'I DIDN'T LIKE THIS MEANING': INDETERMINACY IN CLASSROOM GROUP READING[1]

by

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1. Introduction

Lack of interest in poetry on the part of learners of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) in undergraduate teacher-training programmes and the necessity to provide a whole range of different approaches to literature teaching have motivated the introduction of classroom group reading within an English as a Foreign Literature (EFLit) course. Despite being designed to promote a reader-response-oriented interaction about poetry, the task seems to have increased face threats. In order to understand why this may happen, this paper investigates the micropolitics of social relations among learners and experts, engaged in verbalizing how they make sense of a poem during a face-to-face interaction within one of these classroom tasks.

The interaction analysis revolves around the readings of the poem 'A woman in front of a bank' by the American poet William Carlos Williams, especially concentrating on the verse '... her face, like Lenin's...' (1948, 1986). The analysis includes a discussion about the indeterminacy of the concept of 'socialism' evoked by the word 'Lenin', and focuses on the excerpt in which one of the learners, uttering the sentence 'I didn't like this meaning', contradicts the expert's suggestion about the importance of adding historical information in order to define the concept of 'socialism'. It is also argued that at least two opposing interpretive paradigms encompass the participant's performance, for both expert and learners see meaning, on the one hand, as determinate and on the other, as indeterminate.

The microanalysis shows that traditional beliefs towards expert and learner roles in relation to meaning construction are highly influenced by the specific social situation, namely, the group reading event. The possibility of unveiling the co-existence of opposing paradigms is given by the specific social situation which enables the interactants to externalize how they cope with indeterminacy (Moura 1997) in language.

The main conflict seems to be about the notion of 'face' (in the metaphoric sense), and about the gap between commonly/previously and unusual/actually assigned faces. The analysis of the interaction shows that, on the one hand, the expert sees herself on the verge of imposing her own view towards the poem, while trying at the same time to encourage the learners' autonomy. In their turn, the learners, realizing that they have been pushed too much towards independent reading, demand a stronger feedback, namely the 'right answers' to the interpretation of the poem, while at the same time rejecting the expert's attempt to impose her own reading.

2. Interactional Sociolinguistics

It is through interaction that teachers-researchers can understand their own environments. The focus of their research is the learning environment, i.e., all the traits of the environment, and of the students' and teachers' backgrounds, that influence the knowledge handling, and therefore constrain what is learned (Gumperz 1986). Thus, in order to investigate the learning environment, interaction becomes crucial. According to Gumperz, 'without reference to the actual process of interaction, nothing can be said about how participants react to and make sense of particular tasks' (p. 58). Conversational as well as microethnographic analysts have contributed to giving us deeper insights into classroom interaction. However, interactional sociolinguistics proposes a more encompassing 'interplay of linguistic, contextual, and social presuppositions which interact to create the conditions for classroom learning' (p. 65).

Gumperz believes that analysis should concentrate on key instructional activities, which are in their turn definable through 'speech events', and he suggests that the latter 'can be further explored through looking at participant structure, that is, the norms of participation that exist in different cultural groups and govern the type and quantity of interaction that make up the event' (p. 66).

Besides investigating what is going on at the moment of the interaction itself, it is also very important to observe what kind of expectation the interactants had in advance about what is going on during interaction. Gumperz also believes that what people know in advance and what they expect of these events, i. e., 'the schemata or interpretive frames', are essential to the understanding of what is

going on during the event itself: 'the degree to which schemata are known, how schematic information is signaled and learnt, and to what extent learning is a matter of sociocultural background, is crucial to our understanding of the communicative dimensions of instructional processes' (p. 66).

In a way, previous knowledge and expectations are based on preestablished constraints. According to Erickson (1996), students and teachers are engaged in two main sets of procedural knowledge: the academic task structure (ATS) and the social participation structure (SPS). The first is 'the patterned set of constraints provided by the logic of sequencing in the subject-matter content of the lesson', whereas the second is 'the patterned set of constraints on the allocation of interactional rights and obligations of various members of the interacting group' (p. 154).

These two sets of procedural knowledge guide the interaction, but they do not determine it completely, because of an always present amount of improvisation in classroom discourse. Erickson's (1982) notion of classroom discourse as improvisation, based on a premise which considers schools lessons as social encounters, is quite relevant to understanding the learning environment. Social encounters are understood as 'partially bounded situations in which teachers and students follow previously learned, culturally normative 'rules', and also 'innovative by making new kinds of sense together in adapting to the fortuitous circumstances of the moment' (p. 166). The innovation and the improvising situational variation provide learners and teachers alike a more participatory role in the interactional process.

3. Group reading tasks in literature classrooms

In the educational setting focused on in this study, both the SPS and the ATS of the observed event shall be investigated. Concerning the second type of procedure, a particular structure needs to be further looked at: the group reading event. In order to explain why I shall focus on this particular type of task, some background information on the EFLit teaching environment[2] will be presented.

Few researchers have been working on foreign literature environments in Brazil, but Souza (1997), whose work has brought the issue under a new light, demonstrates that literature teachers who make use of monologues, present literature as an eternal, stable,

respectable entity, giving no emphasis to the actual reception of the work of art, thus devaluing the reader's role. Whereas language teachers, despite the fact that they generally use dialogue as the classroom interaction pattern, present language itself as a stable, normative and reproducible entity, thus devaluing the learner's contribution. In both environments, learners develop a huge dependence on the teacher and, therefore, become silent. This learners' 'silencing process' is observable through the teaching procedures in both language and literature classrooms.

Recent research, following Souza's steps, has shed light on a problematic area in English as a Foreign Language training programmes, namely literature teaching. Language teaching has been a topic thoroughly debated among language teachers. However, this has not been the case with literature. Literature teachers are much more involved with content discussions than with metho-dological questions. In order to develop this issue further, I present some arguments and counter-arguments with respect to Graff's (1994) view of literature teaching.

From a disliking-books-at–an-early-age position and a blank-panic-in-front-of-literature personal history, this literary critic develops his idea of how literary criticism should be taught before reading assignments are given. He states that what made literature seem attractive to him was 'exposure to critical debates'. Re-telling his own experience of having to read *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* in an undergraduate course, Graff (op. cit.: 48) realizes that

> reading the critics was like picking up where class discussion had left off, and I gained confidence from recognizing that my classmates and I had had thoughts that, however stumbling our expression of them, were not too far from the thoughts of famous published critics.

Graff's point is to demolish the premise which considers approaching literature without the lens of literary criticism a primary and innocent experience, whereas re-reading it for criticism is considered a secondary, corrupting experience. As a reader, Graff felt the need for 'a conversation with other readers'. In his case, these readers were the critical texts on the literary work which had been assigned to him. He claims that 'reading books with comprehension, making

arguments, writing papers, and making comments in a class discussion are *social* activities' (p. 43; author's emphasis).

What concerns us in Graff's arguments is his idea of reading as a social activity. First of all, I think that Graff underestimates how influential his classmates' voices have been for his own desire to seek out other readers in critical texts; and second, I would like to suggest that had his teacher not allowed the group to speak freely on Huck Finn's conflict, maybe Graff would have never found out about his own passion for literary criticism. Classmates can be good company for novice literature readers.

Group reading discussions during literature courses have been shown to be a possible pedagogical way of fighting the syndrome that affects so many: namely, an anguishingly silent response to literature. A first company that could be provided to those panicked readers are those with whom they would certainly sympathize. The teacher's role, in this case, would be to cope with the quite unstructured dialogue ('stumbling discourse') about the text and bring into the classroom criticism which can help these readers to pick up where they have left during class discussion.

The fear of literature escalates when we talk about poetry. The group discussion method can, besides enabling the students to feel in a community amongst themselves, help to see poetry not as a sacred object which can only be approached by authorized people, such as the teacher or the chosen critic, but as a piece of reading like any other. Group discussion is also an opportunity for learners to exercise their own voices, even if in a 'stumbling' way. It is also an acknowledge-ment of reading as a social event, a concrete gathering of a small group of people around a text. In this social event they will, of course, use procedures that are common to social interactions and some of which are specific of this phenomenon.

In the research context analysed, the attempt to bring group reading into literature classes was originally triggered by some introspective research methodology. It is important to clarify that the definition of introspective method (also called 'verbal report', 'protocol' or 'think-aloud technique') is considered here as a procedure of data collection in which 'the subject just lets the thoughts flow verbally (...)' (Cohen & Hosenfeld 1981:286) while trying to tackle, or upon completing, a task. In this case, it provided the basis for applying the method as a pedagogical tool and, as such, it

has become an important methodological device in literature reading and teaching.

For the above reasons, this paper is particularly concerned with the ATS called small group reading discussion, during which four people make 'particular situated sense' (see Tuyay, Jennings & Dixon 1995) of a poem in an EFLit classroom. According to Garcez (1998:10), 'contemporary work on face-to-face interaction and literacy [Bloome and Egan-Robertson 1993] (...) takes the initial microethnographic methods and point of view to the specific understanding of how reading and writing are constructed as integrally social processes'. Investigating interaction during group reading discussion is a way to know more about 'the type of activities that foster the practices of externalising one's own reasoning, inquiring of others, and comparing positions and perspectives on an issue or a problem' (O'Connor and Michaels 1996:64).

In this case, the group's issue is the reading of a poem in a foreign language. As it is very uncommon to have literature students speaking about poems in the classroom, I think, as do O'Connor and Michaels, that to observe the 'orchestration of group discussion' may provide new insights about 'a site for aligning students to each other and with the content of the academic work...' (1996:65). And, due to the fact that group discussion, because of its complexity, is rarely 'a site for intellectual socialization in elementary school; (it is rare even in many secondary and college settings)' (op. cit.: 66), I believe that to describe and to analyse the nature of the interaction of a particular small group discussion provides a privileged space in which to carry on an investigation of what happens when students talk about poetry, and when a literature teacher does not make solitary speeches about poetry. In other words, I will observe what happens when learners as readers and the expert as reader interact about poetry in a classroom during a group reading discussion.

4. Overview of lesson

The data analysed here belong to a year-long participant observation of an EFLit course during a teacher-training programme in a private university in the State of São Paulo. The course was designed by the teacher and by myself, who was participating as a researcher and as a teaching assistant in the classroom. As group reading was one of the

academic tasks designed for this course, students were often instructed to gather freely into small groups and were asked to verbalize to each other how they were making sense of a text, usually a poem.

In the analysed event, although the group is reading a poem in English, their discussion of it is held in Portuguese. They use English (but not in the excerpts analysed) mostly to quote from the poem. Thus, the language of the interaction observed is, for most of it, Portuguese. For the sake of non-Portuguese readers, I shall present the data in an English version. However, the interaction analysis is based on the original Portuguese version.

The lesson in which the data is embedded took place a month before the end of the course and lasted two hours. Six small groups worked together in the classroom. The activities of four groups were tape recorded (technical difficulties made videotaping impractical). The teacher and I took turns in assisting the six groups, but in the event analysed below only my own participation is recorded (under the pseudonym Clara[3]). Unfortunately, the teacher's voice could not be recorded.

The group focused on here will be called Group 1 (G1) and its three readers will be named Silvia, Maria and Paulo. During this event (labeled Reading Event 8, Group 1 = RE8G1), they interact in two different ways: with or without teaching intervention/assistance.

Several groups interact at the same time, while the teacher and the teaching assistant are going around offering assistance. Interaction within the other groups is not focused on here. Our concern here is the interaction in RE8G1 and, more specifically, the moment at which G1 is assisted by the teaching assistant. Among the three different moments of teaching assistance which took place in RE8G1, I have chosen the second one because, in this particular piece of talk, Silvia's utterance 'I didn't like this meaning' seemed to point to an open conflict about meaning construction.

5. Data analysis

The extracts to be presented below are all part of the second moment of teaching intervention, in which the group is discussing the line 'her face, like Lenin's' of the poem below.

A woman in front of a bank
William Carlos Williams

The bank is a matter of columns,
like convention,
unlike invention; but the pediments
sit there in the sun
to convince the doubting of
investments 'solid
as rock ' – upon which the world
stands, the world of finance,
the only world: Just there,
talking with another woman while
rocking a baby carriage
back and forth stands a woman in
a pink cotton dress, bare legged
and headed whose legs
are two columns to hold up
her face, like Lenin's (her loosely
arranged hair profusely blond) or
Darwin's and there you
have it:
a woman in front of a bank.

During the discussion, the notion of socialism evoked by the word 'Lenin' happened to become a central issue. What is going on here? What is these interactants' understanding of what is going on? How do these interactants fit their actions to their understanding? Or in Goffman's terms: what is the frame for this activity? In other words, more specifically: what is it that will constitute the context for Silvia's understanding when she says 'I didn't like this meaning'? Let us see how they interact:[4]

(1)

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01  Silvia   And why Lenin or Darwin?
02  Clara    Yes
03  Silvia   Leni::n
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04  Paulo   A dictator,       //atra::
05  Maria                     Socialism, //equality among the parties,
06          //between   inverted commas
07  Pedro                                    Yes
08  Silvia  Equality among the parties, everybody is equal, blablabla,
09          nobody has nothing, everything is equal
10  Clara   It's, it's from the forties this poem (0.5) right? (0.2) the
11          forties, right? Remember this it's //important
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The chosen excerpt begins when Silvia, who has the floor, puts a question ('And why Lenin or Darwin?') to the teaching assistant, who answers it ('Yes'). This adjacency pair shows a lot of interaction. First of all, this sequence is not similar to the usual IRE (Initiation-Response-Evaluation) triadic dialogue (cf. Gumperz, op. cit.), which is a sequence of conversational moves recurrent in classroom pattern. The person asking the question is not the teacher but the learner, and the teacher does not answer back. Clara's 'yes' is not a straight answer to Silvia's question because Silvia did not ask Clara a question to be answered. This question functions here, as it occurs throughout the interaction, as a hypothesis investigation (HI) marker. During poetry reading, the group seems to be doing an investigation and trying to solve a problem; one way to accomplish the task is to raise hypotheses.

In my research context, just as in first grade classrooms, readers are not used to the free verbalization required. So they have to establish some forms of talk that are part of being a competent poetry reader, which includes being a 'hypothesizer, an evidence provider, maker of distinctions, checker of facts' (Connor & Michaels, op. cit: 64). Due to this lack of familiarity with the task, the lesson has been designed in such a way as to provide scaffolding support (Vygotsky 1987), so that the students can be helped to achieve these goals. In this sense, group reading may provide peer support as well as simultaneous teaching assistance. Poetry reading functions very much like, for instance, mathematical problem solving.

If one explores the analogy of poetry reading to mathematical problem solving, one has to consider that in discussions of poetry reading the teacher has to a) tie together the different approaches to different solutions, and b) tie together the different solutions to some interpretations by establishing a working consensus around some of these possible readings of the poem. Poem reading is indeed

like problem solving: readers defend hypotheses, others make discoveries.

Thinking of the focused interaction as part of a problem solving task may help us to see the adjacency pair referred to above differently. Silvia is asking herself a question that may be answered by those engaged in solving the problem, namely Pedro and Maria. Clara is not part of the group. As teaching assistant, occupying the expert role, she is supposed to know the answers to the tasks prepared by herself. However, she is not the person who asks the question, neither is she the person who answers it. Why is that so?

In this group reading session, the assignment was for the learners to verbalize freely on their own way of making sense of the text and they were told that the teachers were supposed to interfere as little as possible. So Clara's 'Yes' is a continuer and an evaluation, because it assures Silvia that she may go on and that she may go on in the direction chosen. This means that raising self-directed questions aloud seemed to be a proper way of dealing with the task.

When Silvia stretches the final syllable of the word 'Leni::n', she seems to be asking for help because Paulo immediately takes the turn and, in a way, helps her by giving a characterization of the person being spoken of (Lenin). Paulo says 'attra::' (he may have said 'attractive') and Maria, as Paulo had just done to Silvia, takes the floor to make the connection between the person mentioned and the social historical movement known as socialism (M.: 'socialism, equality among the parties, between inverted commas'). In a smooth transition, as if Maria's voice had been an **expansion** of Silvia's, Silvia regains the floor, echoing Maria's utterance and expanding it (S.: 'equality among the parties, everybody is equal, blablabla'). (I adopt the term 'expansion' from Jacoby and Ochs (1995) where it means: 'a caregiver's linguistically enriching reframing of a child's unintelligible or partially intelligible utterance' (p. 172)). Here, the expansion is done by another participant of the interaction aiming at accomplishing the academic task. The concept of socialism given as 'equality between the parties' should be considered as unreliable, in accordance with Maria's expression 'between inverted commas'. When Maria makes this meta-comment, she gives a cue that enables Silvia to become a 'critic of socialism'. From that moment on, Silvia actually takes the critical role, especially when she says 'blablabla', that is, no matter what they say about socialism ('everybody is equal, blablabla, everything is equal'), Silvia seems to express that she does

not believe that in socialism everybody is equal. She does not believe this 'blablabla'.

Silvia, Maria and Paulo are aligned around this topic. However, Silvia's turn is followed by Clara's, which does not expand Silvia's utterance as it has been done but, instead, establishes a topic change. Clara's 'it's it's from the forties this poem' introduces a new kind of positioning in the interaction. Clara does not keep impartial to the generation hypothesis process (as she was supposed to, according to previous instructions), but instead, she changes the course of the investigation. Here we notice a transition relevance place, so let us observe what goes on next:

(2)

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01  Silvia   But I'm terrible at da(h)tes hahaha
02  Clara    Be  Because the Berlin wall had not yet fallen  down
03  Paulo                                                  No
04  Silvia                                                 Yes, it hadn't
05  Clara    The perestroika had not happened yet, we didn't know the
06           things  that  had  happened  in  the  Soviet  Union  under
07           Stalin's policy,
08  Maria   No, and that's why//
```

Clara's 'it's from the forties (...)' embarrasses Silvia, who states that she is not good at dates. However, it should be mentioned here that the poem had reached the readers on a separate piece of paper. The only historical information they had were the birth and death dates of the American poet.[5] The moment Clara refers to the decade in which the poem was written, she is doing several things at once. First, she is interfering with the group reading process, second, she is stating her teaching position, third, she is showing her traditional beliefs that historical knowledge is essential to poem exegesis.

Let us consider the first action. Her interference with the group reading process happens at a moment when she adopts the learners' point of view on socialism. For them, it seems to be, as Maria puts it, 'equality among the parties, **between inverted commas**' (my emphasis). Clara's utterance 'it's from the forties' functions as a warning to the group. She is not giving them a direct instruction, but she is indirectly making them reconsider their negative hypothesis on socialism. Clara introduces the matter of the historical

period of the poem's writing and after that, she self-evaluates her own contribution as important to the task. In a way, Clara is giving the scaffolding support the group may need. However, her warning is too strong, it puts the readers in a state of alarm.

Clara says 'It's it's from the forties this poem (0.5) right? (0.2) the forties, right? Remember this, it's //important'. Her checking 'rights', the authoritative pause (0.2), the instructional imperative ('Remember'), the warning emphasis ('this'), the self-positive evaluation of her contribution ('it's important'), they are all evidence of assertive teaching moves which are too strong. They show the others that she is not just another reader, but that she is the **teacher as reader**.

By not recognizing Clara's information as being important, Silvia fails to confirm Clara's teaching rights. Silvia only gives another information concerning herself. What does it tell us about Silvia's understanding of Clara's previous actions? It seems to be a reaction against Clara's positioning. It suggests that Silvia is not ready to accept Clara's entitled rights to the interpretation of the poem. In proffering this self-deprecation, Silvia is also claiming that the knowledge of historical information may be less relevant than other types of knowledge. It foreshadows a conflict formation whose iceberg tip begins to become visible. In other words, Silvia does not accept that Clara is not aligned with the group.

The follow-up of this interaction shows that, after some turns, Silvia eventually regains the floor and rephrases her previous belief that, no matter what is said about socialism and, in this case, no matter what Clara may say about it, 'over there [in Russia] it was a false socialism'.

(3)

```
01  Clara   So, there had been  sort of a,  an  idealism,  isn't it?
02  Maria                                         An idea
03  Silvia  Of the false socialism, over there it was a false socialism?
04  Clara   Exactly, but nobody knew it then, they didn't know it
05  Maria   Here it's real socialism,  here it's rea::l,  socialism
06  Clara                              What does he have? he's American,
07          he comes from the United States, and he's  talking  about
08          a historical fact far  away  from him  in  the  manner  he
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09          figures it to be
10  Paulo            That he figures it to be, yes
```

After Clara's explicit rejection of Silvia's contribution (S: 'over there it was a false socialism'; C: 'But no one knew it then'), Maria manages to support Clara's position by rephrasing and summarising it ('here [in the poem or in the writing period] it's the real socialism'). Clara, notwithstanding, being unsure of having convinced Silvia and Paulo of her point, introduces another 'figure to the interactional scene' to give her opinion a more authoritative taint. She introduces the author of the poem into the conversation (C.: 'What does **he** have? He's American ...', my emphasis). When Clara states her point of view as if it were the author's, Paulo is convinced and shows that by echoing the end of Clara's turn (P.: 'That he figures it to be/ yes'). But still, when Clara solicits ('Right?') confirmation from Silvia, she realizes that she has not managed to convince everyone. Let us look at Silvia's reply:

(4)

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01  Silvia  But even so, when you don't know what it is, the
02          Americans had always had conflicts with the Russians
03  Clara   And what is the conflict? The Americans are capitalists,
04          they are (0.5)
05  Silvia  Socialists
06  Clara   What are they against?
07  Silvia  Capital
```

Again, Silvia does not seem to agree with Clara's reading. Silvia's 'but' is softened by 'even so', in the sense that she partially disagrees with Clara. Her disagreement is not clear, because in her next turns she seems to be **revoicing**, albeit in an **appropriation** manoeuvre, Clara's arguments. (I use the term 'revoicing', as adapted from O'Connor and Michaels (op. cit.: 71), where it means : 'a particular kind of reuttering (oral or written) of a student's contribution by another participant in the discussion'). The term 'appropriation' is used according to Rogoff (1990; in Jacoby and Ochs, op. cit.); it stands for the fact that 'learners actively draw and assimilate skills and understandings from other members through their participation in social interactions with them' (p. 173).

Before this disagreement, the verbal interaction concentrated on Clara and Silvia, assigning silent observer roles to Paulo and Maria. Silvia attempts to resume her animator role in order to make Clara into a hypothesis investigation checker figure (S.: 'when **you** don't know what it is...'), but Clara regains the floor and poses a question back to Silvia, who seems to give up her role as principal when taking the student respondent, or gap filler, role (C.: '...they are (0.5); S.: socialists').[6]

Silvia tries to become both animator and principal. However, Clara's taking the floor leaves only the gap filler role for Silvia. Clara's move forces Silvia to give up the role of principal, but she keeps the animator's voice. Silvia answers: 'socialists', but it is an answer conceived within and by Clara's speech itself. Teacher asking and learner answering with preestablished gaps are characterized by not allowing a principal role for students. In her speech, Silvia attempts to change Clara into a 'figure' (S.: 'even when **you** don't know'); while doing this, she is also trying to distance herself somewhat from the teacher (animator/principal), who is there at the moment of interaction, self-asserting her powerful position as teacher. Silvia does not succeed, though, and the gap filler role is abandoned at the very moment Clara repeats the instructions in an imperative mode (C: 'This is a basic thing for this poem, right?'):

(5)

```
01  Clara   And what it stands for,  right? This is a basic thing for this
02          poem,                  ⌈ Right?
03  Silvia  But there it is, I didn't│like this meaning (0.2)
04          Not=not=not thinking who Lenin was, what he did (inc.),
05          but wasn't his idea of socialism ?
06  Clara   Right
```

As Hamlet (III, 1) had put it before, 'Ay, there's the rub'. Silvia at this moment says 'I didn't like this meaning'. She does not accept Clara's imperative way of asserting that the specific historical information is basic for the poem's interpretation. Silvia's next turns (S.: 'not=not=not thinking (...) wasn't his idea of socialism?') are all in negative form, as if stressing the conflict.

(6) Conflicting reading paradigms

At first, this piece of interaction only revealed an open conflict about meaning construction; now, in addition, the interaction also reveals an open conflict about context and social role co-construction. In order to understand what was going on, I had to consider the expectations that the participants brought with them about this activity. Concerning the teaching assistant, an important question was suspended: what were her reading frames? The analysis revealed that Clara's reading frame was influenced by different reading paradigms, something which can be illustrated by contrasting '**the conduit metaphor**' and '**the toolmaker's metaphor**'. These concepts come from Reddy's article (1979, 1993) 'The conduit metaphor: a case of frame conflict in our language about language'; let me clarify these concepts before returning to the data.

Reddy presents a frame restructuring in which he argues against the logic of a framework called 'the conduit metaphor', in favor of another called 'the toolmaker's metaphor'. According to Reddy, in the first paradigm, human communication is embodied by core expressions which imply that:

(1) language functions like a conduit, transferring thoughts bodily from one person to another; (2) in writing and speaking, people insert their thoughts or feelings in the words; (3) words accomplish the transfer by containing the thoughts or feelings and conveying them to others; and (4) in listening or reading people extract the thoughts and feelings once again from the words. (p. 170)

Sentences like: 'Try to get your thoughts across better', or 'Insert those ideas elsewhere in the paragraph' are part of a list of valuable examples given by Reddy to show how this metaphor is constituted in the English language. In order to investigate the deep implications of the conduit metaphor, Reddy presents an alternate metaphor of conceiving human communication. He proposes a metaphor in which people talking to one another are 'like people isolated in slightly different environments' where they have to survive all alone. The only possible interaction is through 'smalls sheets of paper' delivering 'from one environment to another – instructions for making things helpful in surviving, such as tools (...)' (pp. 171-2).

Reddy calls the impossibility of having any other way of contact, except by means of the small sheets of paper, 'radical subjectivity', and the contents of each special environment, the 'person's repertoire', which cannot be transmitted to other people, whereas the blueprints in the paper stand for human communication. In Reddy's metaphor, different people trying to exchange instructions about a tool realize their instructions do not agree. They have to abandon some earlier hypothesis and think over how to send more detailed instructions to each other. In other words, they have to spend time and energy to make sense to each other. And when that happens, Reddy says that 'they have raised themselves to a new plateau of inference about each other and about each other's environments' (p. 174). Reddy's point here is to emphasize how 'human communication will almost always go astray unless real energy is expended' (p. 174). Exactly the opposite is expected when human communication is based on the conduit metaphor. In that perspective, 'what requires explanation is failure to communicate' (p. 175). Reddy states that 'partial miscommunication, or divergence of readings from a single text, are not aberrations. They are tendencies inherent in the system, which can only be counteracted by continuous effort and by large amounts of verbal interaction' (p. 175). For Reddy, 'there are no ideas in the words' (p. 187) and, therefore, we cannot capture ideas, nor can we funnel them out to people. In other words, language is essentially indeterminate. Reddy's 'toolmaker's metaphor' is an attempt to show that, in cognitive terms, there is no way to look within the human mind; it is only through external marks, such as language, acts and the like, that human beings are able to interact with each other. If human communication is such, then researchers are only able to investigate it through the same external signs.

If one considers the piece of instructions in Reddy's metaphor as text, then one could say that Reddy's view of human communication is close to Cavalcanti's (1992) view of text. While referring to the state of the art in reading studies, Cavalcanti states that different theoretical trends agree that 'a text allows several readings to different readers, as well as to a same reader at different moments' (p. 223). Just like Reddy's persons had problems establishing levels of inference, so will Cavalcanti's readers. Cavalcanti's (p. 224) point is that plurality does not imply denial of a converging kernel of interpretation. However, this convergence is not established by only one person: 'Now convergence needs to be re-defined as the fruit of an intersubjectivity process (...) of different readers and as something different from plurality. This redefinition may take into consideration that the text is an indeterminate object, but with potential meaning (...)'. (ibid.) The problem which came along with the acceptance of reading plurality was the criteria for teachers to accept or reject certain readings in the classroom.

The **intersubjectivity** process mentioned by Cavalcanti is close to the concept of **co-construction** in Jacoby and Ochs's sense (op. cit.), which means 'the joint creation of a form, interpretation, stance, action, activity, identity, institution, skill, ideology, emotion, or other culturally meaningful reality' (p. 171). Co-construction does not imply conformity, or supportive interactions, because divergence and plurality are also co-constructed.

Both concepts owe much to Bakhtin's (1981) **dialogism,** which puts forward the notion of polyphony, where texts are products of 'previous, current, future and hypothetical dialogues' with others (in Jacoby and Ochs, op.cit.: 173). Dialogism is a key word for this language/literature learning environment. Holquist (1990) summarizes very accurately this pervasive idea in the Russian philosopher's work:

> Dialogism exploits the nature of language as a modeling system for the nature of existence, and thus is deeply involved with linguistics; dialogism sees social and ethical values as the means by which the fundamental I/other split articulates itself in the specific situations (...) and in so far as the act of perception is understood as the patterning of a relation, it is a general aesthetics, or it is an architectonics, a science of building. (p. 33)

In this sense, Bakhtin uses dialogue as a metaphor for the unity of the self and the other. Similarly, in psychology, Vygotsky made what Holquist called 'the revolutionary decision that tutoring was a necessary aspect of the child's journey to a ground of a higher consciousness'. Thus, Holquist links Bakhtin's concept of dialogism and Vygotsky's so-called 'zone of proximal development', since both emphasize social factors and the essential role of education in human development.

(7) The interactional conflict

In relation to the data, we can say that Clara claims the floor on behalf of the expert who is invested with the entitled rights (as is the author) to transmit the meaning contained in the words to the readers's minds, thereby revealing a 'conduit metaphor' frame. However, Clara's reading frame is not univocal; it is also influenced by the 'toolmaker metaphor', insofar as the tasks proposed to the readers have been designed to enable them to exercise their own readings and develop their authoritative voices. The conflict between opposing paradigms is said to be normal in the case of teachers taking research training courses, as had been Clara's case. The follow-up of the interaction reveals how the learners' reactions are quite similar to Clara's own positioning, only in an inverted form.

Clara had emphasized the importance of the historical period in which the poem was written for the definition of the concept of socialism (C.: 'It's, it's, from the forties'). She had offered information on geopolitical issues (C.: 'The Berlin wall had not yet fallen down') and on historical persons ('...under Stalin's policy'). Clara seems to externalize and project her beliefs on what socialism should have been, on to the poet. In other words, she defines socialism for her learners according to what she thinks Williams thought it was. In order to do that, she takes the poet's point of view, as she had taken the learners' (only she disagreed with the latter, and agreed with the former). Clara says 'he's American'; i. e., to an American poet writing a poem in the late forties, the relation between Lenin and socialism could have not been a negative one, such as the learners seemed to assume. Clara's line of argumentation goes as follows: Williams was American, he is not our contemporary and cannot have had access to the historical facts that she and the learners have now in the late nineties. These facts (C.: 'perestroika had not yet happened', for instance) may have influenced the readers' response, but they could not have influenced the poet then. Thus, the readers should change their beliefs on what socialism is for them today and adopt another definition, which may take into account the poet's point of view in 1948.

What do the learners do about Clara's demands? Silvia manages to regain the floor by overemphazising her turn. She stresses the utterance 'I didn't like this meaning' in order to overcome Clara's voice. When Clara leaves the floor, Silvia explicitly inverts the roles,

animating Clara as an hypothesis investigation checker figure. After that, Clara only manages to utter **disguised stoppers** (they are 'disguised' because expressions like 'right' and ' I got it' are usually used as continuers), whereas Silvia develops and presents her hypothesis about the importance of socialism for the interpretation of the poem. What is remarkable in Silvia's utterances ('But there it is, I didn't like this meaning (0.2) no=no=not thinking who Lenin was, what he did (inc.), (0.5) but wasn't his idea of socialism?') is the fact that her arguments are indeed an example of a **revoiced appropriation** of Clara's earlier turns. Silvia revocalizes the importance of the historical period for the understanding of the concept of socialism.

In a revoiced appropriation, an interactant revoices another participant's contribution such that, far from enlarging it, it almost mutes the latter's voice. In the case observed, the contribution is revoiced in a contradictory way, i. e., Silvia disagrees with Clara formally, but agrees with her in terms of content. Her strategy seems to function as a social role marker in which Silvia claims the authority, the entitlement rights, for herself, even if Clara had attempted to make them her own. Silvia's reaction demonstrates that Clara establishes a configuration through the ATS (group reading session) in which it is possible for Silvia to become an authorized reader of the poem or an authorized hypothesizer; the problem is that Clara fails to go to the end of this possibility. Clara refuses Silvia the right to speak. As a consequence, rather than appropriating Clara's voice, Silvia seems to be appropriating Clara's social role as an authorized reader. In a way, Clara's disguised stoppers (alleged continuers) are her discourse strategy to protect her voice as a teacher. Clara's interruption of Silvia's talk by saying 'Right' and (repeatedly) 'I got it' may represent her way of hindering Silvia from going ahead with muffled revoicings. Clara realizes that her teacher's voice is being appropriated and seems not to accept being muted. Thus, she attempts to interrupt Silvia and get her voice back.

When she does manage to retrieve her position, she significantly changes the course of the debate. Let us see how the interaction proceeds:

(6)

01 Clara   Humm, this is one reading
02 Maria   One reading
03 Clara   Yes, I think it is one of the only ones
04 Clara   What about the other reading?
05 Paulo   ((laughs))
06 Silvia Which other?
07 Clara   Not this one ((smiles))

Clara achieves to save her face by not authorizing Silvia's reading as the only one. Although Clara's strategy reveals that she is reacting to the muffled revoicing, it also reveals how contradictory the teaching role can be. As I have said before, the task had been designed to allow readers to verbalize how they were making sense of the poem. However, the structure of this academic task was not something established and stable. It was a new experimental structure to both teacher and students. That is exactly what makes this piece of talk interesting to researchers. The unusual character of the task allows us to observe different reactions to changes in the classroom.

The more Clara attempts to impose her own reading of the text, the less Silvia is ready to accept it (at least, as Clara's: C: 'it's important'; S: (...) 'I didn't like this meaning'); it may be accepted if revoiced and appropriated ('M.: No, there is the one [reading] of the woman who, women that have passed; S.: Passed by'). The more Clara attempts to ask for plurality of interpretations (C: 'this is **one** reading'), the less Silvia is ready to provide them (S: 'I think that is one of the **only** ones'). Plurality may be accepted if it comes from a peer, though.

In this interactional context, the degree of acceptance of teaching assistance seems to be independent of the teacher's conflicting reading paradigms. When Clara imposes her own reading, Silvia rejects it. However, when Clara admits reading pluralities, Silvia refuses to provide other readings. One can perceive that both teacher's and learner's roles are highly unstable here. Thus, face threats are increased. This may be due to the nature of Clara's social role as a researcher/teaching assistant who had not the full status of a teacher, but it may also be due to the conflicting stage in which the researcher had been undergoing the consequences of an enlargement of the **sense of plausibility** (Prabhu 1991). Here, what concerns us in

Prabhu's concept is the awareness that 'different sources may influence different teachers to different extents', whereas each teacher has a sense of plausibility which is his/her 'resulting concept of how learning takes place and how teaching causes or supports it'. For, as Prabhu puts it, 'the greater the teacher's involvement in teaching, the more likely it is that the sense of involvement will convey itself to learners (...)' (p. 73). Clara had been influenced by different reading paradigms, and her sense of what makes teaching succeed had changed. As a result, she attempts to change her teaching, too. The learners realize that Clara has opened up a different learning possibility. They can make their own sense of the poem. So, why do they need Clara anymore?

A last transcript, which precedes Clara's exit from the group, thus ending the second teaching intervention, may demonstrate how unstable the relation had become:

(7)

01 Clara   Hum, hum, I got it perfectly, I got it perfectly, I'm not
02   wishing to contradict you, what I'm just trying to say is
03   the following, the question I have is the following, this
04   poem, or in this poem, does the poet give his opinion
05   about this question, or doesn't he? And if he doesn't give
06   his opinion, how is it that he puts everything that you are
07   seeing?
08 Silvia What do you mean by <u>if</u> he doesn't give it? Of course he
09   does
10 Clara   I have asked, yes or no, (0.2) and if it is yes, how is it so?
11   Where is it? (0.3)
12 Silvia In the things we have said ((very fast and surprised))
13 Maria   Uhhuh ((laughing))
14 Silvia Don't complicate it
15 Maria   Huhuhuhu
16 Clara   Hahahahaha ((laughing and moving away from group))
17 Maria   We ta:(h)lk ta:(h)lk ta:(h)lk
18 Paulo   Le(h)t's expel the doctor from he:(h)re, oh, oh, oh
19 Maria   We ta:(h)lk ta:(h)lk ta:(h)lk, and after that she comes to
20   give us qu(h)estions?

This grand finale was already foreshadowed by the previous excerpts analysed. So, let us observe what is going on here.

Clara repeats the 'I got it', but this time she got it 'perfectly' and she repeats that. She stresses that she is not 'wishing to contradict' the group and she poses them a question: 'this poem, or in this poem, does the poet give his opinion about this question, or doesn't he? And if he doesn't give his opinion, how is it that he puts everything that you are seeing?' The only thing that seems to bother Silvia in such a long question is the 'if': 'What do you mean by if he doesn't give it?' Silvia is categorically sure about this point: 'Of course he does'. The 'if' may bother Silvia, because it is a marker of uncertainty; it is a road to multiple possibilities. Silvia's annoyance and surprise are a negative reaction to what the 'if' represents. Clara insists on opening the possibilities: 'I have asked, yes or no, and if it is yes, how is it so? where is it?' Clara has accepted Silvia's assuring 'of course he does', which means a 'yes' possibility to Clara. However, Clara pushes Silvia further by asking 'where is it?' This question reveals a number of things about this interaction, but the answer does much more.

Where is the *locus* of the meaning of this text?, Clara could have asked instead. Silvia's answer is demolishing: 'in the things we have said'. Here, the reading paradigms diverge. On the one side, we have Clara's quest for the meaning in the words, on the other, Silvia's certainty that the meaning is the interaction itself. They cannot agree, so they should part. Clara feels it was time she left the group at that very moment. She says nothing when she leaves. She is, as Silvia had wished, silenced. Maria summarises the mutinous atmosphere by 'We ta:(h)lk ta:(h)lk ta:(h)lk/ and after that she comes to give us qu(h)estions?' Maria and Paulo who seemed to have accepted Clara's role previously, demonstrate at the end of this excerpt that in fact they were aligned with Silvia, but had waited until this moment to state their peer solidarity.

The group had been discussing alone, without teaching assistance, and they had managed to produce a considerable amount of relevant observations about the text. In the excerpt analysed in this paper, it is shown that they have also talked a lot, and besides, have reached sound readings of the text. Thus, it is understandable that they feel compelled to dismiss Clara. For she had been interrupting their course of investigation and, above all, she has not validated their readings. They dismiss Clara, explicitly not considering her higher rank (P: 'the doctor.'). In this case, rank superiority did not provide a

warrant for Clara's continued presence in the interaction scene. And what is more, it does not determine the expert's role in relation to sanction and definition of meaning in a linguistic division of labour. The learners see Clara as an elderly peer (she is only a learner, anyway, she is not a doctor yet) who may be dismissed at any time. In short, she is not yet the/a teacher.[7]

After Clara's exit, the group resumes a very lively interaction about whether or not the author of the poem gave his opinion on the socialism issue. It demonstrates that Clara's presence has altered the participant structure in a very deep way. When Clara leaves the group, the participant structure goes back to its previous pattern, in which Silvia has a leading role of conducting the investigation. The students are relaxed again. Roles are re-settled. Yet, the expert has managed to make her point: they kept discussing. They did not stop opening possibilities for reading the poem, and they changed their beliefs about the definiton of socialism in favor of that of the expert. However, they do so through a revoiced appropriation, i. e., making believe it was their own definition, not the expert's.

8. Conclusion

To sum up, I would like to argue that reframing of personal and teaching beliefs becomes visible in a teaching environment only if both teachers and researchers are aware of this normal stage of co-occurrent paradigms (Feyerabend 1979). Once teachers are being more and more encouraged to become researchers of their classrooms, they also become much more aware of different theoretical trends and paradigms. Thus, the conflicting presence of opposing paradigms should become an interesting phenomenon to be further investigated.

To take a dialogical, Vygotskian position implies that both teachers' and learners' usual roles are at risk. Some pedagogical procedures can help to diminish the insecurity that arises from the risks that are part of the 'untrodden paths'. The teacher's role in this dialogic pedagogy is simple, and at the same time extremely complex, because most of us are addicted to the pervasiveness of the expert's voice. And to realize a somehow absent and yet very active presence is quite a difficult task for the teacher. To acknowledge meaning as indeterminate, to understand human communication as

co-constructed dialogically means to admit that 'every interactional moment is potentially an opportunity space for some participant to redirect the unfolding of the discourse[8] such that individual understandings, human relationships, and social order might be changed' (Jacoby and Ochs, op. cit.: 178).

What had started as a quest to understand a conflict on meaning construction has turned out to have a larger scope. The dispute over the concept of socialism showed off a conflict in terms of social role unstability. Both teaching assistant and students provide each other with a context to co-construct their social roles. Building upon academic task structure – namely, the freedom to express their own reading of the poem – and upon the social participant structure – namely, the rights and obligations of interactants in the inter-action –, they co-construct their roles as learners who can speak for themselves about poetry and who can refuse teaching assistance if it distorts their voices, and as a teaching assistant who can interfere with students' readings and who may be dismissed if the interference is too authoritative.

Learner-centred group reading of poetry enabled readers, learners and expert alike, to externalize how they coped with the complex task of dealing with indeterminacy in language; the micro-analysis unveiled how unstable their social roles had become while performing such a task. This unstability is characterized by two main interactional procedures: the expert's disguised stoppers (i.e. continuers used as stoppers) and the learners' revoiced appropriation.

Contrary to what is believed (Putnam 1975), the expert's role is not always legitimized by the learners, because, when requesting the expert's sanction, they act in accordance with a view of communi-cation embodied in the conduit metaphor, and, when refusing it, their communicative consciousness and practice rest in the metaphor of the toolmaker.

We conclude that a) the way expert and learners alike react in relation to the indeterminacy of meaning is extremely revealing of the micropolitics of this type of event; b) although the toolmaker paradigm is present due to methodological choices, it co-exists with the opposing, conduit metaphor paradigm; c) both the expert's and the learners' faces are endangered to the same extent by an increased autonomous reading practice on the part of the learners and the expert's less self-centred teaching practice; d) the notion of linguistic

division of labour (Putnam, op. cit.) does not apply to this specific situation.

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Notes

1. I am greatly indebted to Heronides Moura, Pedro Garcez and Jacob Mey for their helpful comments on earlier drafts of this paper. The remaining flaws are mine only.
2. For a more encompassing view of this issue see Vieira (forthcoming).
3. As I was too close to the data, and as I needed to be as detached as possible from them, I used an extreme source of 'bestrangement device': a pseudonym altogether different from my own name. I must add that this device has worked very well in my case.
4. Transcription conventions were adapted from Levinson (1983).
5. This poem was published in *The Clouds* in 1948.
6. Here, animator, principal and figure are used after Goffman (1979). The animator is the talking machine, or 'an individual active in the role of utterance production (p. 144); the principal is 'someone whose beliefs have been told someone who is commited to what words say' (p. 144), and the figure is a pronoun that serves as a character in a described event, 'someone who belongs to the world that is spoken about, not the world in which the speaking occurs' (p. 147).
7. At the end of the lesson, Silvia tells the teacher that she may not listen to the tape. Silvia had offered some criticism to the task and she thinks this may not please the teacher, although she does not seem to mind my listening to it.
8. Discourse is understood here as 'how language works as a part of an integrated system of communication' (Gumperz, 1986:62).

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