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Indexing authority in the classroom: children's practices to achieve an authoritative position among classmates

Abstract

The paper explores children's authoritative claims in the peer group, focusing on the practices through which children achieve a position of deontic and/or epistemic authority during peer conflict. Drawing from an ethnographic research documented with video recordings in two primary schools in northern Italy, this study adopts a CA-informed approach to analyze 8- to 10-year-old children's conflictual negotiations of authoritative positions in the group hierarchy. As the analysis illustrates, children mobilize institutional entities and strategically deploy knowledge to underpin their local claims of authority. In the discussion it is argued that such practices are relevant to children's socialization into classroom expectations and to the local negotiation of valued identities in the peer group. These insights are also declined in relation to the dichotomy between social inclusion and exclusion.

Keywords

children's peer interaction, classroom, authority, deontics, epistemics

1. Introduction

Within children's peer groups, the dynamics of social inclusion and exclusion are often constructed and brought to bear in relation to the social hierarchy of the peer group. Children make use of various practices and stances to index affiliation with the members of the group and marginalize other children that are perceived and constructed as non-members of the party (i.e. as out-group). In this regard, children continuously build symmetrical and asymmetrical relationships among peers: for example, asymmetries might be constructed through negative category ascription (e.g., being a 'bad friend', Evaldsson 2007) and on the basis of failures to meet the social expectations of the group (Goodwin 2006).

During these local negotiations of the social organization of the peer group, children might attempt to achieve positions of dominance and control through various means (Kyratzis 2004). One way to obtain a superordinate position in the peer group is to display an authoritative

stance, which might be recognized or resisted by the other children. During their mundane interactions in the peer group, children deploy thus various semiotic resources in their attempts to achieve a position of authority in the peer group. Which are then these resources?

Based on two primary schools in Italy, this study analyzes children's practices to achieve a position of deontic and/or epistemic authority during peer conflict. First, the analysis considers children's mobilization of institutional 'entities': children deploy rules of appropriate behavior, point to material features of the environment, or invoke the figure of the teacher to underpin their local authoritative claims. Second, the study illustrates children's strategic deployment of knowledge: children use reported speech or mobilize first-hand knowledge to make stronger epistemic claims and achieve thereby a position of epistemic authority among classmates.

Previous studies on children's negotiations of authority have mainly considered instances of play (see among others Kyratzis, Marx & Wade 2001, Griswold 2007, Reynolds 2010). Moreover, these studies have seldom considered peer interactions in the classroom setting and the relevance of the institutional frame for children's enactment of authority. In this regard, the study contributes to our understanding of children's joint construction of their social hierarchy by considering task-related activities in the (L2) classroom.

A first goal of the study is to provide insights on the verbal, embodied, and material resources that children deploy to claim a position of authority in the classroom. The analysis considers these authoritative claims in sequences of peer conflict, which might also involve a teacher. Notably, children's attempts to achieve a position of authority are relevant to the negotiation of valued or problematic identities, and possibly to children's sociolinguistic development. In this regard, a second goal of the study is to consider to which extent these practices play a role in children's social organization and in their socialization into the expectations of the context. Eventually, a third goal of the study is to appraise the relevance of local authoritative claims for children's inclusion and exclusion in the peer group.

2. Theoretical background

The study is informed by a peer language socialization perspective (Kyratzis & Goodwin 2017) and focuses on children's semiotically-mediated participation in everyday activities. In and through language and other semiotic systems, children acquire the social and linguistic skills that allow them to act appropriately, and thereby to be included, in a specific community of practice.

In the classroom, children are apprenticed into the set of expected ways of behaving that inform and regulate everyday activities. Although studies in language socialization have mainly focused on teacher-led socialization, an increased attention is being devoted to the role that children might assume in the apprenticeship period of peers. In this regard, scholars have shown that children are active agents of their own socialization, managing to create their own environment for learning (Kyratzis and Johnson 2017) and to creatively reproduce teachers' worldviews and ways of speaking (Burdelski 2013). As regards the latter, children's reproduction of institutional messages is often bound to their local purposes in the peer group (see the concept of *interpretive reproduction*, Corsaro 1992).

Children's peer socializing practices become especially visible during breaches of the social expectations of the group, which might be sanctioned by other children. Notably, this sanctioning of peers' conduct often results in conflictual exchanges between children. In this regard, *conflict* has been shown to be a central part of children's socialization into the expectations of the new community (Ehrlich & Blum-Kulka 2010; see Moore & Burdelski 2020 for an overview). Moreover, conflict is central to the local negotiation of children's social organization and of positions of power and subordination (Corsaro & Maynard 1996): children often dispute over their right to control and shape the ongoing activity (Maynard 1985, Goodwin 1990), at times by claiming an *authoritative role* among classmates.

2.1. Indexing authority in the peer group

Within sociology, authority has been defined as 'legitimized' power, i.e. as a right to exert power that is accepted and acknowledged by subordinates (Weber 1964). Setting out from this broad recognition, other authors have focused on the *process* through which this legitimacy to exert power is constructed and brought to bear: participants jointly construct 'authority' in and

through various semiotic resources.[1] Thus, authority is (also) the outcome of participants' displays and negotiations of an authoritative position in interaction (Buzzelli & Johnston 2001).

Within this research milieu, scholars have also dealt with the local negotiation of authoritative positions among children. Even though children might have different statuses within the peer group (see note 1), the absence of pre-determined hierarchical roles makes the local negotiation of authority particularly significant. Recognizing children's concern for power in the peer group (Kyratzis 2004), previous studies have focused on children's strategies to achieve an authoritative position (e.g., Goodwin 1990, 2006) or on local displays of subordination to dominant peers (Kyratzis, Marx & Wade, 2001, Griswold 2007). As regards the former, children can claim an authoritative position through various practices. These practices might include the enactment of privileged roles in pretend play (Goodwin 1990, Sheldon 1996, Reynolds 2010, Cobb-Moore 2012), the manipulation of rules during games (Goodwin 1995, Evaldsson 2004), sanctioning and assessments (Goodwin 2006, Evaldsson & Tellgren 2009), and collaboration with other peers to obtain their support (Maynard 1985). Notably, these ways of displaying and constructing authority have been mostly analyzed in instances of peer play. In this regard, this study broadens the field of analysis by considering children's authoritative claims during task-related activities in the (L2) classroom.

In the classroom, the institutional frame might play a role in children's negotiations around authority. For instance, children can mobilize institutional entities as authoritative sources, invoking thereby higher order figures as co-authoring one's actions (see Cooren 2010 and the concept of *ventriloquism*). For example, children can use reported speech to invoke an adult figure during a dispute (Maynard 1985, 21), they can use an authoritative institutional register (Evaldsson 2007), they can creatively reproduce teachers' use of honorifics (Ahn 2020), or they can enact the role of the teacher to correct and discipline their classmates (Author 2022). The initial part of the analysis integrates these studies by considering children's 'presentification'

[1] Clearly, authority is not just locally 'emerging' from participants' social interactions. In fact, authority is the result of the interplay between structural features of the context and their local re-negotiation by participants (see Giddens 1984). This interplay is rendered by the notions of *status* and *stance*: the former refers to participants' established rights and responsibilities to act as the authority, whereas the latter concerns participants' local claims and displays of an authoritative position (see Heritage 2012 for this distinction in relation to epistemics). Within children's peer groups, authoritative *stances* appear to have greater significance, since there are no 'institutionalized' *statuses* among peers. Nevertheless, children might indeed have authoritative statuses as a result of their temporally unfolding lived experience in the peer group (for example, a child who is constantly praised and recognized as 'the best student' in a classroom might have a higher epistemic status in the peer group, regardless of his/her stances). Notably, these statuses can always be subject to re-negotiation and resistance.

of authoritative sources during peer conflict. Specifically, it analyzes children's authoritative claims in relation to the *deontic* and *epistemic* order of interaction.

2.1.1. Deontic and epistemic authority

Scholars of language and social interaction have narrowed down the concept of authority by distinguishing between *deontic authority*, i.e. the right and obligation to establish what to do next and to determine future courses of action (Stevanovic & Peräkylä 2012), and *epistemic authority*, i.e. the right and obligation to know best about a specific topic (Heritage 2012).

As regards deontic authority, participants might attempt to control the ongoing activity by deciding what needs to be done in a specific situation. These local claims of the right to decide regards both the interactional sequence (e.g. to select next-speakership, choose a topic, or interrupt an interlocutor) and future courses of action. Crucially, these moves correspond to specific deontic *stances* (as opposed to statuses), as they regard participants' local claims which might be then ratified or resisted by the other interlocutors.

Participants' authoritative claims might also regard the epistemic order of interaction, as they can revolve around the relative entitlement over some domains of knowledge (e.g., direct versus indirect access, first-hand versus second-hand knowledge, Drew 1992). As regards interactions in the peer group, children can strategically use knowledge to carry out their personal agenda and/or achieve a superordinate position among peers: for example, this can be accomplished by constructing the recipient as unknowing (Jordan et al. 1995, Melander 2012), or by (not) explaining something (Morek 2015).

Clearly, children's epistemic stances and claims of superior knowledge can be challenged by peers. As the analysis will show, an authoritative claim (be it deontic or epistemic) is not enough to achieve a powerful position in the peer group, as it must be acknowledged and ratified by the other members of the group. This recognition points to the collective 'work' that create, sustains, and re-do children's social organization. Rather than being a mechanical byproduct of pre-ordained categories and roles, children's social hierarchy is (mainly) an emergent product of social interaction.

Children's co-construction of their social organization concerns thus both the epistemic and the deontic order of interaction. Notably, these local negotiations often involve a moral component. As the analysis will show, by claiming an authoritative position children also construct the set

of morally acceptable ways of behaving in the classroom. Specifically, children jointly negotiate their local conceptions of right and wrong, holding each other as morally accountable for previous and ongoing actions (Evaldsson 2007).

3. Setting and methods

3.1. The schools and the corpus

The analysis is based on data that were collected in two primary schools in a city in northern Italy. The schools are located in a suburban area, with relatively high rates of people with a migratory background or low socioeconomic prospects. Probably reflective of the social tissue of the broader neighborhood, the schools enroll a high percentage of non-native children. In order to deal with children who still have a limited competence in Italian, the schools organize several Italian L2 classes. These L2 classes are attended by a small group of children with a similar level of competence in Italian. Conversely, the ordinary classroom is attended by up to 25 children with heterogeneous levels of competence.

The analysis takes into consideration peer interactions among children aged 8 to 10, in the ordinary as well as the L2 classroom.[2] The activities in the classrooms are multifarious. In the L2 class, children might work individually on the task assigned, or do group exercises that might involve the teacher. Activities in the ordinary classroom vary consistently, ranging from small group work to whole-class exercises and discussions.

In the data, peer conflict arises quite often and irrespectively of the activity at hand: children argue during small group work, individual exercises, or whole class discussions. In this article I focus on *extended* sequences of conflict (i.e. sequences of oppositional stances or actions that unfolds over more than two turns). This focus is due to the difficulty of clearly defining peer conflicts composed of just two sequential actions (for instance, resistance to an initial opposition might not be clearly displayed). Moreover, extended conflicts provide children with

[2] The ordinary and the L2 classroom are different context, with distinct pedagogical aims and interactional structures. However, children's strategies to achieve an authoritative position are similar in the two contexts (the only difference being that in the L2 classroom children can also draw from authoritative sources from the ordinary classroom – see the analysis and the discussion). Furthermore, in the extracts analyzed children do not display a particular orientation to the specificity of the two contexts. Since the social phenomena under scrutiny were similar, the article presents extracts from the two contexts to provide a full picture of the data in the corpus (see section 3.1.).

ample opportunities to develop and refine their strategies to achieve an authoritative position. In 71 occurrences of extended peer conflict in the corpus, children deployed various strategies to achieve authority. First, children mobilized 'entities' from the institutional environment, such as institutional rules (e.g., "you must/cannot do x"), material features (e.g., the blackboard, the book), or the teacher (e.g., "the teacher said so"). Second, children tried to achieve an authoritative position by strategically using knowledge (e.g., by mobilizing first-hand knowledge, or through reported speech). Table 1 illustrates the frequency of these phenomena in the corpus (ca. 30h of video-recorded interactions).

Peer conflicts	**Mobilizing institutional 'entities'**			**Epistemics-related practices**
	rules	materials	teachers	
71	16	5	6	3

Tab.1. Occurrences of different ways of performing authority during peer conflict

3.2. Analytical methods

The data were collected during a period of ethnographic fieldwork that lasted 9 months. The ethnographic approach is integrated with the micro-analytical instruments of Conversation Analysis, which allow to consider participants' local deployment of various semiotic resources to accomplish their communicative aims (Goodwin & Cekaite 2018). The use of ethnographic information was relevant to grasp the wider structures and ideologies available to children, who agentively drew on them in their peer group interactions. For example, ethnographic knowledge was necessary to recognize the institutional matrix of specific rules (see Ex. 1). Apart from that, the analysis is informed by a concern for members' understanding of social categories (see *membership categorization analysis* in Sacks 1992). Specifically, the social and moral implications of the practices under scrutiny are considered also in relation to children's negative category ascriptions (Evaldsson 2007).

Approximately 30 hours of naturally-occurring interactions in the classroom were video-recorded, transcribed (see the transcription conventions at the end of the volume), and analyzed using this combined methodology. The analysis proceeded inductively, as videos and transcripts were repeatedly viewed to identify relevant phenomena. All occurrences of extended

peer conflict were selected and analyzed in relation to the authoritative strategies that children deployed. Specifically, children's mobilization of various entities was considered in relation to the local negotiation of deontic and epistemic authority in the peer group. Analytical hypotheses were then discussed and validated in several data sessions with the local research group. The three excerpts presented in this article are representative of children's strategies to enact authority in the larger corpus (see Table 1).

4. Analysis

First, the analysis considers children's mobilization of institutional entities to enact an authoritative position during peer conflict. Children formulate institutional rules (section 4.1.) and make relevant material features of the environment or institutional figures (section 4.2.) to achieve a position of deontic authority and decide about necessary courses of action. Second, the analysis illustrates children's attempts to secure a position of epistemic authority and achieve thereby their local aims during conflict (section 4.3.).

4.1. Mobilizing institutional rules

In the corpus, children often reproduced institutional rules in the peer group. These rules were usually deployed after breaches of the social expectations of the context, for example to sanction transgressors for their inappropriate behavior. Notably, this local deployment of rules was often germane to the local negotiation of children's social hierarchy. Specifically, Excerpt 1 illustrates children's mobilization of an institutional rule to achieve a position of deontic authority during peer conflict. The conflict is sparked by an infringement of classroom normativity. Ana reproaches a classmate, but her reproach is questioned by another child. In response to that, Ana mobilizes an institutional rule and manage to establish her right to decide what needs to be done (see also Cobb-Moore, Danby & Farrell 2009 on children's deployment of rules).

The conflict occurred during group work. Four children sit around a table, with a teacher standing close by. Before the sequence shown here, Nima and Yanis have been intermittently arguing over some markers.

Excerpt 1

```
   1            ((Nima and Yanis are arguing over markers))
   2   Ana      stop nima and yanis:!
                stop nima and yanis:!
   3            (0.5)
   4   Ana      non è   bel[lo!
                it's not ni[ce!
   5   Carlo               [ana lasciali stare.=va bene?
                            [ana let them be.=alright?
   6            (1)
→  7   Ana      no! perchè dobbiamo fare in gruppi,
                no! because we must work in group,
   8   Teacher  ana ha ragione eh?
                ana is right eh?
                (0.2)
   9   Teacher  lo dovete fare in [gruppo
                you  must work in [group
→  10  Ana                        [non si deve litigare non è importante
                                  [one must not argue it's not important
   11  Nima     io stavo mettendo a posto il pennerello (.)
                i was putting the marker back (.)
   12           ^lui gioca con i pennerelli
                ^he plays with the markers, (    )
   13           ^((raises arm toward Yanis))
```

The quarrel between Nima and Yanis has been going on for some minutes, making it difficult to work collectively on the task assigned. Ana and Carlo have been trying to keep on working despite the noise and the recurrent disruptions. Eventually, Ana issues a directive to stop her classmates' inappropriate behavior (*stop nima and yanis!*, line 2). Although the recipients of the reproach are not ambiguous, the girl chooses a named address, which strengthens the force of her turn (Macbeth 1991). After a brief pause, this first reproach is followed by a further negative assessment of their conduct (*it's not nice*, line 4). With these moves, Ana claims a position of deontic authority with her peers, i.e. she claims the right to decide what must be done in that specific situation and to control her classmates' behavior.

Carlo seems more willing to maintain the prior *status quo* and proposes a different course of action: he suggests ignoring the classmates' disruptive conduct (*let them be*, line 5), in this way questioning the usefulness of Ana's reproach. However, Carlo's advice and his final confirmation request (*alright?*, line 5) are baldly rejected by Ana (*no!*, line 6), who then gives an account for her previous interactional moves: she invokes an institutional rule, including herself in the domain of validity by using the first person plural (*we must work in group*, line 7). When an initial directive is not enough to get compliance, children might mobilize an

institutional entity to underpin their prior move and substantiate the parallel claim of deontic authority.

At this point the teacher, who has approached the group at Ana's first reproach, intervenes and confirms once more the institutional rule by recycling the same words used by the girl (line 9). This restatement and the explicit endorsement of the Ana's action (*Ana is right*, line 8) legitimize and reinforce her claim about the appropriate local behavior. Nevertheless, Ana proceeds along her trajectory and reproduces another rule in overlap with the teacher, this time with an impersonal formulation that constructs her classmates' previous conduct as 'arguing' and therefore directly problematizes it (*one must not argue*, line 10). This second rule formulations constitute a further claim of deontic authority and re-actualizes the necessity for Nima and Yanis to comply.

The concerted efforts of Ana and the teacher are successful, as Nima justifies his previous actions (line 11) and blames Yanis for the misdeed (lines 12, 13): neither the rule nor Ana's non-neutral description (i.e. that they were 'arguing') are resisted. Ana's right to construct a shared version of reality and to decide about necessary courses of action has been interactionally established. Arguably, the fact of drawing on institutional discourses (and, here, the teacher's official legitimization) played a major role in constructing her as the dominant child of the group.

In Ex. 1, Ana reproduces two institutional rules in the peer group, deploying them as authoritative sources to achieve a position of deontic authority among classmates. When faced with resistance, children might mobilize an institutional rule to establish their right to decide about necessary courses of action (and thereby end the conflict).

4.2. Mobilizing institutional materials and figures

Children also mobilized other institutional 'entities' during conflict. For instance, they used material resources (the blackboard, the book, a poster on the wall) or invoked the teacher to support their authoritative claims with the other disputants. Ex. 2 is an example of this local mobilization. The sequence was recorded in the Italian L2 classroom and involves three children, Ying, Ahsan, and Ramil. Ying and Ahsan attend the same ordinary classroom. The children are copying an exercise that the teacher has written on the blackboard. The text on the blackboard consists in the instruction ("Read the text and answer the questions"), a brief text,

and five questions, each preceded by a number in a round bracket [i.e., 1), 2), etc.]. The children are expected to copy the text and wait for further instruction.

Excerpt 2

	1	Ying	*((looks at Ahsan's notebook))*
	2	Ying	em:: numero m: non ci serve ^questa=
			em: number m: we don't need ^this=
			^*((points on Ahsan's notebook))* [Fig. 1]
→	3	Ahsan	=sì! (.) [guarda.
			=yes! (.) [look *((points to the blackboard))*
	4	Ying	**[no**
	5	Ying	a: perchè questa è dentro. tua sta fuori
			a: because this is inside. yours is outside
	6	Ahsan	si! si può fuori
			yes! you can outside
	7	Ying	[no (.) va bè
			[no (.) whatever
	8	Ramil	[NON SI PUO:
			YOU CANNO:T
	9		*((the children keep on copying from the blackboard))*
	10	Ahsan	ecco
			there
	11		(0.2)
	12	Ahsan	montagna, punto (.)
			mountain, period (.)
	13		<tu sei proprio indietro>
			<you are really behind>
	14	Ying	°tu sei proprio indietro°
			°you are really behind°
	15	Ahsan	io sono avanti
			i am ahead
	16	Ying	ahsan se zi- se è fuori deve fare a cerchio.
			ahsan if it- if it's outside you must do a circle.
	17	Ahsan	(.) no: usa questo perchè h-
			(.) no: use this because h-
→	18		la maestra ha fatto così
			the teacher did like this *((points to the blackboard))* [Fig. 2]
	19		(0.3)
	20	Ying	eh perchè è dentro.
			eh because it's inside.
	21	Ahsan	no fuori (.)
			no outside (.)
→	22		anche la maestra laura lo fa così
			also the teacher laura does it like this
→	23	Ying	la laura fuori, (.) fa: cerchio.
			laura outside, (.) doe:s circle.
	24		*((the children keep on writing. Ahsan does not correct what he has done))*

Fig. 1. Ying points on Ahsan's notebook

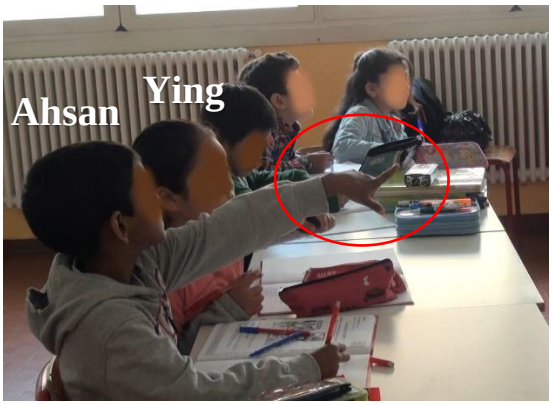

Fig. 2. Ahsan points to the blackboard

At the beginning of the sequence, Ying glances at Ahsan's notebook and finds an element which she deems inappropriate: Ahsan has written the numbers of the questions with a round bracket. Ying makes relevant the trouble, pointing to an alleged norm regarding the correct way of writing (*we don't need this*, line 2). [3] Ying is thereby claiming a position of deontic authority, attempting to establish what needs to be done. Ahsan immediately counters Ying's contribution (*yes*!, line 3). Notably, Ahsan does not limit his contribution to this initial opposition. Pointing to the blackboard, he invites Ying to look at the artefact on which the teacher's record is fixed and publicly available. With this move, Ahsan is underpinning his choice of using the round brackets with an authoritative source, i.e. one of the artefacts that represent and embody institutional authority in the classroom.

Confronted with Ahsan's resistance, Ying points at another 'rule' (see footnote 1), maintaining that just numbers within the margin of the paper need a round bracket – whereas Ahsan's numbers are outside of the margin (*because this is inside. yours is outside*, line 5). Notably, Ying does not question the authority of the institutional artefact *per se*. Rather, she invokes a

[3] From my ethnographic field knowledge, there is no clear rule regarding how to write the number before a question or a sentence. Teachers said that there was no fixed rule, but that they possibly told the children on some specific occasion, individually, how to do it (e.g. in one case they might have told a student to do a circle, in another case to do a round bracket). Possibly, children interpret these individual instructions as all-encompassing rules and reproduce them with their peer on various occasions.

further rule that justifies her previous stance: the institutional authoritative 'frame' is not questioned. Ahsan further resist his classmate's deontic claim (*yes! you can outside*, line 6) and Ying seems to concede that the issue is not so relevant (*whatever*, line 7). In overlap with Ying, Ramil joins the conversation to oppose Ahsan's turn in line 6 (*you cannot*, line 8). This opposition, not further specified, is left unattended by the other children, who resume copying from the blackboard: the dispute is first abandoned.

After one minute, Ahsan finishes copying from the blackboard and announces it to his classmates (lines 10, 12). The announcement is accompanied by a negative evaluation of Ying, who is still writing the last questions (*you are really behind*, line 13). This morally-laden evaluation gives rise to a brief exchange in which children counter the other opponent: Ying recycles Ahsan's turn (line 14), and Ahsan claims his superordinate role in the local peer hierarchy (*i am ahead*, line 15). At this point, possibly in reaction to Ahsan's 'undisputable' claim, Ying re-topicalizes the previous issue and invokes another rule: when outside of the margins, numbers must be circled (*if it's outside you must do a circle*, line 16). Confronted with this argument, Ahsan mobilizes again institutional entities to account for his choice and to support his argumentative position: he points to the blackboard, this time making explicit the link between what is written and the teacher (*the teacher did like this*, line 18).

Ahsan's reference to institutional authority is 'reversed' by Ying, who maintains that the teacher used the round brackets because inside of the margins (of the blackboard, presumably) (*eh because it's inside*, line 20). At this point, Ahsan appeals to a further figure to support his argument and secure his position of deontic authority. Having recognized that the blackboard is not enough to establish what must be done, he mobilizes the teacher from the ordinary classroom, Laura (*also the teacher laura does it like this*, line 22). Ying reverses again Ahsan's 'presentification' of the authoritative source: she deploys the same source with an extra element, 'outside', which is coherent to her previous argumentative line (*laura outside does circle*, line 23). Ahsan and Ramil do not pick up Ying's contribution and the dispute is again abandoned, this time for good.

Ex. 1 shows how children mobilize different institutional entities to negotiate their authoritative positions in the peer group. In order to underpin their deontic claims, children mobilize artefacts from the material environment and non-present teachers as authoritative sources. Despite their opposition, both children seem aligned in this orientation to the institutional frame. Neither the authority of the blackboard not the authority of the teacher is questioned. As a matter of fact, children try to 'bend' these authoritative sources to fit their local aims: the same institutional

entities are invoked to sustain conflicting positions. Notably, children's deontic claims are relevant to the local negotiation of valued and problematic identities in the peer group. In this case, this negotiation revolves around children's claim to be the most competent pupil (see children's concern for who finishes first) or the 'good pupil'. As regards the latter, children hold each other accountable for departures from a locally constructed norm (see Ying's invoking of an institutional rule or Ramil's turn in line 8, which construct Ahsan as morally reproachable).

4.3. Using reported speech and displaying first-hand knowledge

In the corpus, another way to secure an authoritative position was to strategically deploy knowledge. For example, children displayed first-hand knowledge of an event, or asked peers answer-known-questions to check their academic knowledge. Ex. 3 is an example of these local negotiations around children's epistemic rights. Children use reported speech and mobilize first-hand knowledge to index a stronger epistemic stance during conflict, thereby attempting to achieve a position of epistemic authority. The sequence was recorded in the Italian L2 class; it involves a small group of children and the teacher, Simona. The lesson has just begun and children are telling what they have been doing recently. Immediately before the sequence, Ramil said that he plays basketball.

Excerpt 3

```
1    Ahsan      simona?
2    Teacher    eh. dimmi tesoro.=
                eh. tell me darling.=
3    Ahsan      =a calcio,
                =to football,
4               (0.2)
5    Ahsan      sono andato a calcio
                i went to football
6    Teacher    tu sei andato invece ^a calcio.
                you went to football ^instead.
7    Ahsan                           ^((nods))
8    Teacher    dove?
                where?
9    Ahsan      e: non lo so, <non mi ricordo via> (.)
                e: i don't know, <i don't remember street> (.)
10              ma:[:
                bu:[t
11   Ying          [ma ahsan,
```

```
                    [but ahsan,
→  12              tutti dice- ma tutti di- hm:
                   everybody say- but everybody sa- hm:
→  13              a nostra classe tutti dice t- tu:
                   in our class everybody say y- you:
   14              tu dici le bugie non vai a calcio.
                   you lie you don't go to football.
   15   Ahsan      si:!
                   ye:s! ((nods vehemently and briefly looks at the teacher))
   16              io vado a calcio,
                   i go to football,
   17   Teacher    ma. ying perchè- sta parlando ahsan,(.)
                   but. ying why- ahsan is speaking, (.)
   18              tu cosa ne sai se lui va o me- o no a calcio (.)
                   what do you know if he goes or not to football (.)
   19              poi in classe tutti dicono.
                   and in the class everybody says.
   20   Ying       eh.
   21   Teacher    non   si  dice  tutti   [dice.
                   you don't say everybody [say.
→  22   Ahsan                              [c'è adam,
                                           [there's adam,
   23   Teacher    eh.
→  24   Ahsan      c'è   adam   della   seconda b[i:,
                   there's adam from the second b[i:,[4]
   25   Teacher                                  [eh.
→  26   Ahsan      che viene con me a calcio
                   who comes with me to football
   27   Teacher    eh.
→  28   Ahsan      oggi n-(.) e: martedì non è venuto,
                   today h-(.) e: on tuesday he didn't come,
   29   Teacher    non è venuto
                   he didn't come
→  30   Ahsan      perchè: (.) martedì pioveva
                   because: (.) on tuesday it was raining
   31   Teacher    eh: bè
                   eh: well
   32   Ying       °pioveva tanto°
                   °it was raining a lot°
   33   Teacher    e: invece munir va:- fa qualche sport?
                   e: munir goe:s- does some sport?
```

At the beginning of the sequence, Ahsan calls the teacher's attention and tells *in plenum* that he plays football (lines 3 and 5). The teacher asks Ahsan some further piece of information (*where?*, line 8), but the child is not able to answer (*i don't know, i don't remember street*, line 9). With this admission of ignorance, Ahsan displays a weaker epistemic stance (Heritage

[4] Ahsan means a specific classroom: second grade, section b.

2012), which is immediately exploited by Ying: she interrupts his classmates and makes an accusation, constructing him as a liar (*in our class everybody say you lie you don't go to football*, lines 11-14). Notably, Ying does not directly tell Ahsan that he lies, but use indirect reported speech (Clift & Holt 2006) to give a more solid basis to her accusation: Ying mobilizes the voices of her classmates in the ordinary classroom as a device to "heighten evidentiality" (Couper-Kuhlen 2006, 82), thereby making a stronger epistemic claim (note the use of "everybody"). At the same time, this verbal choice allows her to avoid direct responsibility for the judgement expressed (since she is merely reporting what others have said, Johansen 2011).

Ahsan counters Ying's accusation by simply restating his claim (*yes! i go to football*, line 14 and 15) and looks at the teacher, thereby orienting to her role of (moral) authority in charge of re-establishing the social order. The teacher indeed intervenes and takes Ahsan's side. Despite Ying's indirect reported speech, the teacher deems the 'animator' culpable and reproaches her: first, she hints to a rule of appropriate behavior (*ahsan is speaking*, line 17); second, she contests Ying's epistemic right to assess Ahsan's activities out of school (*what do you know if he goes or not to football*, line 18); third, she corrects a mistake in Ying's contribution (*in the class everybody says. you don't say everybody say*, lines 19 and 21). The teacher thus reestablishes Ahsan's right to be the primary knower of his after-school activities and socializes children to the primacy of first-hand knowledge.

Ahsan seems willing to further oppose Ying's accusation. In overlap with the teacher, he starts providing various pieces of information regarding his sport activities: he mobilizes a potential witness (*there's adam from the second bi who comes with me to football*, lines 22, 24, 26), and adds some information about him and the last training session (*on tuesday he didn't come, because on tuesday it was raining*, lines 28, 30). After having initially admitted his lack of knowledge, Ahsan makes various epistemic displays to sustain his position (i.e. to support his claim the he plays football). Through this display of first-hand knowledge, Ahsan claims a position of epistemic authority and resists Ying's morally-laden accusation (i.e., that he is a liar). The teacher's reproach and these various epistemic displays seem to corner Ying, who eventually concedes by ratifying Ahsan's last utterance (*it rained a lot*, line 31). The following turn allocation by the teacher 'officially' ends the conflict (line 32).

The sequence illustrates children's use of indirect reported speech and of first-hand knowledge to negotiate their relative positions of epistemic authority. Children attempt to lay strong epistemic claims in a conflictual round of accusation and defense. These claims are underpinned by mobilizing the children in the ordinary classroom or by displaying access to first-hand

knowledge. Notably, these negotiations are relevant to children's social organization (see below) and to the co-construction of a local moral order (see the relevance of the morally-laden category 'liar').

5. Concluding discussion

The article considered different practices in and through which children attempt to achieve a position of deontic and/or epistemic authority. In order to make stronger authoritative claims during peer conflict, children might mobilize elements of the institutional frame or strategically deploy knowledge in interaction.

As regards the former, the analysis illustrated how children might mobilize institutional entities as authoritative sources. First, children can reproduce institutional rules to overcome their classmates' resistance and obtain compliance (section 4.1.). Second, children can make relevant material features of the local environment to sustain their argumentative position and account for previous choices (section 4.2.). Third, children can mobilize the figure of the teacher if other authoritative sources are deemed insufficient for their local purposes (section 4.2.). These various practices are deployed by children to establish their right to decide about necessary courses of action. In this regard, they are attempts to achieve a position of *deontic authority* in the peer group (even though they are also relevant to epistemics, see below).

As regards the latter, the analysis highlighted children's practices to negotiate their relative epistemic rights during conflict. Children can use reported speech or display first-hand knowledge to achieve an authoritative position and negotiate the truth-value of a previous statement (section 4.3.). Through these local practices, children attempt to achieve a position of *epistemic authority* with their classmates.

The insights of the analysis integrate previous studies on children's negotiations around authority in the peer group, which mainly considered instances of play (see section 2.1.). In this regard, the study broadens the field of analysis by showing how children make authoritative claims during task-related activities in the classroom. Notably, children mobilize various entities from the institutional environment to underpin their local authoritative claims, pointing to the relevance of classroom interaction for children's construction of their social organization and peer cultures. The normative expectations of the institution seem to represent a benchmark

around which children's hierarchy is played out and disputed: failures to meet institutional expectations are sanctioned by peers, who test and realign their social relationships on their basis.

In this respect, the practices analyzed are indexical of valued or problematic identities in the peer group. By mobilizing institutional entities children attempt to achieve the valued position of the more competent pupil, who knows classroom rules and the appropriate way of doing things (Ex. 1 and 2). At the same time, the recipient is constructed as non-competent (e.g., as somebody unknowing of the rule, see Ex. 1). This kind of local negotiation is particularly visible in Ex. 3, in which children dispute the role of the epistemically superordinate child. Apart from this focus on knowledge and competence, children's negotiation of their local identities and roles revolves around morality. Children display their being 'good pupils' with peers and teachers, showcasing their alignment to the institution. At the same time, they hold other children as morally at fault for perceived transgressions of the local order (Ex. 1 and 2). Moreover, children might ascribe morally-laden negative categories to classmates (e.g., 'liar', Ex. 3).

As mentioned above, this local negotiation of children's roles and social organization might unfold in relation to the institutional frame. Children sanction other classmates' inappropriate conduct (Ex. 1 and 2), thereby constructing an environment in which following the rules is a requisite to be part of the community. In this regard, the practices in the analysis are relevant to children's socialization into the set of expected ways of behaving in the classroom. By mobilizing features of the institutional environment, children act as 'spokespersons' for the institution, thereby introducing their classmates to appropriate ways of acting in that context. This might be especially relevant in the L2 classroom, which is attended by children with a limited knowledge of the Italian schooling system. Furthermore, non-native children make relevant specific features of the local ecology, allowing their classmates to recognize and be 'attuned' to the salient element of the classroom environment. Thus, they possibly have a role in their classmates' acquisition of competences to act within an otherwise opaque environment (Goodwin 2018).

These insights are relevant for children's inclusion and exclusion in the peer group. The practices through which children claim authority can be a vehicle for inclusion, as they also socialize recipients to expected ways of behaving in the (L2) classroom context. In this regard, following shared norms of behavior is seen as requirement for membership in the community:

children are ‘included’ as group members on the basis of their alignment to the social expectations of the classroom context.

Nevertheless, children’s negotiation of their social hierarchy might be problematic, as it may lead to practices of exclusion. In the excerpts presented, this risk is primarily bound to children’s negative category ascriptions. For example, a child might construct another classmate as non-competent, or as an outsider, for not complying with a classroom rule. Alleged transgression of the classroom order might also attract a moral evaluation. Children might sanction other classmates, constructing them as morally reproachable for their departures from the norm. Moreover, the analysis also illustrated how negative category ascription might regard morally-laden categories such as ‘being a liar’.

The analysis showed thus instances of children being, at least situationally, ascribed membership to a despised category. This might be problematic *per se*, as it might hinder children’s ability to construct meaningful social relationships and develop competences to participate in everyday peer activities. Apart from that, exclusionary practices become especially problematic when they crystallize over time. Although this study does not offer longitudinal insights in this regard, children’s local practices can be interpreted in relation to their potential future bearings: once a child has been associated with a deficiency, there is always the risk that this characteristic becomes an enduring feature of his/her *persona* in the classroom, possibly jeopardizing his/her ability to participate in everyday activities and to qualify for membership in the peer culture.

To conclude, children’s strategies to achieve a position of authority seem to entail both a potential for inclusion and exclusion. Depending on the contingencies of the specific situation, these practices can accompany children along the process to become competent members of the group, but they also possibly exclude them on the basis of their failure to behave in a morally and socially appropriate way. This recognition points to the paradoxical character of the practices highlighted. When children correct a classmate’s behavior, they are at the same time socializing him/her to the local expectations of the context (and thus setting the preconditions to include him/her in the community) *and* ascribing him/her the potentially problematic identity of someone who does not (yet) behave appropriately.

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