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DIALOGIC CLASSROOM TALK – RETHINKING ‘MESSY’ CLASSROOM INTERACTION

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ABSTRACT

Over the past decades, dialogic classroom talk has increasingly been acknowledged to be of prime importance for teaching and learning. Many researchers refer to the writings of Mikhail Bakhtin when conceptualising ‘dialogic’ or ‘dialogism’, either as an epistemology or an ontology. In our study we rely on an ontological view of ‘dialogue’ and on the distinction drawn by Bakhtin between ‘authoritative’ and ‘internally persuasive word’ to conduct a sequential analysis (informed by CA) of an extract taken from the film ‘The Class’. Although, the teacher-student interactions at times appear to be ‘messy’ at first sight, our analysis will show that students’ utterances can be considered as an expansion of the subject matter which is accomplished dialogically with their teacher.

INTRODUCTION

Over the past decades, teachers and researchers have increasingly come to acknowledge that dialogic interaction/talk among students and teachers is of prime importance for teaching and learning in the classroom and beyond. Many refer to the writings of Mikhail Bakhtin when conceptualising ‘dialogic’ or ‘dialogism’, which can be described as “a general epistemology for the human sciences” and/or “an ontology of the human mind” (Linell, 2009, 30). In our subsequent discussion of related research, we will lean towards considering ‘dialogue’ as an ontological principle, since “then creativity, learning to learn, and an ethics of openness to the other are relatively easy to understand as closely related fruits of deeper identification with the space of dialogue itself” (Wegerif, 2008, 359). From this perspective, when selecting data for a fine-grained analysis, it makes perfect sense to take into consideration sequences of classroom interactions that appear ‘messy’ at first sight.

For this reason, we chose an extract taken from the film ‘The Class’ (Cantet, 2008) showing classroom interactions that at some point seem to ‘deteriorate’. By conducting a sequential analysis informed by conversation analysis (Gülich, & Mondada, 2008) and by further relying on the bakhtinian concepts ‘dialogic’ and ‘authoritative/internally persuasive word’ (Bakhtin, 1981, 1986), we will open up a new perspective on the event. In so doing it becomes possible to consider students’ utterances not as digression but as enriching contributions to an expansion of the subject matter that is conducted dialogically with their teacher.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Dialogism

When we investigate classroom interactions in terms of ‘dialogic classroom talk’, we rely on the bakhtinian concept of ‘dialogism’. ‘Dialogism’ is commonly related to assumptions such as ‘any speech utterance responds to what has gone before and anticipates future responses’ or ‘meaning is co-constructed in dialogues and does not exist *a priori*’. In this sense, ‘dialogism’ may be considered as an epistemology for the human sciences and as a resource to study human interactions. However, Bakhtin goes beyond epistemology by asserting “that the world for us, that is the world of meaning, is essentially dialogic” (Wegerif, 2008, 349). For Bakhtin indeed, ‘self’ is inherently dialogic, a relation, and “*to be means to communicate*” (Bakhtin, 1984, 287). ‘Dialogue’ in a bakhtinian sense arises in a space of difference: “In dialogism, the very capacity to have consciousness is based on otherness” (Holquist, 2002, 17). So, we address ‘dialogism’ in an ontological perspective, following Wegerif (2008, 347-348) who argues “that adopting an ontological perspective more compatible with dialogic has the potential to improve the practice of dialogue in education.”

Consequently, within the context of our research, we argue that in ‘dialogic classroom talk’ there is mutual regard for otherness; ‘dialogic classroom talk’ is based on “the differential relation between a center and all that is not that center” (Holquist, 2002, 17). ‘Dialogic classroom talk’ is open to different mutually crossing perspectives. We assume that in ‘dialogic classroom talk’, teacher and students have disposition towards considering each other’s perspective while engaging in shared inquiry. Attention is paid to more than one point of view, more than one voice is heard in the classroom and there is ‘interanimation’ of voices and ideas (Bakhtin, 1981). The ‘interanimation’ of voices occurs in a way that “the speaker himself is oriented precisely toward such an actively responsive understanding” (Bakhtin, 1986, 69) and that the listener simultaneously occupies an active responsive position towards it: he either agrees or disagrees with it. The bakhtinian notion of

‘responsive understanding’³⁵ appears here as a key concept. When teacher and students engage in ‘dialogic classroom talk’, “understanding is imbued with response and necessarily elicits it in one form or another: the listener becomes the speaker” and vice versa (Bakhtin, 1986, 68). The speaker-listener “does not expect passive understanding (...). Rather, he expects response, agreement, sympathy, objection, execution and so forth” (Bakhtin, 1986, 69). Thus, adopting a ‘dialogic’ approach in a bakhtinian sense to analyse classroom interactions means to build on the intrinsically social and intersubjective nature of language. We consider that in ‘dialogic classroom talk’ understanding and by that way meaning-making are mutually co-constructed by the teacher and the students, voicing their perspectives in a dynamic reciprocity of difference.

Recent Research on Dialogue and Education

In recent years, the work of Bakhtin has become of interest to many researchers in the field of education. The term ‘dialogic’, applied to education, has gained increased attention and classroom talk has become a key topic in educational sciences. To situate our research perspective, we will refer to the research of Robin Alexander, Neil Mercer and Karen Littleton, and Rupert Wegerif all working on audio and/or video data. We do however not pretend to provide an exhaustive overview of related research on classroom talk; we shall only draw together some common threads that advocate dialogic theory to investigate classroom interactions³⁶. The above quoted authors all build on ‘dialogic’ as an approach to deal with forms of talk in the classroom and their functions for the development of thinking and learning. Despite various research issues, they commonly agree that in dialogic classrooms, teacher and students, through purposeful classroom talk in which the ideas of the various participants are heard and jointly considered, engage in a process of mutually negotiated co-construction of knowledge.

Robin Alexander (2004, 2008) has developed an approach to classroom education that he calls ‘Dialogic Teaching’. He argues that talk is “the true foundation of learning” (Alexander, 2004, 9). Teachers need to be aware of the power of talk. Alexander shows how talk can be used effectively by teachers to promote children’s thinking and to initiate and support their learning. Picking out Bakhtin’s telling axiom that if “an answer does not give rise to a new question from itself, then it falls out of the dialogue” (Bakhtin, 1986, 168), Alexander differentiates dialogue from conversation in the classroom and states that “where conversation often consists of a sequence of unchained two-part exchanges as participants talk at or past each other (...), classroom dialogue explicitly seeks to (...) chain exchanges into meaningful sequence” (Alexander, 2005, 8). Dialogic interactions are the ones where teacher and students build on each other’s ideas and chain them into coherent lines of thinking and inquiry. That means that ‘Dialogic Teaching’ pays as much attention to the teacher’s talk as to the students’. Dialogic teaching reflects a view and depicts a practice where the teacher’s perspective is not prioritised; teachers take account of students’ contributions and all participants are co-developing the object of the lesson.

Neil Mercer and Karen Littleton (2007, 41) largely join Alexander’s view and describe ‘dialogic teaching’ as “that in which both teachers and pupils make substantial and significant contributions and through which children’s thinking on a given idea or theme is helped to move forward”. Investigating the ‘dialogic’ approach in science classrooms, Mercer (2007, 8) points out that “dialogic teaching has the potential to support meaningful learning of science” and that “dialogue appeared to shift children’s understandings and give them new insights.” According to Mercer, effective teaching in science

³⁵ Responsive understanding means to orient with mutual respect to each other (Voloshinov 1973).

³⁶ Be it in an epistemological or in an ontological perspective.

classroom means that there is a balance between ‘dialogue’ and ‘authoritative talk’ (see below). He concludes that “dialogic teaching requires the teacher to adopt different communicative approaches: at times encouraging exploration of different views; at other times focusing on the authoritative scientific view” (ibid.). Littleton (2011) summarises the above mentioned teacher approaches as follows: The *teacher-as-expert* relies on authoritative talk, putting closed questions, instructing and informing; whereas in dialogue, the *teacher-as-learner* asks open questions, eliciting students’ initial ideas, hearing what groups have achieved and discussing problems and misunderstandings.

Whereas Mercer and Littleton refer to dialogic teaching in terms of the use of talk as a tool for explicit reasoning and thinking³⁷ (in line with vygotskian theory), Rupert Wegerif refers to an ontological interpretation of ‘dialogic’ when relating to the bakhtinian concept of education. For Wegerif, “dialogic education is education for dialogue as well as through dialogue in which dialogue is not only treated as a means to an end but also treated as an end in itself” (Wegerif, 2011, 182). With regard to investigating classroom talk, he relies on the metaphor of ‘thinking as dialogue’ and points to how dialogic education leads to improved thinking and to enhanced learning. Thus, “for dialogic theory, learning to think means being pulled out of oneself to take the perspectives out of other people and, through that engagement in a play of perspectives, to be able to creatively generate new perspectives or ways of seeing and thinking about the world” (Wegerif, 2010, 10). That is to say that ‘dialogic theory’ is not just about dialogue, it is “that two or more perspectives held together in the tension of relationship open a space of potential new meaning” (ibid., 2010, 62). Wegerif (2008, 353) argues that “for each participant in a dialogue the voice of the other is an outside perspective that includes them within it. The boundary between subjects is not, therefore, a demarcation line, (...) but an inclusive ‘space’ of dialogue within self and other mutually construct and reconstruct each other.”

Authoritative and internally persuasive discourse

With regard to these reflections on ‘dialogism’, we will focus on two bakhtinian key concepts that are relevant for our subsequent analyses: the ‘authoritative word (voice)’ and the ‘internally persuasive word (voice)’. The *authoritative word* (e.g. the word of teachers) “demands that we acknowledge it” and “permits no play with the context framing it, no play with its borders, (...) no spontaneously creative stylizing variants on it” (Bakhtin, 1981, 342, 343). On the other hand, the *internally persuasive word* “awakens new and independent words, organises masses of our words from within and (...) enters into interanimating relationships with new contexts. More than that, it enters into an intense interaction, a struggle with other internally persuasive discourses” (Bakhtin, 1981, 345, 346). The internally persuasive word is organised as “half-ours and half-someone else’s” (ibid.) and thus takes account of the other’s perspective.

Bakhtin himself makes reference to school context when underlining the dialogic interrelationship (in difference) of the two categories of words and asserts that when “verbal disciplines are taught in school, two basic modes are recognized for the appropriation and transmission - simultaneously - of another’s words: (...) ‘reciting by heart’ and ‘retelling in one’s own words’” (ibid., 341). Here Bakhtin associates ‘reciting’ with the authoritative word which “orders me to do something in a way that forces me to accept or reject it without engaging with it” (Wegerif, 2011, 181). ‘Retelling’ on the other hand is related to the internally persuasive word “that includes within it an entire series of forms for the appropriation while transmitting of another’s words, depending upon the character of the text

³⁷ Studies showed that exploratory talk may be considered as a tool for reasoning under the assumption that exploratory talk produces educationally desired outcomes (Mercer et al., 2004).

being appropriated and the pedagogical environment in which it is understood and evaluated” (Bakhtin, 1981, 341-342).

Dialogic classroom talk

We should emphasize here that in ‘dialogic classroom talk’, students are given the opportunity to distinguish their own word from that of others so as to identify the ‘authoritative word’; this process being of decisive significance since “consciousness awakens to ideological independent life in a world of alien discourses surrounding it” (Bakhtin, 1981, 345). In the analysed excerpts, teacher and students cope with the usage of the subjunctive mode during a French grammar lesson. We will show in the first part of the subsequent analysis how, in an ‘ordered’ teacher-student interaction, the ‘authoritative word’ (teacher, grammar rule) seeks to impose itself in ‘hierarchical’ characteristics.

In the second part of the analysis, we will point out how the teacher and the students, despite or by virtue of displaying different understandings of the subjunctive mode, are doing expanding meanings, providing them with contexts. In other words, we will show how, in ‘dialogic classroom talk’, making accountable mutual understanding (of difference) and appropriating the subjunctive mode are intrinsically interrelated.

SOME REMARKS ON METHODOLOGY

The analysed excerpts are taken from the semi-improvised³⁸ French drama film ‘The Class’ (Cantet, 2008, original French title: ‘Entre les murs’), that is based on the novel of the same name (Bégaudeau, 2006). The novel is a semi-autobiographical account of François Bégaudeau's experiences as a French language and literature teacher in a middle school in the 20th arrondissement of Paris. Although the film is based on a screenplay, that follows the novel, it is often referred to as ‘authentic’ as the movie displays instances of classroom interactions in a rather realistic way. The analysed excerpts³⁹ show a teacher and his students during a French lesson discussing the correct use of subjunctive mode.

To investigate how they are doing re-contextualising and appropriating the subjunctive mode and by that way expanding the object, we conduct a sequential analysis of the teacher-student talk⁴⁰ that is based on conversation analysis (CA) (see Sacks, 1992; Gülich, & Mondada, 2008; Koole, 2015)⁴¹.

³⁸ The adolescent actors were all students of an existing French junior high school. During the shooting of the movie they “never had a script in hand [...] they improvised according to requested situations” and “came up with their own dialogue” (Cantet, & Bégaudeau, 2008, 11).

³⁹ Teacher-student talk of the selected excerpts has been transcribed (/ for raising voice; [for overlapping) and translated from French into English by partly relying on the official script (Cantet, Campillo, & Bégaudeau, 2006). For the purpose of our analysis here, we rely ‘only’ on verbal interactions although we advocate for CA based multimodal interaction analysis (see Arend et al., 2014).

⁴⁰ According to Linell (2001, 265) (referring to Sacks, 1992, Ochs et al., 1996, Atkinson & Heritage, 1984) “when it comes to method, (...) a cornerstone in the methodological arsenal is sequential analysis, which amounts to saying that no utterance should be analysed in isolation from the contexts and the sequence in which it is positioned.”

⁴¹ Note that here we do not intend to discover new classroom practices by analysing sequences taken from a drama film. We go for a so called ‘single case analysis’ that means that “in a sort of exercise, the resources of past work on a *range of phenomena* and organizational domains in talk-in-interaction are brought to bear on the analytic explications of a *single fragment of talk*” (Schegloff, 1987, 101). CA is considered here as an analytical

This approach allows us to grasp and to visualise the participants' mutual taking account of each other's perspective while dealing with the 'thorny' object 'subjunctive mode'⁴².

In our analysis of the first excerpt, we will show the 'authoritative word' in its located occurrence. In the second part, we will show that teacher-student talk (which may seem 'messy' at first sight) can be seen as 'dialogic' in its sequential unfolding. Our CA related analytic approach displays "that everything said in [the] dialogue, at any point, is interdependent with its position in the sequence" (Linell, 2009, 72) thus visualising dialogic sequentiality⁴³ in its ongoing dynamics.

ANALYSIS

Excerpt 1: IRE/IRF sequences: local occurrences of 'authoritative discourse'

In the first excerpt we will see that the teacher establishes himself as an expert of French grammar, that is to say as local authority on the subject matter 'subjunctive mode'. He is going to explain the use of subjunctive and then the sequence of tenses. To do this, he introduces a sentence (by writing it onto the blackboard) featuring the subjunctive mode of the verb 'to be'.

- 1 TEACHER imagine I say/ he insists/ that I be/ in shape he insists that
I be in shape what is this BE in that example/ Eva/
- 2 EVA it's a present subjunctive
- 3 TEACHER very good it's a present subjunctive well for the imperfect
subjunctive we follow the sequence of tenses and use a past he
insisted he insisted that I/ Khoumba/
- 4 KHOUMBA were
- 5 TEACHER were yes

In excerpt 1 we can see a prototypical teacher-student interaction consisting of recurring three-part sequences (lines 1-3; lines 3-5) "in which the teacher presents the student with an assignment or question (I), the student responds to that (R), and the teacher then assesses the correctness of that response (E)" (Koole, 2015, 4). Each IRE/IRF⁴⁴ sequence consists of three related turns (utterances). The first sequence is initiated by the teacher (line 1) addressing a closed question ("what is this BE in that example") and then picking Eva who produces the expected and correct reply (line 2). This response is positively evaluated and echoed by the teacher ("very good it's a present subjunctive") in line 3.

Then, right after his feedback (line 3), within the same turn, the teacher initiates a new IRE/IRF cycle by introducing the 'sequence of tenses'-topic. Here he relies on a different 'strategy' than in line 1, when addressing the students. The last part of his utterance is "designedly incomplete", that is to say,

resource in illuminating episodes of classroom talk in order to develop a deepened view on existing phenomena, in our case to reach a more detailed understanding of 'dialogism' in teacher-student talk within its local context.

⁴² See the note on the subjunctive at the end of the paper.

⁴³ Note that for Linell (2001, 86) "the principle of sequentiality, and even more so the notion of 'sequence', are given a broader interpretation (...) than in Conversation Analysis (e.g. Atkinson & Heritage 1984) where 'sequence' refers to a local, close-knit sequence, such as an adjacency pair or a repair sequence."

⁴⁴ This sequence is generally known as teacher initiation, learner response, and teacher follow-up or feedback (IRF) in the British school (Sinclair & Coulthard, 1975), and initiation, response and evaluation (IRE) in the American school (Mehan, 1979).

it is designed to be completed by a student (Koshik, 2002). Indeed, the teacher selects Khoumba right away as the next speaker by calling her name. Khoumba provides the correct response (“were”, line 4), which is again positively evaluated by him.

In both sequences, the teacher and the students co-construct typical classroom talk making accountable their responsive understanding about talk/turn organisation. Transition relevance places (Sacks et al., 1974) between turns are made mutually recognisable. Teacher and students, in mutual agreement, do locally re-contextualising a certain type of classroom talk. In other words, they are doing validating the authoritative discourse of the institution. The teacher’s feedbacks show that he obviously knows the answer to his own questions; the students know that he knows but nevertheless they ‘play’ the game as listeners occupying an active response position towards the known information questions, and as speakers (in the allocated turn) they try to give the expected answer. The interanimation of voices occurs in a way that the teacher is confirmed as expert. As Linell (2001, 74) points out, there may be various asymmetries of knowledge in institutional contexts and thus experts (teachers) tend to ask questions and other participants (students) are addressed to respond to these questions. The teacher’s authoritative voice putting closed questions, instructing and informing is heard in an actively responsive manner. Simultaneously, sequential analysis allows us to see how the teacher and the students are doing accomplishing the authoritative discourse of French grammar. The latter is “conjoined with authority” and demands that students acknowledge it and make it their own (Bakhtin, 1981, 342, 343).

Excerpt 2: Exploring ‘otherness’: local occurrences of ‘internally persuasive discourse’

In the previous part of analysis, we have pointed out how teacher and students, in mutually addressed commitment, *do* carrying out a teacher-designed activity. Focussing on the turn allocation system in IRF/IRE sequences, allowed us to illuminate how, in ‘authoritative discourse’, the students’ understanding of the grammatical item *subjunctive mode* is elicited and displayed.

In excerpt 2, some students are doing challenging the usage of subjunctive mode as well as the related sequence of tenses. We will see that, in distancing themselves from the ‘authoritative word’, they display ‘otherness’ and thereby are *doing understanding* otherness. There is a shift from teacher initiated IRF/IRE sequences⁴⁵ to questions and comments generated by the students. At that point, the students seem to be somehow ‘rebellious’ towards the teacher’s assertions and at first sight classroom interaction may seem ‘messy’. But, relying on Bakhtin, we will show “the importance of struggling with another’s discourse” to *do* understanding in difference. So, after the teacher has validated Khoumba’s answer (see lines 4 and 5, excerpt 1), another student, Esmeralda, breaks with the IRF/IRE device (‘structure’), by self selecting for the next turn.

- 6 ESMERALDA you really think I’ll go and see my mother I’ll say that I
were’d been in shape/ [what will she understand/
7 TEACHER [no no no it’s not I were’d been it’s
learn the sentence first [before bawling
8 ESMERALDA [that I be were in shape
9 TEACHER that I were in shape it’s a sequence of tenses
10 ESMERALDA no one says that in real life I don’t know eh it’s the truth
(other voices raising, inaudible comments)
11 TEACHER the first thing I notice is before even mastering something
here the imperfect subjunctive you’re already telling me it’s

⁴⁵ IRF/IRE sequences validated by the students (see excerpt 1)

- no use start by mastering it then you can call its use into question
- 12 ANGELICA it's she is right it's not the way people speak today that's the way people talked in the old days even my grand mother didn't speak like that
- 13 BOUBACAR even your great grand father didn't say that it's from the Middle Ages
- 14 TEACHER no it isn't from the middle ages
- 15 BOUBACAR it is
(other voices raising)
- 16 TEACHER I'll talk this over but calmly indeed I well it's true not everyone talks that way in fact people who do are pretty rare

Esmeralda (line 6) displays that she is distinguishing her own voice from the teacher's authoritative voice by addressing him directly and putting his word to the test ("you really think"). We can see here that understanding the other's word⁴⁶ as different triggers the meaning making process in a bakhtinian sense: meanings are produced dialogically in tension between different voices. The student sets the teacher's voice against her mother's voice ("what will she understand"). In that way, she is doing both, drawing a distinction between school context and (every day) home context *and* retelling in her own words the word of others. The teacher then proceeds to repair (line 7) Esmeralda's 'retelling' (Bakhtin, 1981, 341) by rejecting her grammatical phrase. In the first turn part ("no no it's not I were'd been"), he is voicing the authority of grammar and, in the second turn part ("it's learn the sentence first"), he displays the authority of 'reciting by heart' (ibid.). He does not answer the student's raising question about her mother's understanding. Esmeralda replies immediately⁴⁷ to the teacher's prompting ("learn the sentence first") (line 8) by a 'repair' ("that I be were"). Thus she shows that she takes into account the teacher's authority. The teacher makes a second repair (line 9): in the first part of his turn, he formulates the correct phrase ("that I were in shape") and in the second turn part, he is doing reinforcing his expertise ("it's a sequence of tenses"). The struggle and dialogic interrelationship of two distinct categories of discourse (the authoritative word and the internally persuasive word) are enacted here in the mutually responsive teacher-student voices. The teacher and the student are both defending their respective position by considering each other's perspective.

Esmeralda extends her line of argument (10) by asserting that "no one says that in real life". Note the use of the deictic 'that': even in school context Esmeralda doesn't say (repeat) the correct phrase 'I were'. Once more, she makes accountable being aware of difference: she believes that the concept of *sequence of tenses* has no place in real life. Yet, in the same turn she admits a doubt ("I don't know"). The student seems to be about aligning with the teacher's word before however supporting again her belief ("it is the truth"). Here, "it is possible to give a concrete and detailed analysis of" Esmeralda's "utterance, once having exposed it as a contradiction-ridden, tension-filled unity of two embattled tendencies" (Bakhtin, 1981, 272). Esmeralda is indeed voicing here two interior competing forces, the centrifugal tendency towards difference and the centripetal tendency towards unity (ibid.).

Other students' voices raise; the sound level is growing. Then (line 11), the teacher proceeds to launch the next authoritative word, clearly not orienting to Esmeralda's question. He defers any possibility of student comments. The teacher makes quite clear to the students that investigating the usage of imperfect subjunctive in their own words, is subject to the suspensory condition of mastering the grammatical item.

⁴⁶ initially considered as authority (the teacher's voice so as the authoritative voice of a French grammar rule)

⁴⁷ note the overlapping with the previous turn

But another student, Angelica, validates Esmeralda's argument ("she is right") (line 12), by re-questioning the use of the imperfect subjunctive in everyday conversation with family members. Moreover, she expands the argument by providing it with a temporal dimension ("that's the way people talked in the old days even my grand mother didn't speak like that"). Boubacar then self selects as next speaker (line 13). He recycles the phrasal structure of Angelica's turn completion and widens the temporal dimension to a far more distant past ("*great* grand father, middle ages"). We should notice here the use of the personal pronouns: Angelica's "my" (line 12) becomes Boubacar's "your" (line 13). Boubacar visibly transforms Angelica's argument into a joint one, though he does it from his point of view. The locally occasioned appropriation of the other's word as a resource for developing the discussion occurs in complementary reciprocity. Subsequently in line 14, the teacher proceeds to an authoritative rejection ("no it isn't from the middle ages") immediately countered by Boubacar in line 15 ("it is").

We may see in lines 6 to 15 that different perspectives are held in tension. The students' internally persuasive word enters into an intense interaction with the authoritative word. Exploring difference leads to the challenge and competition between ideas. Following here the 'single case' of interanimating discussion about the usage of subjunctive mode means that we follow the appropriation and the development of another's word in "the gradation of its transitions" (Bakhtin, 1981, 346). In other words, we attend "the play of boundaries, the distance between that point where the context begins to prepare for the introduction of another's word". Finally (line 16), the teacher 'agrees' with the students ("it's true"). However he does not change completely his earlier position; he transforms the students' "no one" into "not everyone" and "people are pretty rare". Thus, "instead of fixed me on one side (...) [he] enters into the space between⁴⁸ and learns to see (...) anew from there" (Wegerif, 2010, 62).

CONCLUSION

In the presented 'single case' study, we show how 'dialogic classroom talk' is accomplished in the locally verbalised occurrences of the teacher's and the students' crossing perspectives.

In the first part of our analysis (excerpt 1), we point out how the teacher and the students display knowledge about subjunctive mode as well as mutual understanding of prototypical classroom talk organisation. In a reciprocally enacted IRF/IRE sequence, both teacher and students *do* re-voicing the authoritative word of French grammar by making accountable⁴⁹ that "its authority was already acknowledged in the past" (Bakhtin, 1981, 342).

In the second part of our analysis (excerpt 2), we rethink 'messy' teacher-student interaction in terms of 'struggle' or dynamic interrelationship between 'authoritative discourse' and 'internally persuasive discourse'. Relying on the bakhtinian concept of 'dialogism', we show that in the analysed classroom interaction, meaning-making builds on a dynamic reciprocity of difference. We point out that, in struggle with the other's discourse, the participants display awareness of differences in point of view and they attempt to acknowledge and to understand the other's perspective. In doing so, they co-construct new meanings and expand the subject matter of the lesson. Thus we assert that "it is essential to look beyond the moment of miscommunication to the longer-term ongoing dialogic process if we want to understand the struggles that lead to learning" (Warshauer Freedman, & Ball, 2004, 6).

⁴⁸ a 'dialogic' space

⁴⁹ through correct answers resp. positive feedback

NOTE ON THE SUBJUNCTIVE MODE

In the analysed excerpts the discussed object/subject matter is the subjunctive mode and more specifically the sequence of tenses when using it (present subjunctive or imperfect subjunctive). So, we shall briefly address this critical grammatical issue. The subjunctive is a mood of verbs that can be found, with varying functions, in many languages. Generally, the notions that are expressed by the subjunctive are “doubt, possibility, necessity, desire, and future time” (“mood,” 2016, para. 2). In English the subjunctive is not very common and is usually only to be found in formal styles⁵⁰ (see e.g. the example from our first excerpt: He insists that I be in shape) (op. cit.). In French, to express, for example, a wish or an order (“he insists that”) the subjunctive mode is used behind ‘that’. Furthermore, there are intricate rules of sequence of tenses that apply. In grammar lessons in French schools, the subjunctive remains nevertheless, or because of it, a commonly treated topic, that carries many challenges for both students and teachers.

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⁵⁰ “More often, subjunctive meanings are expressed by modal auxiliary verbs, such as *can*, *must*, or *may*, as in ‘He must be ready on time.’” (op. cit.)

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