

## Research Summary

# The analysis of classroom talk

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- The article explains the difference between **linguistic ethnography (LE)** and **sociocultural research (SC)** in studies of talk in classrooms, but also compares these two qualitative methods of analyzing classroom talk to other methods of studying classroom talk, including quantitative ones.
- LE looks at the relationship between classroom discourse and identity negotiation, for example the recognition and use of different languages and language varieties in schools
  - It has its roots in anthropology and is non-interventionist, which means it doesn't try to intervene in learning but studies participants' social interaction and identities, which impact opportunities for learning
  - LE can be used for examining other social environments apart from schools [e.g., corporate offices, hospitals, etc.]
- SC, whether ethnographic, interventionist, or quasi-experimental, wants to look at learning
  - What types of dialogue or collaborative activity promote learning?—rooted in the psychological theories of Vygotsky
- Both methods share the same assumptions that cultural and local norms shape teaching and learning processes, and that meanings are re-negotiated through interaction over various periods of time
- Compared to quantitative methods, these qualitative methods take smaller samples but do not reduce them to counts of types of interaction [e.g., 15 confirmation checks in 25 minutes]; rather, they preserve the data as the actual recorded dialogues
  - This is because the meaning of interaction always depends on interpersonal and temporal dimensions—what the participants know about each other and what has been said before; “interactions in any observed session are likely to have determinants in the histories of individuals, groups, and institutions” (p. 5).
  - Also, LE and SR both have an analytical focus on language, and both can be used in longitudinal studies
  - Since most learning is gradual, our analysis of how talk enables learning needs to happen on a suitable timescale (p. 10)—e.g., several lessons or months
  - LE provides a rich, detailed description of events and practices within the community
  - SC analysis makes connections between the forms of language use and the social functions learners acquire
    - The forms of language can be quite technical, from distinctive pronunciations to grammar constructions to vocabulary, to the discourse in different subject areas (Science, Fine Arts, Social Studies)
    - IRF/IRE [Initiation-Response-Feedback/Evaluation] sequences can be studied in the teacher-student Q&A
    - Or a Hallidayan Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) framework can be used

- The most current LE/SC research involves teachers as co-investigators or makes use of technology for doing mixed-methods research
- Some say that LE or SC should also become more multimodal, focusing on more than just language (e.g., gaze, gesture, illustrations, electronic media). However, the author of this article only agrees to a point: "...language remains for me the prime cultural tool of the classroom. Spoken language enables, in unique ways, the development of relationships amongst teachers and learners." (p. 10)

**Original Text:** Mercer, N. (2010). The analysis of classroom talk: Methods and methodologies. *British Journal of Educational Psychology*, 80, 1-14. <https://doi.org/10.1348/000709909X479853>.