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# **Practices of inclusion/exclusion in and through classroom dialogue: Children's peer socialization to institutional norms of literacy and language use**

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## **Abstract**

The paper explores non-native children's peer socialization to local norms of literacy and appropriate language use in classroom dialogue. Drawing on a larger ethnographic research documented through video recordings in a primary school in northern Italy, this study adopts a CA-informed approach to analyze an Italian L2 class attended by children aged 8 to 10. Within the theoretical framework of language socialization, the study focuses on non-native children's enacting of correction sequences following peers' problematic conduct. As the analysis illustrates, children creatively re-produce teachers' ways of speaking and value-laden messages to enforce normative uses of language in the classroom. In the discussion we argue that, by enacting and reproducing institutional discourses and roles, non-native children (a) socialize their classmates into expected ways of speaking, reading, and writing, (b) co-construct local classroom cultures that are differently (mis)aligned to the institutional one, and (c) negotiate social hierarchy in the peer group. Risks and opportunities of such practices are then considered in light of the dichotomy between inclusion and exclusion.

## **Keywords**

Language socialization, linguistic norms, literacy, subteaching, primary school, classroom dialogue, classroom cultures, L2 classroom, ethnography and Conversation Analysis

## **1. Introduction**

Last decades' migrations have led to a conspicuous presence of non-native children in the Italian public schooling system. Interacting with teachers and peers, these children gradually acquire the linguistic and cultural knowledge necessary to competently participate in everyday activities. As several actors take part in this socialization process, the account in the present article will necessarily be partial and incomplete: in particular, the analysis will focus on a

perhaps minor moment in children's sociolinguistic development, i.e. on spontaneous dialogues *among non-native children*. Traditional studies on the matter mainly considered the relationship between expert members of the community and novices, highlighting for example the discursive practices by which native speakers socialize L2 learners to expected ways of speaking and behaving. This article partially shifts the focus, as it shows that also non-native children might play a role in newcomers' "apprenticeship period".

The analysis considers a small group of children attending an Italian L2 class in a primary school. The focus will be on the practices by which children momentarily enact the role of the teacher in the peer group, thus socializing their classmates to institutional norms regarding the appropriate use of the second language. This enactment is accomplished by reproducing ways of speaking which are prototypical of teachers' talk: after few months of attendance at the Italian school, non-native children seem already able to take up and creatively reproduce adult discourse(s), hence acting as "spokespersons" for the institution within the peer group. These *subteaching* practices regard lexical and pragmatic norms in relation to everyday language use, as well as norms concerning literacy.

Apart from its socializing potential, children's creative reproduction of school institutional "cultures" seems extremely relevant in terms of peer hierarchies and local identities. By embodying an authoritative role, children claim a dominant position among classmates and make relevant epistemic asymmetries concerning appropriate (linguistic) conduct in the new community. Moreover, the sequences appear heavily morally-laden, as transgressors are held individually accountable for the alleged misalignments with the institutional order. Drawing on these analytical findings, in the discussion it is argued that this kind of peer practices entails both opportunities for newcomers' inclusion and risks regarding possible exclusion practices among children.

## **2. Theoretical background**

This study refers to so-called "social" approaches to language development, which date back to the linguistic turn in the mid-1960s and gained prominence in the last two decades (Steffensen and Kramsch 2017). Within this stream of research, scholars have tried to account for the social and cultural dimension of situated, *dialogical* processes of (second) language acquisition: rather than on learners' deficiencies, the focus is on the resources they are able to deploy in order to accomplish effective communicative exchanges. Among the multifarious

approaches that share this perspective (see Atkinson 2011 for an overview), the *language socialization* paradigm is particularly relevant for the present study (Ochs and Schieffelin 2012). Following Ochs and Schieffelin's insights, the analytical interest lies in the *process* through which a novice acquires new competencies by actively participating in everyday activities. Moving from an initial position of peripheral participation, the newcomer interacts with the limited resources at hand and is gradually introduced to the culture of his or her new community of practice (Lave and Wenger 1991).

Although the processes of language socialization have been studied in a variety of institutional and non-institutional contexts, the relevance of schooling in children's development has brought several scholars to focus on classroom dialogue. In order to account for the heterogeneous nature of this context in our transnational societies, contemporary research focuses on the complex interrelationships between cultural meaning-making practices, language ideologies and identity-related issues that characterize it (Figuroa and Baquedano-López 2017). Furthermore, and beyond the traditional adult-centered perspectives, scholars seek to cast light on socialization practices taking place within the (children's) peer group.

### *2.1. Peer dialogues as a language socialization arena*

Although the interest in peer dialogue goes back to the 1970s (see the seminal collection *Child Discourse*, Ervin-Tripp and Mitchell-Kernan 1977), the relevance of peer practices for children's sociolinguistic development has been systematically addressed only in the last two decades (Kyratzis and Goodwin 2017, Cekaite et al. 2014). Focusing on the ways children socialize each other to appropriate ways of speaking and to expected forms of social behavior, this line of research has convincingly highlighted the role children assume in novices' "apprenticeship" period. Specifically, recent analyses have underscored children's agency in co-constructing the linguistic order of the classroom in and through dialogue: this ability often emerges in relation to resistances to monolingual norms (Tarim and Kyratzis 2012; Cekaite and Evaldsson 2008; Kyratzis, Reynolds and Evaldsson 2010) and seem functional to the negotiation of valued identities and group membership (Cekaite and Björk-Willén 2012, Evaldsson and Cekaite 2010).

As regards literacy practices, children play a role also in the process of socialization to the "culturally situated organizing principles that shape individual involvement with text"

(Sterponi 2012, 227). These practices regard for example how to properly read (Moore 2017, Johnson 2017) and might involve misalignments with the institutional literacy curriculum (Dyson 2001, Poole 2008, Sterponi 2007). Moreover, a relevant insight from contemporary studies regards children's ingenuity in autonomously framing their learning activities: apart from institutionally programmed tasks, children locally re-create and dialogically shape their own learning environment (Kyratzis and Johnson 2017, Cekaite and Evaldsson 2017, Burdelski 2010, Melander 2012).

These accounts on children's discursive practices hint to a fundamental characteristic of peer relationships: contrary to what the term *peer* group seemingly suggests, asymmetries between children are continuously built and negotiated (e.g. in terms of linguistic competence). Such epistemic imbalances (Heritage 2012) generate dynamic *zones of proximal development* (Vygotskij 1992 [1934]), which in turn create the conditions for socialization processes to (possibly) take place. These situated asymmetries are in no way fixed and do not necessarily refer to the straightforward dichotomy between natives and non-natives:<sup>1</sup> as this article aims to illustrate, they can also be found among non-native children and might significantly contribute to their (socio)linguistic development.

Although the paper focuses on children's dialogue, adult cultures play a central role in the practices under scrutiny. Children discover a world which is already endowed with meaning and steadily receive values, beliefs, and cultural routines from their adult caregivers, who socialize them to "expected ways of thinking, feeling, and acting" (Ochs 1986, 2). In schools, these adult cultures are strictly bound to the institutionality of the context and include norms and ideologies that inform classroom everyday life. Nevertheless, children are here considered as active agents in their own cultural and linguistic development: value-laden messages from adult discourses are creatively re-produced, subverted and transformed according to momentary goals and agendas in the peer group (Kyratzis and Goodwin 2017, Kyratzis 2004; see also the concept of *interpretive reproduction* in Corsaro 1992). In and through this kind of peer dialogue, children co-construct a social, moral, and linguistic order that might be more or less alternative to the "institutional" one (Danby 2002, Corsaro 1985): certain practices might show a clearer transgressive character, whereas others display children's alignment to adult cultures and mandates. In this regard, children contribute to the

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<sup>1</sup> The dualism expert-novice has been typically analyzed in light of the relationship between natives and non-natives; however, recent studies tend to avoid such *a priori* categorizations in order to observe how asymmetries are dialogically and locally built (see Kyratzis and Goodwin 2017 within language socialization studies, Firth and Wagner 2007 within SLA studies).

construction of local “classroom cultures”, that are built and negotiated both *alongside* and *within* the institutional one (i.e. they are at the same time alternative to and dependent on it, Cobb-Moore, Danby & Farrell 2009). Children’s ingenuity in making use of available cultural resources is extremely relevant for this paper: the next section deals with one of the ways through which children appropriate adults’ messages, i.e. by creatively reproducing teachers’ *ways of speaking* (Hymes 1974) in the peer group.

## 2.2. *Subteaching practices*

The concept of *subteaching* refers to the phenomenon by which children momentarily position themselves as teachers with their peers, reproducing actions – such as instructing, evaluating, and disciplining – and practices<sup>2</sup> which are prototypical of this role (Tholander and Aronsson 2003). This construct is strictly related to the different participation frameworks that children can develop when interacting with each other (Goodwin and Goodwin 2004): in order to consider the disparate roles that participants assume on a moment-by-moment basis, the analysis takes into account the variety of verbal and non-verbal resources through which interlocutors signal their shifts in *footing* (Goffman 1981). As a matter of fact, subteaching practices do not simply involve a child “doing the teacher”, but rather represent a collaborative accomplishment by several (human and non-human)<sup>3</sup> participants. The role of

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<sup>2</sup> Following Heritage and Clayman (2010), I distinguish here between *actions* and *practices*, which are the ways through which actions are accomplished. Furthermore, in this article I make use of two other categories which help make sense of dialogue, i.e. *activity* and *resource*. *Activity* is the superordinate term to describe the frame in which actions are inscribed (e.g. within the activity “doing grammatical exercises”, the action “evaluating” – and several others – can take place), whereas *resources* are the verbal, non-verbal and material means that participants make use of to accomplish their practices. The “hierarchy” of these categories could be therefore summarized as follows: activities > actions > practices > resources. Eventually, for the purposes of this article the terms *practices* (used in CA) and *ways of speaking* (used in the ethnography of speaking) are used interchangeably in the analysis.

<sup>3</sup> Contemporary research on (organizational) dialogue advocates for a perspective that pays heed to the *plenum of agencies* which make a difference in the dialogue at hand (Cooren 2006). Action is here considered as a hybrid phenomenon which mobilizes different discursive and material, human and non-human entities. As regards the present paper, relevant to children’s subteaching practices is the concept of *ventriloquism* (Cooren 2010): children can be seen as mediums through which the institution “expresses” itself; on their part, children ventriloquize institutional messages and by reproducing specific institutional practices assume a superordinate

the teacher will be therefore taken up and/or assigned according to how children locally position themselves in the dialogue at hand (Tholander and Aronsson 2003).

In order to reproduce teachers' prototypical ways of speaking, children need to have them in their "interactional repertoire" (Hall 2018): during everyday activities, they are exposed and socialized to such institutional discourses that become part of a repertoire of shared knowledge within the community (i.e. the classroom; see the concepts of *polyphonic repetition* in Bazzanella 2011). Interestingly, by drawing from these institutionally-sanctioned ways of speaking children index an authoritative stance, thereby claiming a superordinate role in the peer group (a "perspicuous" example of this enactment of authority could be the use of directives; see footnote 3 and Maynard 1985, Goodwin 1990). This mobilization of authoritative sources is strictly related to children's aims and motives, which are not necessarily aligned with the institutional ones (Mökkönen 2012). Acknowledging children's central concerns for *power* and *inclusion* within the peer group (Kyratzis 2004), subteaching practices seem functional to the negotiation of local hierarchies and valued identities among classmates (Rampton 2006). As regards linguistic norms in particular, "appropriately speaking/reading" seem to be criteria for membership in the group and represent one of the benchmarks around which local identities are played out and disputed (Cekaite and Björk-Willén 2012, Johnson 2017). Eventually, relevant to subteaching practices is their moral character (Tholander and Aronsson 2003, Mökkönen 2012): when correcting their classmates' ways of speaking, children point to (alleged) breaches in the social expectations of the group and hold them individually accountable for their linguistic and social behavior (Drew 1998; on the relationship between accountability and linguistic norms, see Enfield and Sidnell 2019).

The event of a child assuming the role of the teacher with his or her classmates<sup>4</sup> seems to take place quite regularly and has been documented by several scholars (Feldman et al. 1976, Steinberg and Cazden 1979, Sieber 1979). More recently, Tholander and Aronsson's concept of *subteaching* (2003) has been explicitly used to address peer practices among Turkish minority students in Denmark (Møller and Jørgensen 2011) and Finnish pupils in an

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position in the peer group (see also children's uptake of authoritative discourses in Goodwin 1990 and the idea of a "presentification" of authoritative sources in Benoit-Barné and Cooren 2009).

<sup>4</sup> Previous literature has suggested that girls enact the role of the teacher more often in comparison to their male classmates (among others, Sieber 1979). The present analysis, together with more recent studies on the matter (Tholander and Aronsson 2003), seems, however, to indicate that also boys reproduce teachers' practices with their peers. In general, the so-called "separate world hypothesis" has been widely criticized for essentializing sex-gender differences (Kyratzis and Guo 1996).



English L2 classroom (Mökkönen 2012). The latter study is particularly relevant for this article, as it shows how subteaching practices play a role in peer socialization to specific language norms. However, Mökkönen's analysis considers Finnish-speaking students, i.e. a homogeneous group, who are mainly negotiating the (English) monolingual norm of the L2 classroom. Unlike previous research on the matter, this analysis focuses on a heterogeneous group of children where the only shared tongue is the L2, i.e. Italian:<sup>5</sup> therefore, children enforce norms which are relative to the appropriate use of the language they are currently learning.

### 3. Data and methods

The sequences under scrutiny come from a corpus of 6 hours of video-recorded dialogues in an Italian L2 classroom. The data are part of a broader ethnography which involved two primary schools placed in a suburban neighborhood of a city in northern Italy. In order to deal with a growing number of non-native, non-Italian-speaking children, the schools organized several L2 classes according to pupils' different levels of competence. More specifically, the analysis considers a literacy class and, therefore, children with a basic competence in Italian.

The literacy class takes place once a week and is attended by a small group of non-native children, aged 8 to 10. The target children of the present study are Ramil, a boy from the Philippines, and Ying, a girl from China. At the time of the recording, both children have been attending the Italian school for less than a year. Relevant for the analysis are also Ahsan and Munir, from Pakistan, who actively participate in the dialogues under scrutiny. The activities in the Italian L2 class are quite multifarious, ranging from grammatical exercises on photocopies to children's personal narratives of past experiences. In general, peer tutoring is explicitly encouraged by the teacher and children are praised for helping their classmates (e.g. the teacher was recorded saying "Are you helping him? Well done! You must help him.").

As regards the methodology, the data were collected during an ethnography that lasted nine months. The ethnographic approach was chosen to better grasp participants' *emic* perspective and to gather contextual elements to which participants are likely to orient when

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<sup>5</sup> The target children do not share a (mother) tongue. However, two "peripheral" participants, Ahsan and Munir, come from the same country, Pakistan (all names in the article are pseudonyms). Nevertheless, children interact only in Italian: neither in the ethnographic fieldnotes nor in the videos there is trace of a negotiation of the monolingual norm.

they interact (Maynard 2006; see Weigand 2010 on the importance on considering contextual information by the analysis of dialogue). After the first period of ethnographic fieldwork, several hours of naturally-occurring interactions were video-recorded, transcribed<sup>6</sup> and analyzed with a focus on social action as “rooted in language” (Weigand 2010, 29). Specifically, the present methodology is informed by Conversation Analysis (Sidnell 2010), a micro-analytic approach that has proven efficient and heuristically fruitful for the sequential analysis of classroom dialogue (see Gardner 2019 for an overview). Moreover, this combined approach allows to consider the *multimodal* resources participants make use of in their everyday activities (Mondada 2019), paying thus heed to the “complex whole” of language-in-use (Weigand 2018).

#### 4. Analysis

The first two sequences are relative to the first phenomenon under scrutiny, i.e. peer socialization to an appropriate lexical choice (section 4.1.). Ramil and Ying enact the role of the teacher and make relevant *semantic norms* (i.e. relative to the referential function of language, Enfield and Sidnell 2019, 267) to elicit the appropriate reference term for everyday school objects. The following sequences are relative to the second phenomenon, i.e. peer socialization to appropriate ways of “doing requesting” (section 4.2.). In this case, Ramil enforces institutional *pragmatic norms* (ibid.). Apart from this partition, the sequences are presented in chronological order: extracts 2, 3 and 4 come from the class that took place two weeks after that of extract 1. Eventually, a third category is relative to peer socialization to literacy practices: here, Ying and Ramil enforce norms relative to appropriate ways of reading and writing in the classroom (section 4.3.).

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<sup>6</sup> Data were transcribed according to Jefferson’s conventions (Jefferson 2004); transcript symbols are in the appendix.

#### 4.1. Peer socialization to appropriate lexical choices<sup>7</sup>

In the first extract, children are working on their own on a reading comprehension exercise. The dialogue involves Ramil and Ying and happens “underground”: the teacher does not seem to notice this exchange, as she is talking to another pupil at the other side of the classroom.

##### Extract 1

Legend: R=Ramil, Y=Ying, A=Ahsan, M=Munir

1 Y ((raises R's pencil case e looks under it, seems to be looking  
Y for something))

2 mi dai quella?  
**can you give me that?**  
((hand gesture to imitate the correction fluid)) [Fig. 1]

3 R ((moves his pencil case away from Y))

4 cosa vuol dire?  
**what does it mean?**

5 (1)

6 Y ((repeats the gesture)) ^((points to the notebook))

7 R ^((nods)) come si chiama?  
**how is it called?**

8 Y °questo° ((points to the notebook, then repeats the gesture))  
°this°

9 R e come si chiama?  
**and how is it called?**

10 (1)

11 e: (.) mi dai, (.) quella cosa

Y e: (.) **can you give me, (.) that thing**  
((repeats the gesture))

12 R come si chiama (questa), ((repeats the gesture))  
**how is it called (this),** [Fig. 2]

((5 lines))

Fig. 1



Fig. 2



Fig. 3



<sup>7</sup> For a previous analysis of the first two categories, see Nasi (2020).

- 13 R bianchetto. ((takes his pencil case))  
**correction fluid.**
- 14 R  
bianchetto.  
**correction fluid.**
- 15 ((R takes the correction fluid out of his pencil case; as soon as  
he holds it in the hand, Y tries to take it, but R stretches his arm  
back and prevents her from doing so)) [Fig. 3]
- 16 R questo si chiama?  
**this is called?**
- 17 Y bianchetto.  
**correction fluid.**
- 18 ((R gives Y the correction fluid))

At the beginning of the sequence, Ying seems to be looking for something on her desk. In line 2 she makes an explicit request to Ramil, who sits next to her, using verbal and non-verbal resources: apparently, Ying does not know the word to name the object and uses a deictic (*quella*, ‘that’) and a hand gesture, miming the action of applying correction fluid to the paper (Fig. 1). Ying’s question creates the conditions for a preferred answer, i.e. complying with the request (Sacks 1987; see the concept of *conditional relevance*, Schegloff 2007). However, Ramil does not produce the expected second part and seemingly starts a repair sequence (*cosa vuol dire?* ‘what does it mean?’, line 4), which could indicate a failure in understanding. After a short pause, Ying tries again to ask for the correction fluid by pointing to something on the notebook (probably to previous corrections and, metonymically, to the object), and by repeating the hand gesture (line 6). Immediately after the gesture Ramil starts nodding, indicating his comprehension of the request. The fact that the two children have reached a shared dialogical focus is confirmed by Ramil’s reformulation, in line 7: his request for a precise reference term clearly locates the trouble source, i.e. the appropriate *naming* of the object (*come si chiama?* ‘how is it called?’).

Despite Ramil’s efforts, in the following turns Ying again uses deictic elements and the hand gesture to formulate her request (lines 8 and 10). Some cues, however, seem to indicate that Ying has grasped the non-appropriateness of her turns: the questions are formulated with delays, hesitations and, in one case, a lower volume (Pomerantz 1984). Ramil steadily follows

his trajectory and reformulates his question with a marked emphasis (line 7) and a hand gesture (line 9): the repetition of the gesture introduced by Ying again seems functional to the display of understanding (Tannen 2007). Looking at the sequence of Ramil's contributions, the climax in the use of increasingly variegated resources clearly emerges (lines 4, 7, 9 and 12): the child has understood, possibly from the very beginning, the *content* of Ying's request, but he does not accept its *form* and repeatedly points to its problematic character, trying to elicit the appropriate label for the object. Ramil's successive reformulations are a typical communicative strategy in the classroom: to indicate that a pupil's answer is not appropriate, a teacher might withhold an explicit evaluation in the third slot and provide a revised version of the question (Zemel and Koschmann 2011). After a few turns where the sequence proceeds on a similar vein, Ramil submits to the fact that Ying does not know the word to designate the object: he utters the correct label himself, with emphasis and falling intonation (*bianchetto* 'correction fluid', line 13). Interestingly, the child also *repeats* the word (line 14), adopting again a rhetorical strategy that can be associated with teachers' talk (Walsh 2011).

Apparently, the sequence has come to an end: Ramil has told his classmate the appropriate reference term and, at this point, he could give her the object. Ying seems to draw this conclusion and lifts her hand to grab the correction fluid that Ramil has taken out of his pencil case. However, the child stretches back his arm (Fig. 3) and enacts once more the role of the teacher by asking his classmate to repeat the word (*questo si chiama?* 'this is called?', line 16); the format, i.e. an incomplete utterance that the pupil is supposed to finish, is again typical of teachers' talk (*designedly incomplete utterances*, Koshik 2002). Ramil's pedagogical action is not limited to the explicit formulation of the correct naming for the object: having provided the right "answer", he checks that Ying has indeed understood and learned the word that he introduced. In the end, after Ying's display of understanding (line 17), Ramil finally gives her the longed-for correction fluid.

The sequence in extract 1 is an example of peer socialization to a norm of appropriate language use (i.e. "things must be called by their name"). Using the (few) words in his repertoire, Ramil manages to do "being the teacher" by reproducing several practices prototypical of this role (i.e. pursuing a response with successive questions, repeating the word to be learned, not completing an utterance to elicit completion). Through these subteaching practices, Ramil temporarily positions himself above his classmates in the group hierarchy: at the beginning of the sequence he is in a position of power, due to his access to material resources, and he accentuates this asymmetry by pointing to a further *epistemic* imbalance, i.e. he knows something that his classmate does not know (Melander 2012).

Eventually, it is worth noting that this pedagogical sequence was not planned by the teacher, but autonomously co-constructed within the peer group. This ability to create learning opportunities in the interstices of the “official business” of the lesson also characterizes the second extract, which again revolves around a negotiation of school materials.

### *Extract 2*

This sequence was recorded two weeks after the previous one. Four children sit around a table with the teacher (I) and the researcher, doing grammatical exercises on a photocopy.

- 1     A     rami:l,  
          **rami:l,**
- 2     R     sì[:  
          **ye[:s**
- 3     A     [mi passi il cancellino?  
          **[can you pass me the eraser?**
- 4           (0.2)
- 5     R     no:,  
          **no:,**
- 6     A     (io no-) (.) è ^perché ho ↑sbagliato  
          **(i do-) (.) it's ^because i made a ↑mistake**
- 7     R                           ^((takes his pencil case))
- 8     R     ^non è cancellino.  
          **^it's not eraser**
- 9           ^((takes the correction fluid out of his pencil case))
- 10    Y     bia- [(.) BIANCHETTO:!  
          **cor- [(.) CORRECTION FLU:ID!**
- 11    R           [si chiama bianchetto  
          **[it's called correction fluid**
- 12           (0.3)
- 13    I     posso ^per piacere,  
          **can i ^please,**
- 14    R           ^((gives A the correction fluid))
- 15    R           bian[chetto?  
          **correction [fluid?**

- 16 Y [chetto? ahsan,  
[fluid? ahsan,
- 17 I per piacere si dice eh, quando si chiede qualcosa  
**you should say please eh, when you ask for something**

The structure of the sequence is similar to the previous one: Ahsan needs an object and asks Ramil for it, who in turn initiates an *inserted sequence* (Schegloff 2007) before complying with the request. At the beginning of the sequence, Ahsan first opens a “communicative channel” with Ramil by calling his name (line 1), and then formulates his request using a specific term for the object (*cancellino* ‘eraser’, line 3). After a short pause, Ramil bluntly refuses to comply (*no*, line 5) without providing an explanation for his dispreferred answer. Ahsan does not desist and further tries to obtain the object by giving an account for his request (*è perchè ho sbagliato* ‘it’s because I made a mistake’, line 6). At this point, Ramil locates the trouble source more precisely, highlighting the corrective character of the sequence (Macbeth, 2004): Ahsan’s lexical choice is not appropriate (*non è cancellino* ‘it’s not eraser’, line 8).<sup>8</sup> Ramil’s turn appears to widen the participation framework, as Ying joins the exchange and displays her linguistic competence: after a first hesitation, she utters the appropriate label (line 9) in overlap with Ramil, who now similarly provides the correct answer (*si chiama bianchetto* ‘it’s called correction fluid’, line 10). After a short pause, Ahsan obtains the item requested.

The sequence is a further example of Ramil’s subteaching practices:<sup>9</sup> as in the first extract, the child seems to perfectly understand his classmate’s request, and yet he chooses to make relevant a “trouble” in the communication and to correct it before proceeding with the current activity. Such disruptions of the progressivity of interaction highlight children’s metalinguistic awareness (Duranti 1997, Stivers and Robinson 2006) and seem extremely relevant from a pedagogical perspective, as they introduce peers to local classroom cultures. Interestingly, the correction is here *distributed* between two children, Ramil and Ying, who

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<sup>8</sup> Interestingly, during the correction sequence Ramil takes the object out of his pencil case, preparing to comply with the request; this constitutes further evidence of Ramil’s immediate understanding of Ahsan’s question in line 3.

<sup>9</sup> Unlike the previous sequences, in this extract the teacher is closely monitoring the children; since their dialogue takes place under the adult’s gaze (Foucault 1976 [1975]), Ramil’s enforcing of the norm could be partly influenced by issues of social desirability (as mentioned above, peer tutoring is explicitly encouraged by the teacher).

appear aligned against their classmate: their combined effort projects a subordinate identity on Ahsan and holds him morally accountable for his (alleged) mistake (see the increase of volume in line 10 and, more broadly, the concept of *aggravated* correction, Goodwin 1983). This co-constructed correction also underscores a peculiarity of the second language classroom, i.e. the fact that every contribution in the L2 is potentially subject to evaluation (Seedhouse 2004).

When Ramil gives Ahsan the correction fluid, the first sequence among peers is concluded. However, in partial overlap with the end of the first exchange, the teacher expands it by pointing to another problem in Ahsan's request: the child did not use the adverb *per piacere* 'please'; line 13). The teacher makes use of a designedly incomplete utterance, promptly completed by Ramil and Ying (lines 15 and 16). Again, Ying emphasizes her turn by calling Ahsan by name, in a sort of reproach that holds him individually accountable for the breach in the normative expectations of the group (Galeano and Fasulo 2009). Eventually, the explicit formulation of the rule by the teacher (line 17) closes the brief sequence, which shows one of the ways through which children are socialized by adults to specific pragmatic norms (Wootton 1997). As the following extracts will show, such socializing practices are not restricted to the adult-child relationship: politeness rules can also be reproduced and enforced by children within the peer group (Burdelski, 2010).

#### 4.2. Peer socialization to an appropriate way of "doing requesting"

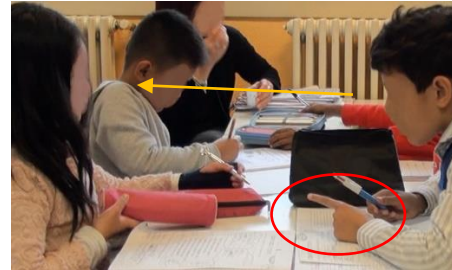
The two sequences presented here come from the same lesson as extract 2 in section 4.1. In particular, the dialogue in extract 3 took place approximately five minutes after the exchange presented in extract 2. Children are again working individually on a photocopy and their dialogue goes seemingly unnoticed, as the teacher is talking to the researcher.



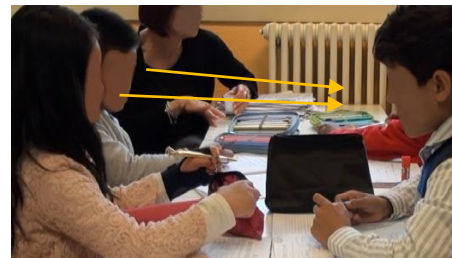
### Extract 3

- 1 M posso gomma?  
2 **can i eraser?**  
((points to Y's pencil case)) [Fig. 4]
- 3 Y gomma, (.) sì  
**eraser, (.) yes**  
4 ((opens her pencil case))  
5 (0.2)
- 6 R per piace:re  
**plea:se**
- 7 R, Y ((look at M)) [Fig. 5]  
8 (0.4)
- 9 Y no non ho gomma  
**no i don't have eraser**
- 10 A io sì!  
**i do!**
- 11 ((takes his pencil case))

[Fig. 4]



[Fig. 5]



At the beginning of the sequence, Munir asks Ying for the eraser, using verbal and non-verbal resources (lines 1 and 2; Fig. 4). The request seems appropriate, as Ying (verbally) produces the expected second part (*sì* ‘yes’, line 3) and opens her pencil case, probably to give Munir the requested item. At this point, however, Ramil joins the conversation and enforces the norm introduced by the teacher a few minutes before: the adverb *per piacere* ‘please’ is emphatically stretched and comes together with a sustained gaze toward Munir (lines 6 and 7). Ying also looks at his classmate, aligning with Ramil in a “formation” (Kendon 1990) that constructs Munir’s behavior as (morally) reproachable (see Fig. 5; see also Margutti 2011). The explicit formulation of the politeness formula and children’s gazes seem to make relevant a response by Munir (Stivers and Rossano 2010), e.g. the repetition of the item uttered by Ramil in line 6; nevertheless, Munir does not ostensibly answer. After a short pause, Ying refuses to comply with her classmate’s request (*no*) and gives an account for her refusal (*non*

*ho gomma* ‘I don’t have eraser’, line 9).<sup>10</sup> In the end Ahsan, sitting next to Munir, joins the conversation and offers his eraser instead (lines 10 and 11).

The sequence clearly shows Ramil’s role as “spokesperson” for the institution: the teacher’s previous message got ventriloquized by the child (Cooren 2010), who reproduced it within the peer group according to his local motives. As regard the specific format of his turn, Ramil again adopts a practice which is typical of teachers’ talk, i.e. the formulation of an item that is supposed to be repeated by the pupil (Duff 2000). The fact that this socializing practice is once more distributed between two children points to the necessity of considering the complex (i.e., not limited to a merely dyadic expert-novice relationship) participation frameworks in which socialization processes take place.

After ten minutes, Ramil finds another opportunity to enforce the institutional norm relative to appropriate request formats: children are drawing pictures and Ahsan needs an azure pastel. As in extract 3, the two adults are talking to each other and do not take notice of the children’s dialogue.

#### *Extract 4*

- 1 R ((is looking into his pencil case))
- 2 A ramil! (.) posso, e::m: (.) ^l'azzurro?  
**ramil! (.) can i, e::m: (.) ^the azure?**
- 3 ^((points to R's pencil case))
- 4 R ((closes his pencil case, smiles))
- 5 ah?  
**ah?**
- 6 (0.2)
- 7 A <azzurro.>  
**<azure.>**

---

<sup>10</sup> The analysis of the entire video reveals that Ying has an eraser in her pencil case and deliberately chooses not to lend it. In the sequence, Ying seems first willing to give Munir the object and then suddenly changes her mind; if this were due to Munir’s failing in aligning to the pragmatic norm implemented by the children, it would constitute evidence of the central role that (institutional) norms play in processes of inclusion/exclusion within the peer group. However, Ying’s “shift” could be explained otherwise, e.g. in relation to personal relationships between children.

8 (0.3)

9 R per?  
plea-?

10 A il cielo.  
the sky.

11 R per piacere  
please

12 A per piacere.  
please.

13 R ((opens his pencil case, stops smiling))

14 azzu:rro (0.2) io non ce l'ho azzurro!  
azu:re (0.2) i don't have azure!

15 ((shows his pencil case))

16 A ((drops his head))

At the onset of the exchange Ramil is looking into his pencil case. Ahsan calls him by name and formulates a request using verbal and non-verbal resources, i.e. a polite question (*posso* 'can I', line 2), a hesitation (possibly indicating a word search<sup>11</sup>, Goodwin and Goodwin 1986) and a hand gesture toward Ramil's pencil case (lines 2 and 3). Ramil does not comply with the request and seems to initiate a repair trajectory relative to a failure in understanding (*ah?*, line 5); this is clearly Ahsan's interpretation, as he again articulates the name of the requested item (*azzurro* 'azure', line 7). However, in Ramil's turns (4 and 5) there are some cues that suggest a different interpretation: the child closes his pencil case, an apparently oppositional move, and smiles, providing a key that indicates the playful character of his action (Corsaro 1992). All these details considered, it seems that Ramil has already understood the request and, as in extracts 1 and 2, *suspends* the expected reply to start an inserted (pedagogical) sequence.

The latter interpretation is supported by the continuation of the sequence: Ramil is not satisfied by Ahsan's reply and tries to locate the trouble source more precisely. Using a

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<sup>11</sup> During this extended hesitation, Ahsan produces a so-called *thinking face*, which constitutes a further cue pointing to an ongoing word search (Goodwin and Goodwin 1986).

designedly incomplete utterance,<sup>12</sup> he urges his classmate to complete the formula, i.e. to utter the word *per piacere* ‘please’ (line 8). Nevertheless, the answer is not the expected one, since Ahsan misunderstands Ramil’s turn by interpreting the Italian preposition *per* ‘for’ in its final meaning (i.e. *what for?*): he therefore gives an account for his request (*[per] il cielo* ‘[for] the sky’, line 10). At this point, Ramil is forced to change practice: he produces the entire formula (*per piacere* ‘please’, line 11) and further sustains his gaze toward Ahsan, again applying a certain moral pressure for compliance on his classmate. In an evident contrast with the (absent) reaction in extract 3, Ahsan promptly repeats the formula (line 12).<sup>13</sup> Satisfied with Ahsan’s alignment, Ramil seems bound to give him the azure pastel (line 13), but he cannot find it and gives his classmate the bad news (*io non ce l’ho azzurro* ‘I don’t have azure’, line 14). Interestingly, the child shows his pencil case to provide a material evidence of his statement (line 15). Ahsan, discouraged, drops his head.

This last sequence is a further example of Ramil’s enactment of the role of the teacher. After few months of attendance at an Italian school, the child is able to reproduce typical practices of teachers’ talk: here, he utters a designedly incomplete sentence and prompts the repetition of a specific item (Burdelski 2020). Another interesting element of extract 4 is relative to the ludic character that subteaching practices might assume: apart from the above-mentioned issues of power and hierarchy within the peer group, such practices seem to be deployed by children to co-construct playful moments within the course of the lesson.

#### 4.3. Peer socialization to literacy practices

In the corpus considered, children correct their classmates also in relation to (institutional) literacy, i.e. to the set of practices regarding appropriate reading and writing in the classroom.

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<sup>12</sup> In comparison to extract 3, Ramil changes here his discursive “strategy”: by using a format which clearly presupposes a reply, he makes a stronger move to elicit the formula he is awaiting. As a matter of fact, Ahsan indeed gives Ramil an answer (though not the expected one).

<sup>13</sup> This article does not consider in detail alignments and resistances to the norms reproduced by children; however, such practices appear extremely interesting in relation to children’s negotiations of *deontic* rights and responsibilities among them (i.e. who decides – and is seen as having the right to decide – what should be done in a specific situation, Stevanovic and Peräkylä 2014). As regards Ahsan’s “reprise” of the item uttered by Ramil, several scholars have highlighted the role that *repetitions* play in children’s sociolinguistic development (Keenan Ochs 1977, Burdelski 2010).

The extract below was recorded at the beginning of a reading comprehension exercise: a child, Munir, is reading aloud a text before the children start working autonomously on the task.

*Extract 5*

- 1 M ((is reading aloud))  
2 gino mangia la torta oggi  
**gino eats the cake today**
- 3 Y ferma! c'è- (.) punto  
**stop! there is- (.) period**
- 4 (0.2)
- 5 M oggi gino ha ((keeps on reading aloud))  
**today gino has**

At the beginning of the sequence, Munir is fluently reading the text, whereas the other children follow along on their own photocopies. At turn 2, Munir does not pause after the first sentence, which ends with the word *torta* ‘cake’: the break between sentences is not prosodically marked, i.e. neither in the speech tempo nor in the intonational contour there is a cue that indexes it. At turn 3, Ying points to the problematic tempo of Munir’s reading by issuing a teacher-like directive (*stop!*, line 3; Moore 2017). Ying’s turn seems to work here both retrospectively, as it sanctions previous behavior, and prospectively, since the following account (*c’è punto* ‘there is period’, line 3) appears oriented to future actions and to avoid the recurrence of the “mistake”. Again, Ying makes use of a typical format of instructional settings (i.e. an imperatively formatted directive, Rauniomaa 2017) to reproduce an institutional norm regarding appropriate ways of “reading aloud”. Munir does not ostensibly reply: after the disruption, he resumes his previous activity and keeps on reading the text for his classmates. However, the fact that he starts from the beginning of the new sentence (i.e. “today”) might be a cue indicating his alignment to (or at least comprehension of) Ying’s directive.

The next extract revolves around appropriate *writing*. The pupils are expected to work autonomously on a grammatical task which consists in writing a series of sentences. Ramil, sitting in front of Ahsan, has already finished the exercise, whereas his classmate is still writing the last sentence.

*Extract 6*

- 1 I lo riesci a scrivere da solo ahsan?  
**can you write it alone ahsan?**
- 2 A un:: po'  
**a:: bit**
- 3 I non mi pia:ce, ((dictates to A, who writes))  
**i don't li:ke,**
- 4 R NO! non mon. mo(h) (.)  
**NO! not ^mon. mo(h)**
- 5 ^ ((points on A's notebook)) [fig. 6]
- 6 R hh[hhhh  
**hh[hhhh**
- 7 A [ ((erase something on his notebook))
- 8 I bravo ramil. (.) è una n, non una m. (.) n::  
**well done ramil. (.) it's a d, not a m. (.) d::**
- 9 no:n, (0.2) dettagli[elo tu ramil  
**don:'t, (0.2) dictate [it to him ramil**
- 10 R [o ((points on A's notebook))  
**[o**
- 11 R en,  
**en,**

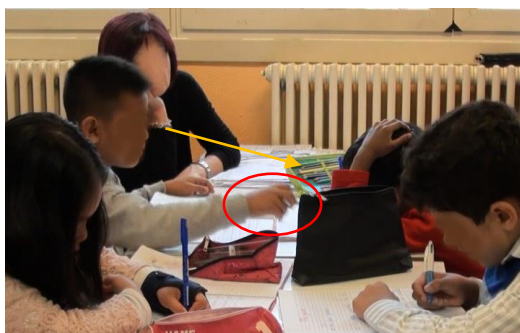


Fig. 6

In line 1 the teacher asks Ahsan if he manages to write the sentence alone, possibly because he is the only child who has not completed the exercise. Ahsan's answer displays a certain difficulty in doing the exercise autonomously (*un po* 'a bit', line 2), and in line 3 the teacher starts dictating the sentence to the child, who begins to write on his notebook. Sitting in front of Ahsan, Ramil monitors his classmate and almost immediately corrects what he is writing: he first points to a problem (*no!*, line 4), and then clearly locates the trouble source, i.e. the first letter of the word *non* 'don't' (line 4; see Cekaite and Björk-Willén 2012 for further examples of this "dual" structure). The directive is constructed both with verbal (*non mon* 'not mon', line 4) and non-verbal resources (a pointing gesture toward the mistake in the notebook, Fig. 6), and makes relevant a compliant uptake by Ahsan, which is indeed delivered: in line 7, he starts erasing the mistake on his notebook. Interestingly, Ramil's correction is followed by a laughter, which seems here to index a mocking attitude toward his classmate (Glenn 2003). Despite this potentially problematic derision, Ramil is praised by the teacher (*bravo ramil* 'well done ramil', line 8), who formulates the correction more extensively and starts again dictating the sentence (*non* 'don't', line 9). This resumption of the previous activity is, however, soon interrupted: turning again to Ramil, the teacher appoints him officially as her "substitute" (*dettaglielo tu* 'dictate it to him', line 9), thereby recognizing and legitimizing his subteaching practices. Embodying his now institutionally-sanctioned role, Ramil starts spelling the word for Ahsan (lines 10 and 11).

The two extracts clearly illustrate children's enforcing of institutional norms regarding appropriate ways of "doing literacy". Locally enacting the role of the teacher, Ramil and Ying retrospectively corrected their classmates' mistakes and prospectively socialized them to appropriate ways of reading and writing. This enactment of the teacher's role is accomplished mainly through directives, which represent one of the main resources to achieve an authoritative position within the peer group (Goodwin 1990). Indeed, the two sequences seem again relevant in terms of children's local hierarchies: especially the correction in extract 6 is produced in an "aggravated" fashion (Goodwin 1983) and seems to project a subordinate identity on the recipient, who is depicted as non-competent and incapable of autonomy.

## **5. Concluding discussion**

Among the various actors that play a role in children's sociolinguistic development, this article focused on the peer group and, particularly, on the ability of non-native children to

socialize each other to expected ways of speaking, reading and writing in the second language, i.e. Italian. Despite its exploratory nature and the small corpus considered, the study casts light on the potentiality of peer dialogues among L2 learners, as it indubitably illustrates what *can* happen when non-native children interact with each other. Furthermore, the analysis questions any unproblematic view of peer tutoring and children's peer learning, as discussed below.

As regards the specific findings of this study, the first insight is relative to non-native children's acute metalinguistic and metapragmatic awareness. Interacting in the fertile context of the second language classroom, they manage to isolate a linguistic item from the dialogic "flux" in order to make an object of reflection out of it (Duranti 1997, Silverstein 1993). Another aspect which seems to emerge from the extracts is children's ingenuity in negotiating their own learning environment: apparently off-task questions regarding school materials are used as a pretext to initiate pedagogical sequences. Also in relation to literacy practices, children manage to interrupt the otherwise smooth accomplishment of a task to initiate correction sequences relative to appropriate ways of reading and writing in the classroom.

In all sequences considered, these learning opportunities are created by disrupting the progressivity of the local dialogue. Pointing to a breach in the moral expectations of the group, the children embody the role of the teacher and thereby socialize their classmates to specific norms of appropriate (linguistic) conduct. These practices, here defined as *subteaching*, are enacted by reproducing teachers' prototypical ways of speaking: among them, the analysis highlighted a) designedly incomplete utterances, b) repetitions to emphasize an item to be learned, c) successive questions to pursue a correct answer, d) formulations of an item to elicit its repetition, and e) imperatively formatted directives.

As mentioned above, these practices have become part of the children's repertoire in the few months since their arrival in the Italian school. Even in the first phase of their apprenticeship, non-native children seem therefore able to act as "spokespersons" for the institution and to socialize their peers to expected ways of speaking, reading, and writing in the new community. Although such peer practices are not sufficient to reach an adequate level of competence (Cekaite and Evaldsson 2017), they nonetheless represent a significant opportunity for children's sociolinguistic and literacy development. Moreover, by reproducing institutional norms children contribute to the construction of local classroom cultures that are differently (mis)aligned to the institutional one. Even though these practices display alignment to institutional normativity and ideologies, the reproduction of adult discourses is also *transformative*, since children's motives go beyond institutional aims and ideologies. In



this regard, subteaching practices appear relevant for the discursive inclusion, or exclusion, of newcomers: teachers' pedagogically-oriented practices are creatively reproduced to address peer concerns and purposes.

Apart from the playful character that they can at times assume, the analyzed practices seem germane to issues of power and inclusion among children. By claiming an authoritative role and by making relevant epistemic asymmetries between them, children co-construct social hierarchies and negotiate power statuses within the peer group. Specifically, children's enforcing of institutional norms is relevant to the local construction of a valued identity, i.e. that of the more competent member of the group: being a competent member involves here both the epistemic level, i.e. which child is (perceived as) more knowledgeable regarding the second language, and the moral level, i.e. which child can consequently claim to be "a good pupil".

Conversely, these practices project a subordinate position on the transgressor, who might face a local alliance of two or more children forcing on him/her the identity of the non-competent child (as in the distributed practices in extracts 2 and 3). Furthermore, the analysis has shown how subteaching practices might be accomplished in an "aggravated" manner and involve mockery. A strict normative view of language use (exemplified by children's intransigence for "mistakes") can thus lead to practices of exclusion, if "appropriately speaking/reading/writing" are seen as criteria for membership in the peer group and transgressions are deemed moral failures. These latter insights point to the possible risks that such practices entail.

In conclusion, considering both the risks and the limited opportunities of (language) development, the role of the teacher in influencing, supervising, and steering these peer socializing practices appears crucial. Although these actions are, clearly, easier said than done, a starting point could be an increased awareness of (a) the relevance of teachers' ways of speaking and of institutional discourses in the classroom, as they might be reproduced by children within the peer group, (b) the role of institutional discourse in the local construction of classroom "cultures of dialogue", (c) the relevance of teacher's displayed orientation to mistakes, and (d) the possible risks of subteaching practices among children. As regards the latter point, an acritical view of children's autonomous work, often implied in widely promoted teaching methods such as peer tutoring and cooperative learning, needs to be problematized.

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## Appendix

Glossary of transcript symbols, adapted from Jefferson (2004).

- .,?! Punctuation markers are used to indicate the "usual" intonation: a full stop indicates a falling intonation, a question mark a rising intonation, a comma a slightly rising intonation and an exclamation mark an exclamative intonation.
- ↑ The arrow indicates a shift into an especially high pitch.
- :
- Colons indicate prolongation of the immediately prior sound.
- abc Underscoring indicates some form of stress, via pitch and/or amplitude.
- ABC Upper case indicates especially loud sounds relative to the surrounding talk.
- °abc° degree signs bracketing an utterance indicates that the sounds are softer than the surrounding talk.

< > Left/right carats bracketing an utterance indicate that the bracketed material is slowed down, compared to the surrounding talk.

ab- A dash indicates a cut-off.

(( )) Doubled parentheses contain transcriber's descriptions.

(abc) Parenthesized words are especially dubious.

(0.4) Number in parentheses indicate elapsed time by tenths of seconds.

(.) A dot in parentheses indicates a brief interval (less than 2 tenths of a second) within or between utterances.

[ A left bracket indicates the point of overlap onset.

^ This symbol indicates the point of overlap onset of non-verbal actions.