. The inadequacies of using a decontextualized approach to classroom discourse analysis to understand the complexities of classroom interaction have also become clear. In the late 1980s and 1990s, a number of studies pointed out that several

dimensions come into play in the process of interaction, including students' cultural backgrounds and learning styles, their psychological states such as motivation, attitudes and beliefs, and classroom cultures, along with teachers' conceptions of teaching and learning, and their lived experiences of L2 teaching and learning (see for example Allwright and Bailey, 1991; Johnson, 1995; Tsui, 1996). Subsequently, research methodologies in neighbouring disciplines have been appropriated for analysis (see Tsui, 2008 for a review of these studies).

Many of the classroom discourse studies since then have been inspired by ethnography of communication, founded by Hymes (1962, 1974), in which studies of language are situated in specific social and cultural settings and are central to the study of culture and communities (see Smart, this volume). The initial focus of ethnography of communication was spoken language, but the discipline was subsequently broadened to include nonvocal forms such as written and sign languages and nonverbal forms such as silence, laughter, and paralinguistic gestures. In the 1970s and 1980s, when issues of language socialization and the literacy development of linguistic and ethnic minorities at home and in schools became a growing concern (Heath, 1982; Philips, 1983), the site of study extended from communities to schools. These studies identified the cultural discontinuity between the home and the school for minority children as a major cause of educational failure and called for a better understanding of the linguistic and social practices in these communities and a better transition from home to school learning environments. They also showed how educational practices reproduced socioeconomic and political practices and called for the need to link micro classroom processes to macro social processes (Toohey, 2008). Since then, a number of studies have been conducted in schools, initially in L1 classrooms (see for example Cazden, 2001; Mehan, 1979) and subsequently in L2 classrooms as well (see for example Watson-Gegeo, 1988; Harklau, 1994; Duff, 1995; Johnson, 1995).

Ethnographic studies of classroom discourse are characterized by the researcher spending an extended period of time in the classroom, either as an observer or as a participant, taking on the role of a teacher or a teacher assistant. Typically, the lessons observed are audio or videorecorded and supplemented by field notes. As it is not always practicable to be a participant researcher, many classroom researchers obtain an *emic* perspective on classroom processes through the collection of a variety of qualitative data, such as teachers' and learners' journals, interviews, and stimulated recalls. The researcher also spends time in the school, outside the classroom, gathering data on the wider sociocultural and political contexts that are relevant to the research focus and throw light on the interpretation of classroom discourse data, such as educational policy documents, the school curriculum, the socioeconomic background of learners, and the school culture (van Lier, 1988; Duff, 1995; Johnson, 1995; Bailey and Nunan, 1996). In other words, the classroom researcher, as an ethnographer, is engaged in "watching what happens, listening to what is said, asking questions through informal and formal interviews, collecting documents and artefacts—in fact, gathering whatever data are available to throw light on the issues that are the emerging focus of inquiry" (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007: 3).

An ethnographic approach that focuses on one part of the situation, or a slice of everyday life, and analyzes in great detail how interaction is organized and managed socially and culturally at the micro-level in particular settings, has been referred to as "ethnographic microanalysis of interaction" or "microethnography" (see Garcez, 2008 for a summary of micro-ethnographic studies). Ethnographic studies of classroom discourse are essentially micro. Face-to-face interaction in the classroom is taken as a site for studying cultural production and reproduction (Mehan, 1998), and the focus is the description and interpretation of detailed interactional processes. As such, the discipline has close affinity with ethnomethodology, which examines the reflexivity of spoken interaction and the management of the interactional process by participants as they make sense of each other's actions in real time (Garfinkel, 1967) (see Clayman, this volume).

Micro-ethnographical studies of classroom discourse have been criticized for offering a “limited and limiting perspective,” on the grounds that they treat the classroom as a self-contained unit rather than as part of the larger society, and largely ignore the sociocultural and political structures that have a bearing on classroom discourse (Kumaravadivelu, 1999: 453). This criticism is perhaps not entirely well founded, because many of the studies that have emerged since the mid-1990s did involve a combination of micro- and macroethnography (Duff, 2002; Garcez, 2008; Toohey, 2008) (see also Jasper, this volume). That is, data are collected from both the larger social context and the classroom context. Data reduction is done by selecting sample data sets that are considered to reflect the general patterns observed in the larger data set, or specific data sets that are relevant to the research question, and by conducting interviews with selected participants who are able to provide an *emic* perspective on the phenomenon under investigation. Hence, ethnographic studies typically identify a case, or several cases, for in-depth investigation. For example, Duff (1995) conducted a study in which she explored the impact of language socialization on students’ learning opportunities from a transmission mode to an open enquiry mode of learning in Hungary in early 1990, when the country was going through significant social changes. She selected history lessons because history was a very popular and important subject in the Hungarian curriculum. These lessons dealt with issues that were relevant to the sociopolitical changes at the time, and therefore rich discursive activities could be found in the classroom. Similarly, to investigate problems generated by the transition of English as second language (ESL) learners to mainstream classroom learning, Harklau (1994) identified a small number of Chinese immigrant students and investigated the differences in their patterns of participation in the different learning environments in ESL and mainstream classrooms.

For the case(s) identified, the researcher usually observes a large number of lessons in order to get a sense of the general interaction patterns, routines, norms of practice, and participant relationships. In many cases, most, if not all, of these lessons are recorded. As it would not be possible for the researcher to transcribe and analyze in detail such voluminous data, typically activities or speech events that are representative of the overall patterns observed, or illustrative of the phenomenon under investigation, are chosen for detailed analysis. For example, in the study of history lessons in Hungarian classrooms cited above (Duff, 1995), instead of analyzing all 36 hours of lesson recordings, Duff selected for detailed analysis a total of 16 hours of a speech event, “Student Lectures” involving extensive student talk. According to Duff, an activity, or a speech event, is “simply a way of framing culturally organized behavior in order to consider what is being done, how it is being done, and what it entails and signifies” (p. 513). Focusing on one speech event, she argued, facilitates the deconstruction of the event and comparisons across contexts. As in all ethnographic studies, the choice of a case, or cases, and the selection of the units within a case for detailed analysis are critical. This point will be elaborated further in the penultimate section.

Major themes in ethnographic studies of classroom discourse

Ethnographic approaches to L2 classroom discourse started in the late 1980s and began to attract attention in the 1990s (see for example McKay 1995; Lantolf, 2000). They are often adopted in conjunction with discourse analysis methodologies, to investigate how educational processes and practices are co-constructed by the teacher and the students and how discourse processes and practices shape learning, what opportunities for learning are opened up, and what is being learnt (Gee and Green, 1998; see Richland, this volume). In the rest of this section I shall outline some of the key issues that have been addressed so far and the methods of investigation that have been adopted.

Language socialization of ESL learners

One important theme has been the socialization of ESL learners into different learning environments and the difficulties and opportunities that they encounter in the transition. For example, Harklau (1994) conducted a three-and-a-half-year ethnographic study on the transition of four Chinese immigrant students from ESL to mainstream classrooms in a Californian high school. She investigated the differences in the learning environments in mainstream and ESL classrooms and the learners' performance. Patterns of spoken and written language use displayed by the students, as well as language instruction and feedback in the classroom, were examined together with the content and goals of ESL and mainstream curricula. Harklau was an observer and, at times, a participant playing a similar role as the two aides in the class. She found that one important difference in the learning environments was the interactional routines used in ESL and mainstream classes. While the ESL learners were very quiet in the mainstream classes, they participated actively in ESL classes, initiated more questions, and received more feedback on phonological and grammatical accuracy. Interviews with the learners revealed that in the mainstream classes, where the teacher was a native speaker of English, the teacher's use of unmodified speech, digression into the teacher's own personal experiences, and the use of sarcasm were a source of frustration because the learners could not understand the input. Consequently, the ESL learners "tuned out" and preferred to interact with the written text, which they considered more important than the spoken text. On the basis of these findings, Harklau argued for the integration of the curricula and instructional practices in ESL and mainstream classrooms, so that ESL learners would not be disadvantaged.

On the same theme, Duff (1995) explored the socialization of students from a traditional transmission mode of teaching to an open enquiry mode of learning, which she found resulted in very different patterns of interaction in the classroom and opened up new opportunities for learning. Duff investigated the classroom discourse of an English-medium history classroom in an experimental dual-language (i.e. foreign language immersion) school in Hungary, in the context of sociopolitical changes in the late 1980s that also encompassed educational changes. The Soviet model of teaching, which had been adopted previously, involved recitation (*felelés*), which required students to present formally to the teacher, in front of the whole class, an oral summary of particular aspects or themes covered in the previous lesson, and to respond to questions subsequently posed by the teacher. At the end of the performance a grade was announced. In the 1980s, this Soviet model was replaced by short student lectures and open discussions. Duff observed history lessons in both non-dual language (Hungarian-medium) and dual language (English-medium) lessons, and the former was used as the baseline for analyzing the latter. Over the span of a year, in lessons taught by six Hungarian teachers, Duff observed and recorded almost 40 hours of English-medium teaching. Out of this data set, rather than analyzing the entire lesson, she selected a total of 16 hours of speech events taught by one of the best teachers and containing extended student talk for closer analysis. The speech event was "Student Lectures," which had replaced "Recitation" in the Hungarian-medium lessons. The focus of the study was not, however, the difficulties encountered by the students, but the impact that a more open mode of inquiry had on learning. The findings showed that the introduction of a more democratic form of teaching, one that provided space for students to participate in the co-construction of knowledge, resulted in very different interactional patterns, in which students freely voiced their views and challenged each other and even the teacher. The significance of the discourse, and the socialization of students into the use of a foreign language for a democratic exchange of ideas, could not have been fully appreciated without grounding it in the political changes that were taking place in Hungary at that time.

On a much smaller scale, Morita (2000) conducted a longitudinal ethnographic study on the socialization of L1 and L2 English speaking graduate students into academic spoken discourse. The focus of the study was oral presentation, an “activity” or speech event that occurred frequently and was highly routinized. To understand the academic culture of graduate study at the university, Morita conducted interviews with students and professors, classroom observation, and questionnaire surveys. The findings of the study suggested that the socialization into oral academic presentation, a commonplace feature of graduate studies, is a complex process that involves negotiation between the instructor, the student, and his or her peers.

(Co)-Construction of social relationships, identities and ideologies

Another important theme that has attracted much attention is the conception of ESL learning as not only involving the development of linguistic competence in L2 but also the development of identities, social relationships, and ideologies. For example, Willet (1995) conducted a year-long study of a first grade classroom as part of a larger four-year study of a community of international graduate students and their families. Grounded in the conception of learning as changing participation (Lave and Wenger, 1991; Gee and Green, 1998), the study focused on the changing participation of four children, officially labeled as learners of limited English proficiency (LEP), in activities designed for mainstream classes as their L2 competence developed over time. As a participant–observer, Willet acted as a teacher’s aide and collected extensive data through audio-taping the interactions in the classroom and the participation of the children, taking field notes of critical as well as of daily events in the classroom, the school, and the community, conducting casual conversations with the children to obtain their understanding of classroom events, and conducting interviews with teachers and parents. Classroom discourse data, including both teacher–pupil and pupil–pupil interactions collected at different junctures during the longitudinal study, were analyzed in great detail by drawing on the ethnographic data of each participant, their ethnic and family backgrounds, and the micropolitics of the classroom, which became evident after lengthy and sustained involvement in the classroom and community culture. Questions that guided the analysis of data pertained to the structure of events, the spoken and written discourse structures, the participant roles played by the children, the contextual cues they used, and the social relations, identities, and ideologies that were indexed. Willet observed that the interactional routines and strategies used by the children were sites for constructing their relationships with peers, their identities as competent learners, and their ideologies about the dignity and value of work that were sanctioned in the classroom. These, in turn, affected the children’s access to the language and culture of the classroom. Hence, according to Willet, the question that was addressed was not what interactional routines and strategies led to successful language acquisition but how the learners locally defined the meanings of the interactional routines and strategies that enabled them to construct positive relations and identities in the classroom.

Another example is the study conducted by Duff (2002) on how knowledge, identities, and cultural differences were co-constructed and manifested in the interactions in an ethnically heterogeneous mainstream classroom, which consisted of what she referred to as the newcomers, mostly ethnic Chinese immigrants, the old-timers, and the “local” English-speaking Canadian students. The research question she addressed was how the classroom could provide opportunities for the creation of a cohesive learning community among culturally heterogeneous students where knowledge and identities are negotiated in a culturally respectful manner. She examined both the micro- and the macro-contexts of communication in a content classroom, the interactional features, and the implicit and explicit references to cultural differences and identity. Over a period of two years, she attended two mainstream social studies classes offered by two teachers.

These two classes were selected on the basis of their ethnic mix and of the content of instruction, social studies, which involved issues of Canadian culture, national identity, and current social issues. The data reported in Duff (2002) pertained to classes taught by one of two teachers whom she observed weekly. To gain a better understanding of both the school culture and the individual teachers, she attended other school activities and other lessons taught by the same teacher. She focused on the discourse generated by discussion (a format used by the teacher to explore the history curriculum), during which students were encouraged to express their views about social issues with the goal of creating an inclusive classroom. Duff examined the relational and experiential dimensions of the students' identity construction. The former refers to how the students were perceived by others and the latter refers to how the students experienced and negotiated their own identities. She found that, notwithstanding the good intention to cultivate respect for cultural differences and diversity and to engage local and non-local students in discussions of culture, the teacher inadvertently widened rather than bridged the cultural gap, as a result of the way she positioned the students culturally through the turns she allocated to certain students and through her attempts to get these students to relate the course content to their own cultural backgrounds. The findings problematized the received view of language socialization as a process of the novice learning to participate in the discourse like an expert. They showed that it is a complex process, in which students may or may not socialize into the mainstream discourse, depending on whether they have other multilingual repertoires and identities to draw on, whether they have communities other than the classroom with which they can identify, and what their personal preference for the manner of their participation in the discourse is.

Social positioning, power and gender in classroom discourse

Closely connected to the theme of the co-construction of identities in classroom discourse are the themes of social positioning, power relationships, and gender. Studies engaging with such themes have generally adopted critical approaches to discourse, examining the implications of discourse practices for power, status, distribution of resources, and their relationship with the achievement of desirable social, political, and ethical goals (Hammersley, 2002; Gee, 2004). Kumaravadivelu (1999) suggested critical discourse analysis as the research tool to unravel the "hidden meanings and underlying connections" in classroom discourse "through posing questions relating to ideology, power, knowledge, class, race, and gender" (p. 476) (see Fairclough, this volume). Ethnographic studies with such an orientation have been referred to as critical ethnography. In fact, many of the recently published ethnographic studies in classroom discourse have adopted critical perspectives, and have engaged with issues of equality of access to opportunities for learning, power relationships, gender, social positioning, and identities (see Coates, this volume; Blackledge, this volume). For example, Menard-Warwick (2008) explored the issue of gender and social positioning in an ESL course for adult immigrants as part of an ethnographic study on immigrant women and L2 learning. By examining the linguistic and interactional structures in the classroom, she showed the tension between the identities that the female immigrant learners claimed for themselves as competent members of the community and the gendered social identities that were assigned to them by their teacher. She argued that teachers should listen for and support learners' reflexive positioning in order to facilitate their reconstruction of L2 identities and voices. Another example is the work of Bloome *et al.* (2005), which investigated the social construction of identities and power relationships in two primary classrooms, one being a language arts classroom and the other a social studies classroom, through a detailed analysis of classroom discourse data.

Teacher and learner agency in the co-construction of knowledge

Another prominent theme has been the shift from a deterministic view of classroom discourse being shaped by the context to a view of classroom discourse and context being mutually constitutive. The agency of the teacher and of the learners in co-constructing knowledge and in creating opportunities for learning has been emphasized. For example, over one year, as part of a large-scale research program, spanning ten grades, on how everyday life in the classroom was constructed by members and how opportunities for learning were opened up by these constructions, Tuyay *et al.* (1995) studied the face-to-face interactions of two teams of third-grade bilingual children, a pair of female students, and a group of three male students who were completing a writing task in the classroom. The aim of the study was to investigate the opportunities for learning and the co-construction of knowledge through both spoken and written discourse. The study focused on analyzing the discourse of the two teams of students as they struggled to complete a writing task—a 30-minute student-initiated task called the “planet story,” in which students first listened to a student reading aloud a book on extraterrestrials and then wrote their own stories. This key event was selected because it was typical of the discourse patterns, collaborative tasks, and co-construction of knowledge that could be found throughout the school year, and because it clearly illustrated the roles of both the students and the teacher in the knowledge construction process. Detailed analysis of segments of discussions from both teams was provided, drawing on the ethnographic data on classroom life. The findings showed how the two teams of students negotiated, shaped, and reshaped the task through interaction. The researchers concluded that, while a common task does not entail common opportunities to learn, it nevertheless opens up possibilities for students to construct their own learning through negotiation and renegotiation.

The importance of the agency of the teacher in using creative discursive practices that are appropriate for the students was highlighted in Lin (1999), an ethnographic study of four ESL classrooms in Hong Kong. Drawing on Bourdieu’s concepts of habitus, cultural capital (1973), and symbolic violence (1991), Lin analyzed excerpts of discourse in these classrooms. She showed that, when the teacher refused to use L1 to help the students to transition to English-medium learning, students from low socioeconomic families who had not been socialized into English-medium communication at home were not only disadvantaged but also alienated from learning English. However, when the teacher was able to use L1 judiciously as a bridging tool, ESL learning became meaningful to students.

The above brief review is an attempt to outline only some of the prominent themes that have emerged so far and is by no means exhaustive. It shows that ethnographic studies of classroom discourse have yielded immensely rich data, which have illuminated our understanding of the multi-faceted nature of interaction in the classroom, the role of the teacher and learners, and of the challenges faced by them. Nevertheless, there is a number of issues that the field needs to address, most of which are methodological, to which I now turn.

Issues to be addressed in future research

Research design and theoretical motivation

Methodological issues in ethnographic research have generated much debate. Walford (2005: 1) observes that “what counts as ethnography and what counts as good ethnographic methodology are both highly contested.” On the one hand, ethnographic researchers have criticized positivistic research for failing to recognize the complexity of human social life and the importance of a qualitative approach to the interpretation of data. Positivistic researchers, on the other hand, have

questioned ethnographic research for not adequately attending to the two canons of scientific enquiry, namely reliability and validity, and for neglecting the importance of quantitative analysis, generalizability, and hypothesis-testing. Hammersley (2002) points out that, as a result of the growing influence of ethnography and qualitative research in the past few decades, quantitative research has been marginalized in some areas of social sciences research. He argues that quantitative and qualitative approaches should be seen as complementary rather than mutually exclusive (see also LeCompte and Goetz, 1982; Hammersley, 1990). He further observes that most ethnographic studies do not go beyond the stage of putting into question what has been taken for granted and providing plausible explanations for the identified puzzling phenomenon (see also Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007). He suggests that there is a need for ethnographic research to advance theory through explicit theorizing and hypothesis testing. The latter requires the selection of cases that are theoretically motivated, referred to by Glaser and Strauss (1967) as theoretical sampling, and the partial control of extraneous variables that are relevant to the research question under investigation.

While the ethnographer should adopt an entirely open approach when conducting the study and refrain from imposing his or her own views or a conceptual framework in data analysis and interpretation (LeCompte and Preissle, 1993), this does not mean that the ethnographer should not have any theoretical assumptions that he or she wishes to investigate. In the studies reviewed above, the selection of cases for detailed investigation was motivated by theoretical assumptions or hypotheses rather than being random. The important point is that the researcher should have an open mind and allow the data to refute whatever theoretical assumptions he or she may have. If ethnographic studies were to advance theory, there should be more explicit articulation of the theoretical motivation in the design of the studies.

Etic and emic perspectives

As outlined at the beginning of this chapter, an essential characteristic of ethnographic research is the investigation of a phenomenon from the world view of the participants. In fact, participant constructs should be used to structure the research. While the majority of the ethnographic studies of classroom discourse reviewed here have been based on interviews or informal conversations conducted with participants to construct the larger context in which the classroom discourse data are situated, there are not many that demonstrate an analysis of the classroom discourse data from the participants' perspective. In a number of cases, the analysis of the data presented by the researcher appears to be *etic* rather than *emic*, because there is little or no triangulation between the discourse data, the participants' intentions when they participated in the discourse, and their interpretation of the discourse at the time. (For an example of an explicit triangulation of classroom discourse data with the participation interview data, see Duff, 2002). What Duff has demonstrated by such triangulation is that the participants' perceptions of the discourse in which they are engaged are central to the elucidation of the relationship between social practices of language use and issues of identity, social positioning, power, and gender.) The apparent *etic* perspective could well be due to the fact that the ethnographic studies reported in journal papers are typically part of a larger, long-term study, often lasting over one year and involving the collection of a larger data set than reported in the cited publication. The restricted word limits of most journal papers tend to prevent the author from providing a detailed account of the entire data collection and analysis processes, hence giving the impression that analysis was done entirely from the researcher's perspective. As a number of researchers have pointed out, it is difficult for a journal article of limited length to do justice to the thick description typical of ethnographic research (Lazaraton, 1995; Green and Dixon, 2002; Rampton *et al.*, 2002). Nevertheless, it should be

cautioned that truncated reports in journal articles may mislead novice researchers in the field in terms of methodology.

Macro- and micro-analysis of classroom discourse

Earlier studies of classroom discourse typically attended to the micro-analysis of classroom discourse, providing detailed descriptions of linguistic features of utterances and interactional features. These analyses, however, were decontextualized, as pointed out before. With the growing emphasis on situating the analysis of classroom discourse in the larger social context, the pendulum now seems to have swung the other way. Many of the more recent ethnographic studies have provided rich descriptions of the social context and interaction in the classroom without giving an account of the micro-analytic method adopted, or of the actual data analysis (Green and Dixon, 2002). Frequently, although a few excerpts from the classroom discourse data set were selected and narratives were provided to describe what was happening in these excerpts, the actual micro-analysis of the classroom discourse data was not reported. Zuengler and Mori (2002) observed that there has been little meta-methodological discussion on the micro-analytic frameworks for classroom discourse. The special issue in *Applied Linguistics* Volume 23 (3) was the first attempt. Three exemplars were presented illustrating three different methodologies, ethnography of communication, conversational analysis (CA), and systemic functional linguistics, grounded in three respective disciplines, anthropology, sociology, and functional linguistics (see Duff, 2002; Mori, 2002; Young and Nguyen, 2002). As pointed out by both Rampton *et al.* (2002) and Green and Dixon (2002), who were respondents to the three exemplars, no one micro-analytic framework can independently provide a full picture of language in use in the classroom. The collection of papers showed that merely focusing on the analysis of language produced in one type of text or task, without linking it to the broader context and without accessing the interpretive frames and procedures that participants draw on during the interaction, is insufficient to illuminate what constitutes language in use in the classroom and the factors that come into play as the discourse unfolds. Access to participants' interpretative frames is particularly important in the adoption of CA for analyzing classroom discourse, because of the different assumptions about the conversationalists' linguistic and conversational competence and the shared knowledge between them in natural conversational contexts and in ESL classroom contexts (Rampton *et al.*, 2002). However, detailed turn-by-turn analyses of the discourse, such as those reported in Mori (2002), were necessary to reveal how an intended classroom task (a discussion meeting) was transformed into another unintended task (an interview). As Green and Dixon (2002) observed, it is the interweaving of macro- and micro-levels of analysis that provides the basis for making grounded claims about the interpretation of data. In other words, to gain a better and broader understanding of the multi-faceted nature of the classroom discourse and the challenges faced by teachers and students, it is necessary to use a combination of macro- and micro-analytic frameworks and methodologies.

Classroom as a bounded unit and a unit of inquiry

The basic assumptions of ethnography are that there exists distinct culturally and geographically bounded units and that cultural practices are transmitted from "oldtimers" to "newcomers." These two assumptions, however, have been challenged in the last two decades, as the impact of globalization, typified by the breaking down of boundaries and the emergence of hybridization on all fronts, has become increasingly strong (Toohey, 2008). Rampton *et al.* (2002) questioned whether labels such as "oldtimers," "newcomers," "locals," and "non-locals" continue to be

relevant in a postmodern world where cultural, political, and geographical boundaries are much more porous and fluid than before and cultural hybridity has become the norm. As Toohey (2008) pointed out, new methods of inquiry may be necessary for an investigation that allows the ethnographer to access the multiple contexts and realities in which learners are located (see also Eisenhart, 2001). The question that needs to be considered is whether it is sufficient to take the classroom as the site of inquiry or whether the focus of inquiry needs to “shift from local to broader contexts and back again, as the effects of practices in other contexts are keenly felt at the local level” (Toohey, 2008: 184). The accomplishment of the latter not only requires a much closer link between macro- and micro-levels of research, but also imposes a greater demand on the researcher’s ability to perceive the part–whole relationship among the phenomena being investigated.

Concluding remarks

Ethnographic studies of classroom discourse have provided immensely rich insights into classroom discourse as a mediational tool, not only for learning but also for the negotiation and (co)-construction of identity, power, and social relationships. These studies situate classroom discourse in the wider context and have provided a better understanding of the ways in which micro-processes in the classroom are profoundly influenced by and interconnected with the macro-processes, social and political, that occur beyond the immediate context of the classroom (Erickson, 2004). Studies of this kind help to raise teachers’ awareness of the complexities of the discourse that is generated in their classrooms and of the agency required from them in order to create opportunities for learning. It also helps teachers to understand the learners’ agency—in their constructing knowledge, in their positioning themselves in relation to other members of the community, and in their negotiating their identities as competent members of the learning community.

As ethnographic micro-analysis of classroom discourse, or micro-ethnography, is time-consuming and labor-intensive and comprehensive analysis of classroom discourse data is onerous, the selection of data within a case is very important (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007). Most of the studies outlined in this chapter have selected for detailed analysis specific speech events, or activities that are typical and relevant to the research question rather than the whole lesson. The deep analysis of the phenomenon under investigation, through repeated reading and reviewing of the data, enables the researcher to gain insights that may not be immediately apparent during participant observation (see also Garcez, 2008).

The issues outlined in this section that need to be further addressed are mostly methodological ones, pertaining to ethnography as a whole rather than just to classroom discourse studies. These are, nevertheless, fundamental issues that are likely to undermine the significance of studies in this area, if they are not addressed properly.

Further reading

Zuengler, J. and Mori, J. (eds.) (2002) *Applied Linguistics*, 23 (3) (special issue).

This special issue contains three papers reporting on studies adopting different perspectives in the micro-analysis of classroom discourse and two papers which critiqued these three studies. The exemplars provided an excellent context for the reader to appreciate the issues raised in the critiques.

Hammersley, M. (1990) *Classroom Ethnography*. Milton Keynes: Open University Press.

This book provides an excellent account of some of the earlier but important debates on methodological issues in ethnography.

Hammersley, M. and Atkinson, P. (2007) *Ethnography: Principles in Practice*. Third Edition. London and New York: Routledge.

This book will serve as an excellent guide for those who are interested in conducting ethnographic studies.

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