



CONSTRUCTING MICRO-CONTEXT IN CHINESE L2 CLASSROOMS: A CONVERSATION-ANALYTIC STUDY OF TEACHER-STUDENT INTERACTION

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Abstract

This study examines the dynamic construction of micro-context in Chinese as a second language (L2) classrooms through teacher–student interaction. Drawing on van Lier’s concept of contingency and Du Bois’s dialogic syntax, it conceptualizes micro-context as an interactionally emergent phenomenon shaped through the ongoing negotiation of pedagogical goals and participants’ responses. Using conversation analysis, the study investigates naturally occurring interaction from online Chinese L2 classrooms. The analysis identifies five recurring patterns of micro-context development, distinguished by different relationships between goal orientation and interactional contingency. These patterns range from highly teacher-controlled, transmission-oriented exchanges to collaboratively constructed, dialogic interactions. Findings indicate that productive micro-contexts emerge when teachers maintain pedagogical direction while remaining responsive to students’ contributions, allowing interactional goals to evolve during classroom discourse. The findings contribute to a reconceptualization of classroom context as a dynamic interactional achievement and offer a more flexible understanding of the IRF sequence as contingent and dialogically variable. Implications are discussed for enhancing interactional quality and learner participation in Chinese language classrooms.

Keywords: micro-context, Chinese L2 classroom, interactional contingency, dialogic syntax, teacher-student interaction

1. Introduction

In second language (L2) classrooms, context plays a crucial role in forming communication, influencing meaning-making, interactional coherence, and the flow of discourse. In language pedagogy, the effectiveness of input and output is closely

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connected to how the classroom context is constructed and managed. As a result, improving classroom context for a long time has been a central concern for both researchers and practitioners seeking to enhance interactional quality and promote language acquisition.

Against this background, Kumaravadivelu (2003), after discussing the significance of context in second language learning, proposed key principles regarding context within his language education theory. He emphasizes that context is inextricably linked to various real-world factors and that linguistic communication is inseparable from its communicative environment. He argues that learners must recognize that language is used within a communicative context; otherwise, a vital aspect of linguistic reality is neglected. Consequently, he introduced “*contextualized language input*” as one of his ten macrostrategies. McCarthy and Carter (1994) argue that language should be understood as a dynamic process of negotiating meaning, with a strong emphasis on textuality. Hatch (1992) conceptualizes communicative competence as the functional capacity to produce coherent discourse that aligns with the specific requirements of a given social situation. Only by carefully accounting for the various real-world factors that constitute linguistic, extralinguistic, situational, and extra-situational contexts can one construct an appropriate and coherent “text”, whether in oral or written form.

Despite this growing attention to context as dynamic and interactional, much existing research in L2 classrooms still tends to treat context as relatively stable, pre-structured, and externally defined, which is often reduced to background variables such as cultural setting or institutional constraints. Such approaches risk overlooking the moment-by-moment construction of context in actual classroom interaction. In response, a more dynamic perspective has emerged, focusing on how context is continuously shaped, negotiated, and transformed through interaction itself.

One productive way of capturing this dynamicity is through the concept of *micro-context*, which considers context as locally constructed within unfolding interaction. Drawing on an interactional view of the language classroom, Leo van Lier (1988) highlights that language learning is fundamentally a social and interactive process, in which participants co-construct meaning through engagement. From this perspective, classroom context is not merely given but is actively produced by teachers and learners as they orient to both pedagogical goals and emergent interactional contingencies. Micro-context, therefore, can be understood as an interactionally emergent configuration shaped by participants’ moment-to-moment actions.

However, while the concept of micro-context offers a promising lens, it remains under-theorized and insufficiently explored at the level of fine-grained interaction. To be specific, there is a lack of empirical studies that examine how micro-context is constructed in real classroom discourse and how it develops through interactional processes such as contingency, the extent to which each turn is shaped by, and responsive to, prior turns. Moreover, existing research has rarely incorporated insights from dialogic syntax, which provides a powerful framework for analyzing how linguistic structures emerge across turns in interaction.

To address these gaps, the study investigates the construction of micro-context in Chinese L2 classrooms, focusing on teacher-student interaction. Adopting a conversation-analytic approach and drawing on dialogic-syntactic perspectives, the study examines how micro-context is initiated, developed, and dynamically shaped through interactional contingency in Chinese L2 classroom discourse.

Specifically, the study is guided by the following research questions:

- 1) How is micro-context constructed in the Chinese L2 classroom interaction?
- 2) How does interactional contingency shape the development of micro-context?
- 3) What interactional patterns characterize teacher-student communication within micro-contexts?

By analyzing natural classroom data, this study aims to reconceptualize micro-context as an interactionally emergent and contingently organized phenomenon. In doing so, it contributes to the understanding of classroom discourse by linking micro-context to interactional processes and by extending the application of dialogic syntax to L2 classroom research. The findings also offer pedagogical implications for enhancing interactional quality in Chinese language teaching.

2 Theoretical framework

2.1 Micro-context as an interactional construct

The study of classroom discourse has long been concerned with the organization of interaction and the role of context in shaping pedagogical communication. Early work in discourse analysis, such as that initiated by Zellig Harris (1952), established that language is not an isolated system of sentences but unfolds through coherent stretches of discourse. Subsequent research on classroom interaction further demonstrated that teaching and learning are structured through recurring interactional patterns.

One influential model is the IRF (Initiation-Response-Feedback) sequence proposed by John Sinclair and Malcolm Coulthard (1975), which conceptualizes classroom discourse as a structured exchange between teachers and students. While widely observed, this model has also been critiqued for its tendency to foreground teacher control and limit the representation of more emergent and dialogic forms of interaction.

To move beyond static representations of classroom discourse, later studies have emphasized the dynamic and locally constructed nature of interaction. Hugh Mehan (1979) highlights the importance of examining how classroom interaction is constituted moment by moment, rather than merely describing its formal structure. Building on this interactional perspective, the notion of micro-context has been proposed to capture the locally emergent configurations of meaning, participation, and pedagogical orientation within classroom discourse.

Within language education, Leo van Lier (1988) conceptualizes classroom context as an interactionally constructed environment in which learning arises through participation and engagement. From this perspective, a classroom is not characterized by

a single, stable context, but rather consists of multiple, shifting micro-contexts that are co-constructed by participants in response to pedagogical goals and unfolding interaction. These micro-contexts are inherently dynamic, shaped by both pre-existing instructional purposes and emergent communicative needs.

2.2 Interaction and contingency in classroom discourse

A key feature of micro-context is its dependence on interactional processes, particularly contingency. In interactional terms, contingency refers to the extent to which each turn at talk is shaped by, and responsive to, prior turns. Rather than being pre-scripted or fixed, classroom interaction evolves through participants' ongoing orientation to each other's contributions.

In van Lier's interactional framework, contingency plays a central role in mediating learning. Classroom interaction is understood as simultaneously structured and emergent: while pedagogical goals provide a degree of organization, the actual trajectory of interaction remains open and negotiable. Contingent interaction, characterized by responsiveness, adaptability, and mutual orientation, is seen as essential for fostering learner engagement, attention, and meaningful participation.

This perspective also reconfigures the role of traditional IRF sequences. Rather than treating IRF as a rigid structure, van Lier suggests that it can vary along a continuum, ranging from evaluative and teacher-controlled exchanges to more dialogic and participatory forms. From this viewpoint, the quality of classroom interaction is not determined by the presence or absence of specific structures, but by the degree of contingency and co-construction within them.

2.3 A dialogic-syntactic perspective on interaction

To further examine how micro-context is constructed in the classroom, this study draws on dialogic syntax, as developed by John W. Du Bois (2014). Dialogic syntax provides an analytic framework for understanding how linguistic structure emerges across turns in interaction, emphasizing the relational and sequential nature of language use.

A core concept in dialogic syntax is resonance, which refers to the way speakers reuse, adapt, and transform elements from prior utterances. Through processes such as parallelism, mapping, and structural coupling, participants create connections between turns, allowing meaning to be incrementally built across the interaction. These relationships can be represented through diagraphs, which model the structural correspondences between utterances.

From this perspective, language is not produced independently by individual speakers but is co-constructed through dialogic engagement. The analysis of resonance and cross-turn structure thus provides a powerful tool for examining how interaction unfolds and how meaning is negotiated in real time.

2.4 Towards an integrated framework

Bringing these perspectives together, this study conceptualizes micro-context as an interactionally emergent and contingently organized phenomenon. Micro-contexts are constructed through teacher-student interaction, shaped by pedagogical goals while remaining open to transformation through contingent responses.

By integrating an interactional view of classroom discourse with a dialogic-syntax approach, the present study aims to capture both the structural organization and the dynamic development of micro-context. This framework enables a fine-grained analysis of how classroom interaction unfolds, how participants orient to each other's contributions, and how pedagogical meaning is co-constructed in situ.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research design

This study adopts a qualitative, interaction-based research design to investigate the construction of micro-context in Chinese L2 classrooms. Grounded in an interactional perspective on language learning, the study focuses on naturally occurring teacher-student interaction and examines how micro-contexts are constructed, developed, and shaped through interactional contingency.

Drawing on conversation analysis (CA), the study aims to provide a fine-grained account of classroom discourse by analyzing the sequential organization of conversation. In addition, perspectives from dialogic syntax are incorporated to explore how linguistic structures emerge across turns, particularly through patterns of resonance and structural parallelism.

3.2 Data and research context

The data for this study are drawn from online Chinese classrooms at intermediate to advanced levels. The classes were conducted in small groups of approximately six students, whose Chinese level ranged from HSK3 to HSK5. Each class met twice a week, with sessions lasting approximately 90 minutes.

The instructional format typically involved students engaging with texts through reading activities, followed by teacher-led explanation of vocabulary and grammar, and subsequent practice. While lower-level classes were primarily based on the *HSK Standard Course*, more advanced classes placed greater emphasis on oral communication and interactive tasks.

In total, the dataset comprises approximately 165 sessions (c. 9,900 minutes) of recorded teacher-student interaction.

3.3 Data collection and transcription

Data were collected through audio and video recordings of regular classroom sessions in order to capture naturally occurring interactions. Recording naturally occurring data is

central to CA, as it enables the analysis of participants' orientations and interactional practices in authentic contexts.

Following data collection, the recordings were transcribed manually. The transcription aimed to preserve the sequential and interactional features of talk, including pauses, overlaps, repetitions, and prosodic variation where relevant. Non-verbal elements that were observable and interactionally significant were also noted.

To ensure analytic clarity and relevance, certain segments were excluded from transcription and analysis, including:

- pre-class greetings and off-task talk,
- unintelligible segments caused by technical issues,
- background noise unrelated to classroom interaction.

From the full dataset, episodes representing micro-contexts were identified and selected for detailed analysis. These segments form the primary data for the analytic section.

A simplified set of transcription conventions was adopted to capture interactional features relevant to the analysis. These include pauses (.), overlap ([]), elongation (= =), blurred sound (x x) and emphasis (^). In addition, where relevant, cross-turn structural relations are represented using simplified diagrams to illustrate patterns of resonance and mapping across turns.

4. Analysis

4.1 Micro-context and the two orientations of IRF

van Lier (1996) acknowledges that the IRF sequence (Initiation-Response-Feedback, or IRE in Conversation Analysis) serves as the fundamental unit of interaction designed specifically for language classroom instruction. However, he argues that traditional IRF often functions as a rigid, monolithic questioning procedure characterized by a singular form and function. Not all classroom IRF interactions involve a genuine co-construction of discourse or adhere to pragmatic authenticity; instead, they often impose significant constraints on students' linguistic output. Such interactions may lack engagement and incentive, as students might perceive their responses as being subject to public evaluation by the teacher. This, in turn, can lead to a high affective filter, hindering their willingness to speak and interact.

From an educational perspective, van Lier distinguishes between two broad orientations of the IRF sequence: the Display/Evaluation orientation, where students are required to demonstrate their knowledge for immediate teacher assessment, and the Participation orientation, where the teacher's primary focus is on eliciting and sustaining student attention while actively involving them in the discussion. Although these two orientations often coexist, van Lier maintains that they remain distinct due to their differing impacts on student motivation and the potential for transcending the IRF pattern toward more contingent interactional formats. Consequently, he advocates for the revision and refinement of the traditional IRF model.

In Extract 1, the teacher's questioning of multiple students exemplifies a typical IRF structure with a display/evaluation orientation (L3-9). Within this IRF framework, the teacher's role is confined to evaluating or validating student responses. The interaction invariably terminates following the teacher's feedback in the third turn (L5,7,9), thereby preempting any student-initiated exploration or further elaboration on the topic. Although the teacher attempts a brief extension while interacting with the third student (L11: "Do you like taking photos?"), creating a momentary opportunity to personalize the discourse and stimulate student interest, a genuine interaction fails to materialize. The exchange remains a rigid, teacher-led "question-and-answer" format with limited student engagement.

Extract 1: 带什么东西去中国 (What to bring to China)

- (1) T: ...那我们要带些什么呢? 大家想一想, 如果你要去中国, 你要带什么?
- (2) S1: @@。
- (3) T: @@, XXX, 你要带什么? One thing, one thing for everyone, one thing, one person. Okay, 你说一个就可以了。我们要带什么?
- (4) S1: [x 桑 x]=
- (5) T: 带伞, 雨伞。
- (6) S1: 雨伞。
- (7) T: 带伞。雨伞。很好很好。那 XXX 我们要带什么? 你会带什么?
- (8) S2: 我觉得我会带..(1.1s)手机。
- (9) T: 带手机, 很好。现在在中国, 只要你有一个手机, 你就可以走遍中国, 你可以在中国的任何地方。嗯, 很好, 很好。那 XXX 你呢?
- (10) S3: 我觉得, 我们要带相机。
- (11) T: 啊, 带相机↑, 你喜欢拍照吗?
- (12) S3: @@对。
- (13) T: @你喜欢拍照@。对, 很好。嗯, 大家都说得很好, 都很重要。好的, 我觉得, 还是要带一个东西, @@那就是要带上我们的钱, @@@。
- (14) S2/S3: @@@。

From a conventional pedagogical perspective, this segment might appear to provide a task-driven environment, such as the hypothetical scenario of "traveling to China", intended to foster learner autonomy. However, applying van Lier's theory of interactional contingency, this study argues that these interactional events fail to constitute an effective micro-context. The presence of an IRF structure does not inherently signify the co-construction of discourse. From a dialogic syntax perspective, there is a lack of structural resonance between the teacher's initiation and the students' responses; the teacher does not "prime" the students to reuse linguistic resources in a creative way.

Extract 2: 关于自己的一天_1 (A day in my life_1)

- (1) T: ...好。那 XXX, 你今天好吗?
- (2) S: 嗯...好?

- (3) T: 你早上几点起床, 几点出门? 嗯, XXX 你早上几点起床几点出门?
(4) S: 我今天..(3.4s)嗯起床..六-早上↑?
(5) T: 早上 6 点起床。
(6) S: 哦好, 哼哼。
(7) T: 那几点出门呢?
(8) S: 7 点。
(9) T: 好, 7 点出门。好的, 那你今天和谁见过面? 你今天?
(10) S: Well, 我今天跟我的同事见面了。
(11) T: 很好, 你今天跟你的同事见面了, 跟你的同事见^过面, 见^了面。

In Extract 2, although a degree of structural parallelism or surface-level repetition is observable between the teacher's prompts and the students' responses, this does not constitute effective structural resonance. In these exchanges, the linguistic mirroring is purely mechanical: the students are merely filling the slot without utilizing the prior utterance as a generative resource for further creative meaning-making. This phenomenon illustrates that formal repetition does not inherently lead to the "language-generating-language" effect. Instead of a dynamic co-construction where one turn "primes" the next for cognitive or communicative expansion, the interaction remains static. Consequently, despite the apparent structural alignment, the lack of semantic and pragmatic depth results in a failed micro-context where no authentic dialogic engagement occurs.

Extract 3 : 关于自己的一天_2 (A day in my life_2)

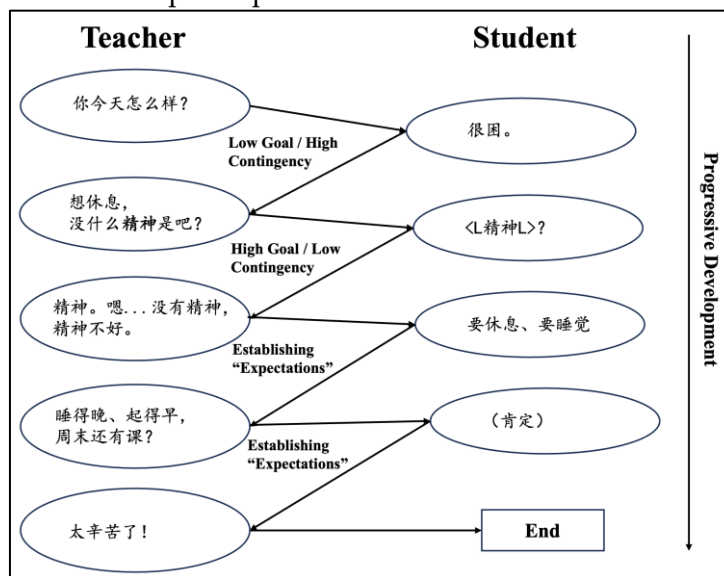
- (1) T: 那 XX 呢, 你今天怎样?
(2) S: 我今天很困。
(3) T: 很^困啊。
(4) S: 嗯。
(5) T: 所以今天就一直想休息, 然后没什么^精神, 是吧?
嗯, 精神不 [好, 感觉很] -
(6) S: [嗯...(1.2s)]<L 精神 L>?
(7) T: 精神。嗯...没有精神, 精神不好。
(8) S: 啊, 是-
(9) T: 是什么-
(10) S: 要-要休息、要睡觉。
(11) T: 就是感觉要休息, 要睡觉。昨天休息得不好吗? 昨天晚上休息得不太好?
(12) S: 我-我-因为我要做一些事情, 睡觉很...很...(2.1s)太晚。
(13) T: 昨天睡得很晚。嗯, 几点睡的? ^你是几点睡的?
(14) S: 我-我觉得, 半夜。
(15) T: 半夜才睡。然后早上起得很早吗?
(16) S: 呃呃=对, 我上课有八点钟有课。

- (17) T : 八点有课，所以...(3.5s)也不得不早起， 是吧？
- (18) S : 是。
- (19) T : 嗯，那我可以想象，你今天应该很困，这个精神不太好。明天呢，明天可以休息休息吗？还是[明天也有课。]
- (20) S : [不可以]@@呃，呃我明天更早起床，因为要坐火车-坐火车去<x blabla x>。
- (21) T : 坐火车，然后你周末还有课，是不是？
- (22) S : 是，是有课。
- (23) T : 那你太辛苦了！

In contrast to Extract 2, the pre-class warm-up in Extract 3 exhibits a markedly different interactional dynamic. Centered on the student's daily schedule, the exchange demonstrates a high degree of communicative authenticity (L13-23). This segment constitutes a successful micro-context oriented toward genuine communication, where the interaction is deeply embedded in the student's lived experience. Notably, the teacher's responses incorporate personal affective attitudes, signaling a shift from a mere evaluator to an active interlocutor. Although the teacher maintains primary control over the trajectory of the interaction, a strategic balance is achieved between teacher prompts and student contributions. This results in a more symmetrical participation framework, enhancing the perceived equality between the participants. The teacher simultaneously provides linguistic scaffolding while consistently eliciting further elaboration. By transcending the linear IRF sequence, the teacher utilizes the student's prior turns to formulate contingent follow-up questions, effectively communicating "expectations" that sustain the turn-taking and drive the co-construction of meaning.

In this communicative-oriented micro-context, the teacher initiates the exchange with a causal greeting and subsequently performs a probing based on the student's contingent response. This micro-context is characterized by low pre-planned specificity; instead, the teacher relies heavily on the student's personal input to sustain the interaction and achieve communicative goals. Consequently, the interaction exhibits "low (predefined) goal-oriented and high contingency." However, when the student expresses feeling "tired" and "wanting to rest", the teacher strategically pivots to activate the previously learned lexical item "精神" (jīngshén, energy). At this juncture, the immediate interactional goal shifts toward vocabulary activation (Turns 5-11), leading to a temporary transition toward "high goal-oriented and low contingency."

Figure 1: Teacher-student participation in micro-contexts with communication goals



While the IRF (Initiation-Response-Feedback) structure remains effective for maintaining classroom order and normative participation, it often stifles student agency, independent thinking, and the development of sophisticated conversational skills, such as turn-taking negotiation and proactive planning. It typically reinforces teacher-led dominance within the classroom discourse. Conversely, by exploring the diverse typologies and affordances of IRF, specifically by prioritizing a participation orientation and shifting away from rote display and repetition, the IRF sequence can serve as a bridge to more non-linear and contingent instructional interactions. Compared to traditional IRF, the contingent interaction within a micro-context embodies greater dialogicity, equality, and self-determination, serving as the key to unlocking the student's learning potential (van Lier, 1996).

Therefore, language classrooms should undergo a form of “interactional engineering” or reconstruction of traditional practices to accommodate more authentic and symmetrical teacher-student exchanges. Achieving discourse symmetry is considered a potentially “subversive act” by van Lier. For genuine pedagogical dialogue to allow students to develop their own voice and exercise the 3A principles (Autonomy, Authenticity, and Achievement), the traditional framework must eventually be transcended. At the heart of this dialogue lies the multifaceted contingency of interaction, which is inextricably linked to linguistic structures. The construction of classroom micro-contexts originates from a dynamic, participation-oriented mode that surpasses the rigid IRF framework. It may begin with the basic logic of IRF but evolves during the interactional process, ultimately reshaping the sequence into a flexible and deeply engaging instructional environment.

Who starts the interaction affects how the micro-context develops. Teachers are the main leaders in the classroom. Most micro-contexts are started by the teacher through planned lessons and activities. In these cases, teachers often use specific “metadiscourse” to guide the students. For example, they use words to clarify who should speak or to keep

students focused, especially in online classes where interaction is harder. This helps students understand the goal of the conversation and use the language more effectively. In contrast, student-led micro-contexts are less common and more unpredictable. Usually, these happen when a student interrupts to ask for a clarification about a word or a teacher's comment. While rare, these moments are important because they show students' curiosity and their desire to share or explore. In these cases, the micro-context is driven by the student's own needs rather than a pre-set plan.

In summary, the micro-context can be seen as a flexible space. It often begins with the teacher's plan, but can change and become more dynamic when students participate actively.

4.2 Goals and interactional contingency in micro-context development

The development of micro-context in classroom interaction is shaped by the dynamic interplay between pedagogical goals and interactional contingency. While pedagogical goals provide orientation and direction for classroom activity, interactional contingency reflects the extent to which participants' contributions are locally responsive to one another in the unfolding sequence of talk.

In order to account for how micro-contexts are organized in classroom interaction, it is necessary to further specify the role of pedagogical goals at different levels. In this study, a distinction is made between event goals and interactional goals. These two kinds of goals define the local scope of classroom interaction and function as the intended outcomes that participants are expected to achieve. In this sense, the effectiveness of a micro-context can be partially assessed in terms of whether its event goal is accomplished. Interactional goals, by contrast, are dynamically activated in the course of interaction. They emerge on a turn-by-turn basis, often in response to the information provided by students, and may shift as the interaction unfolds. Because student contributions vary, interactional goals are inherently flexible, requiring teachers to continuously adjust and generate locally relevant objectives in order to accommodate learners' emerging needs.

Although both event goals and interactional goals may involve knowledge-oriented or communicative orientations, and may be either pre-planned or emergent, they are not independent. Event goals exert a constraining influence on the development of interactional goals (Black & Wiliam, 2009), guiding how participants interpret and orient to the interaction. At the same time, interactional goals accumulate and evolve through ongoing discourse, sometimes aligning with the original event goal and contributing to its realization.

However, interaction does not always proceed in a linear or fully goal-aligned manner. When divergence led by contingency becomes interactionally sustained, it may result in the reconfiguration of the ongoing activity and the emergence of a new micro-context. This dynamic process highlights the flexibility and adaptive nature of classroom interaction, in which pedagogical intentions and interactional developments are continuously negotiated.

Rather than functioning independently, goals and contingency are closely interrelated and often exist in a state of tension. On the one hand, strong goal orientation may lead to more structured and teacher-controlled interaction, where contributions are guided towards the achievement of predetermined outcomes. On the other hand, high levels of contingency are associated with more responsive, emergent interaction, in which participants build on prior turns and co-construct meaning in a less predictable manner. From an interactional perspective, micro-contexts do not develop in a linear or fixed way. Instead, they evolve through turn-by-turn negotiation, in which the relative strength of goal orientation and contingency may shift over time. In some cases, interaction is tightly aligned with pedagogical goals but exhibits limited responsiveness to student contributions; in others, highly contingent interaction may lead to more exploratory but less goal-directed exchanges.

To capture these dynamics, this section examines how different configurations of goal orientation and interactional contingency are manifested in classroom discourse. The analysis of naturally occurring data, it shows how micro-contexts are shaped by the ongoing negotiation between instructional objectives and participants' locally contingent responses.

Extract 4: 原则与工作 (Principles and work)

- (1) T: 第一个刚才在课文里面已经出现了, 我们就不读了嗯。
- (2) S: <LW 二个 LW↑>?
- (3) T: 对, 第二句。试想...?
- (4) S: 试想我们每个人都没有原则, 我们的工作还怎么开...开展?
- (5) T: 嗯, 所以这句话作者其实想说, 每个人都要坚持自己的=↑? ...(3.2s)工作的=↑? ...
- (6) S: ...(4s)<LW 原则 LW>。
- (7) T: ^原则。如果你没有原则=↑...(4s)就很难=↑...?
- (8) S: 我们的工作[<x blabla x>]
- (9) T: [很难^做工作], 开展工作啊。你看, 所以你用“试想如果”的时候其实是一个^反问, 你想表达你自己的一个意思, 你已经有一个态度了啊=, 就是我们每个人都要<S^有原则 S>, 才能开展我们的工作。

In this segment, the teacher starts the micro-context by providing a specific grammatical framework (e.g. L7). The teacher has a clear pre-set goal (high goal) related to text comprehension. However, since this prompt does not come from the student's own needs or interests, the contingency is low.

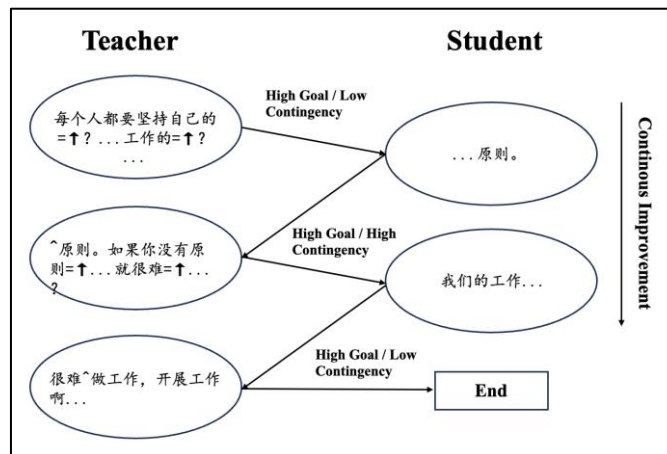
During the interaction, the student responds mainly with single keywords. To achieve the goal, the teacher continuously reuses these keywords (resonance) to help the student complete a full sentence. Although the teacher provides “scaffolding” by repeating and adjusting the student's words, the direction of the conversation is a straight line controlled by the teacher's “script”. The teacher's primary focus is to help the student complete the target sentence and understand the textbook.

Table 1: Diagraph sample from Extract 4

	A	B	C	D	E	F	G
(7) T :	就	很难					?
(8) S :				我们的	工作		。
(9) T :		很难	做		工作		,
			开展		工作	啊	。

This case represents a pattern where both the start and the end of the micro-context are characterized by High Goal and Low Contingency. The teacher has full control over the interaction to ensure that specific knowledge goals (vocabulary or grammar) are met. Although there is “resonance” between the teacher and the student, it is not so flexible. The student’s role is limited to “filling the blanks” in the teacher's plan, with little room for creative expression. If an interaction stays in this “High Goal / Low Contingency” state from beginning to end, it becomes a “transmission” model (like a lecture). This does not fully reach the dynamic potential of a micro-context.

Figure 2: Teacher-student interaction in the micro-context of Extract 4



While this mode is effective for checking students’ memory and knowledge, it limits the students’ active thinking and self-decision. At the end of the interaction, the teacher stops following the student's information and returns to the pre-set goal, which closes the micro-context.

Extract 5: 关于判决结果 (About a verdict)

- (1) T: ...你们支持法院的这种判-判决或者说判决吗? 小杨只有 20%, 嗯, 这个李丽自己 80%啊==。XXX, 你觉得你支持法院这个法院的判定判决吗?
- (2) S: 我觉得我支持。
- (3) T: 那你也认为↑...
- (4) S: 嗯==, 就是...(1.5s)嗯..事故的原因就是..呃李丽呃不<x sian chang x>。
- (5) T: 不^牵绳, 没有牵绳, 没有牵养。
- (6) S: 没有牵养贝壳。

- (7) T: 这是最主要的原因啊。好的, XXX 也支持。但是法院还判定这个司机, 小杨也有 20% 的过错, 你觉得多不多, 少不少?
- (8) S: 我觉得还..还多。
- (9) T: 20% 也多啦?
- (10) S: 对啊, 我觉得没想到。
- (11) T: @@@ 你觉得应该有百分之多少? @@
- (12) S: 这个我=...就是没想到...
- (13) T: @@。
- (14) S: 因为我=..我本来觉得这个情况这个诉讼有点奇怪的...
- (15) T: 哦! 你本来觉得这个诉讼已经很奇怪了, 嗯=。
- (16) S: 我觉得这个女生完全...(3.0s) 嗯=我觉得...
- (17) T: 你觉得女生应该承担^完全的责任。
- (18) S: 我觉得这个司机需要=诉讼她...
- (19) T: 啊噢@@@。
- (20) S: @@ 所以对我来说, 这个故事@@ 是完全反对的@@。
- (21) T: 好啊@@ 完全^相反的。
- (22) S: 嗯相反的@@。

In this case, the micro-context begins with a High Goal and Low Contingency but ends with a High Goal and High Contingency. This transition represents a high-quality interaction. At the start, the teacher creates the micro-context to achieve a pre-set goal (asking for the student's opinion on a specific event). Initially, the teacher focuses on controlling the lesson and encouraging the student to speak, rather than engaging in a deep personal exchange. The teacher uses a general framework that does not yet consider the student's unique input. However, as the interaction progresses, the contingency increases significantly. The student's individual perspective begins to influence the teacher's questions. We can see a shift toward more equal status between the participants. The teacher becomes genuinely interested in the student's views and asks follow-up questions based on the specific information provided by the student.

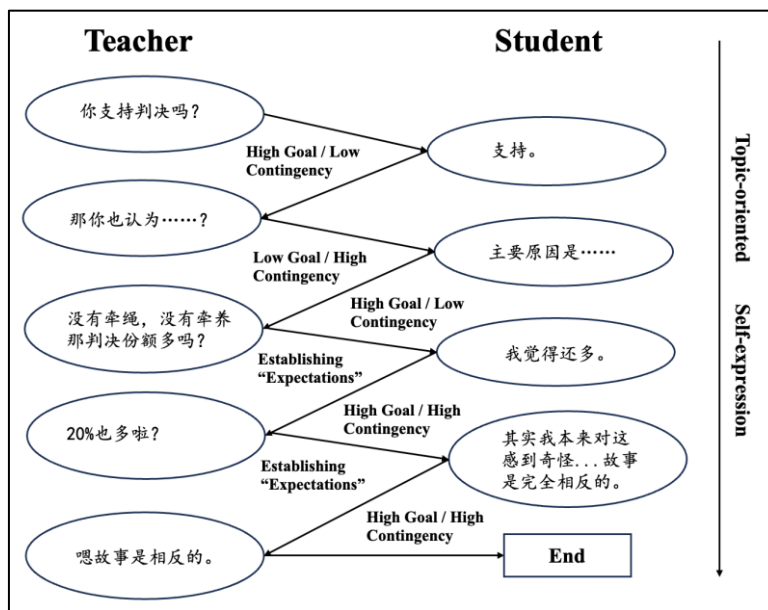
(

Figure 3: mapping from Extract 5

S: 我觉得还多。
↑ ↑
T: 20% 也多啦?

By using a rising intonation to seek further explanation, the teacher creates resonance and encourages the student to take a more active role. Eventually, the student moves from passive responding to active expression (L14), and the dialogue becomes a natural and authentic discussion.

Figure 4: Teacher-student interaction in the micro-context of Extract 5



This pattern shows an ideal development of a micro-context. The interaction is not static; it evolves from a teacher-led structure into a student-influenced dialogue. As the teacher follows the student's focus points, the traditional hierarchy is replaced by a more balanced, symmetrical conversation. The goal remains high (completing the task), but the way it is achieved becomes much more natural, allowing the student to fully express their own voice.

This transition is the key to unlocking student potential. When the teacher stops just following a script and starts responding to the student's actual meaning, the IRF structure is reshaped. The high contingency at the end proves that the micro-context has successfully moved from a formal exercise to an authentic communicative event.

Extract 6: 一盘菜 (A plate of dish)

- (1) T: XXX看看这张图, 是什么? 可以怎么说?
- (2) S: 呃=@@, good question...
- (3) T: You can say...it's a dish... a ^plate of dish.
- (4) S: ahhh...
- (5) T: 想一想..我们说, 一^杯咖啡, 一个杯子。我们说一个瓶子, 一瓶水..那这是一个盘子...那这里是什么菜?
- (6) S: ...嗯一个..盘菜?
- (7) T: @@一^盘菜...所以可以说一^盘-
- (8) S: 我有一个问题。
- (9) T: 请说。
- (10) S: 第二个图片。
- (11) T: 嗯?
- (12) S: 这种菜可以是...草菜还是...呃绿色的菜?

(13) T: 哦我们可以说这叫青菜啊, ^青菜。^青也是一种绿色。青, 青菜。(敲键盘)
或者你也可以说, ^绿, ^绿叶菜。叶, 叶子, leaf。(敲键盘)

(14) S: How to say... vegan one? Vegan 菜? @@

(15) T: 哦那是...^素食, 素食。(敲键盘)素食, 素的食物, vegetarian food。吃素食的人, 就是 vegetarian, 或者说素食主义者。如果你是吃素的人, 你可以说, 我吃素, that's enough。如果你想问, is this food vegan? 那就说, 这是素的吗? 这个者, in traditional Chinese means 的人, 所以素食主义者, 主义, 是-rian, 那就是吃素的人的意思。嗯好, 素食主义者、我吃素、这是素的吗、绿叶菜, 或者我们说青菜...嗯, XXX 清楚了吗?

(16) S: 嗯清楚了, 谢谢。

In this case, the micro-context ends with low goal intensity, meaning that the final interaction drifts away from the teacher's original pedagogical objective. Initially, the teacher uses images and analogical examples to help the student understand and apply new language structures in a new context. This starting phase has a High Goal and Low Contingency, as it follows a specific instructional plan.

When the student attempts to answer, the teacher uses repetition and correction to reinforce the correct use of measure words (e.g., "plate"). However, the focus of the micro-context shifts when the student interrupts the teacher's explanation to ask a personal question. The teacher decides to follow the student's lead and responds to this new topic. As a result, the interaction becomes highly contingent on the student's input (High Contingency), but it moves away from the original goal (Low Goal). The teacher does not return to the initial focus on "plates" after this exchange. This pattern is characterized by a shift from a planned task to a spontaneous conversation. The interaction ends with a different focus than it started with. The original teaching goal is replaced by the student's immediate communicative need. The transition illustrates a student-led turn-taking, which is often triggered by the student's initiative, such as an interruption or a request for information, which breaks the teacher's "script." The teacher shows flexibility by prioritizing the student's question over the lesson plan, which increases the authenticity of the exchange, demonstrating high interactional flexibility but weakens the pre-set goal. The case shows the unpredictable nature of a micro-context. Although the original goal is not fully achieved, the high contingency at the end suggests a move toward a more natural and student-centered dialogue. This pattern proves that a micro-context is not a fixed track but a dynamic space that can be reshaped by the student's voice.

Extract 7: 临阵磨枪 (Sharpening the Spear Before Battle)

(1) T: 今天怎么样?

(2) S1: 很好...我做了很多模拟考试。@@@

(3) T: 今天这几天一直在做模拟考试。

(4) S1: 嗯, 对。

(5) T: 嗯, 做大概几套-做了几套题了?

- (6) S1: 呃...可以再说一遍吗?
- (7) T: 我们一套题里面有听力, 有阅读, 有书写...
- (8) S1: 对对。
- (9) T: ...那是^一套, 完整的一套。<H 你做了几套啦 H>? 做了几套了?
- (10) S1: 今天做了三个套。
- (11) T: 嗯, 不需要“个”了哈。哇, 一天就做了三套。那你好厉害啊=, 一天..一天时间就能做这么多。
- (12) S1: 因为我以前其实没-没有练习。
- (13) T: 哦, 以前没有做过=。
- (14) S1: 对, 所以快要考试, 所以我觉得应该要多练习一下。
- (15) T: 啊=, 我们可以说“临阵磨枪”啊..我在聊天的地方写一下。临阵... (敲键盘) “临阵磨枪”就是这个“阵”...我们知道跟打仗、战争有关系。快要战争快要来了, 我赶快把我的这个枪拿出来..^磨。我们知道你家里面如果你切菜、切肉有那个用刀, 那如果刀不太好用的时候要做什么呢? XXX, 如果这个刀这把刀现在不好用了, 不锋利了, 我要把它=?
- (16) S1: 呃..不知道怎么说。
- (17) T: 这就是刚才那个成语里面的那个动词。
- (18) S1: 哦!
- (19) T: 就是那个第三个..<S^磨 S>, 去<S^磨 S>。
- (20) S1: 磨?
- (21) T: 那个就是磨。所以再说一下...现在这把刀不好用..很不利, 我要把它^磨一下。
- (22) S1: 磨一下。
- (23) T: 那就是磨刀, 那就叫磨刀, 那个工具就叫做磨刀石, 磨刀石哈。
- (24) S1: 嗯, 好。
- (25) T: 你们家里面有这样的东西吗? 就是平时切菜的刀不好用的时候就给它磨一磨?
- (26) S1: 有。
- (27) T: 有吧! 那个就叫^磨, <S 磨刀石 S>。所以临阵磨枪, 就是像你现在这样...还要快要考试了, 已经时间不太多了, 但是我还是抓紧时间把那个我的工具给他=^磨一磨, 让它好用一些啊。
- (28) S1: @@@
- (29) T: 对, 这句话其实还有后面半句, 就是“临阵磨枪, 不快也光”, 我还是补在那个后面。(敲键盘) ...
- (30) S2: 嗯...
- (31) T: 那你看我们平时说这个刀快不快? 也就是锋利不锋利啊? 这里的快是锋利的意思, 就是说这个刀很好用, 切东西切得很快, 能满足你的要求, 啊就是你想切得很细、很小都可以, 很锋利。那如果不锋利了, 那这把刀就变得很=^盾, 我把它的反义词也写在这里..(敲键盘)..都是有那个金字旁, 金属的金, 所以锋利是这个刀还很好用..特别好, 切得很快。那上面那句话里面的“快”, 也是锋利的意思..就是说你临阵磨枪, 有可能这个刀不会变得很锋利、很快, 但至少它看起来很亮, 很光, 是吧? 一定还是有一点点用的, 啊有道理吗? XX 觉得呢?
- (32) S1: 有。@@@, 有, 但是我从来没听说。
- (33) T: 没有听过这一句话啊=?
- (34) S1: 没有。

(35) T: 这个你们如果这样查字典的话, 可能发现它只有这...呃前面四个字, 临阵磨枪, 但有的时候其实我们是会带着后面四个字说的。没有贬义, 就是说像你这样在这个事情快要开始的时候, 然后还是在做准备, 啊这样, 都没有听说过啊? XXX 也没有听说过?

(36) S2: 没有。

(37) T: 其实我也不知道大家那个啊=成语的掌握哈。嗯, 这句话基本上还是一个褒义的, 就是你到最后的时候, 虽然你还是没什么准备..嗯...或者说你准备的不多, 但你还是值得再努力, 再准备一下, 一定是有用的。

Both Extracts 4 and 5 begin with Low Goal and High Contingency. In these cases, the teacher does not start with a pre-planned pedagogical objective. Instead, the interaction is purely communicative, following the student's interests and needs. At the start, the teacher relies on the student's information output to sustain the conversation.

Figure 5: Mapping from Extract 7

S: 很好。 我做了很多模拟考试。
 ↑↑ ↑
T: 今天这几天一直 在做 模拟考试。

In this case, the teacher encourages the student to talk more by paraphrasing and affirming their answers. This creates a supportive environment where the teacher and student talk as equals. The teacher provides not only language corrections but also emotional support. However, as the conversation progresses, the teacher identifies a “teachable moment” and establishes a clear knowledge goal. Specifically, the idiom “临阵磨枪” (Lín zhèn mó qiāng, preparing at the last minute). Once this specific goal is generated, the teacher adjusts the interaction style, shifting toward a one-way transmission of knowledge. As a result, the contingency decreases while the goal intensity increases.

Extract 8: 众口难调

T: ...^这个周末? 打算做点儿什么呢? XXX。

(2) S: 嗯=我会跟我的朋友一起出去玩。

(3) T: 哦, 去哪儿呀?

(4) S: 呃=就去餐厅吃-吃点饭。

(5) T: 什么? 已经订好餐厅了吗? 还是说...

(6) S: 呃=还没有决定...

(7) T: 到时候...

(8) S: 对, 我的朋友喜欢吃的东西跟我喜欢吃的东西有点不一样, 所以我们每次要一起一起见面, 一起出去。

(9) T: 哦=。

(10) S: 吃饭有点困难。

Communicative Goal (Expression of daily personal topics): Pre-set Goal

(11) T: 你们的^口味不太一样, 是吧?

(12) S: 对。

- (13) T: ^口味。
(14) S: 对。口味不一样。
(15) T: 那你具体来说一下, 你喜欢-你吃东西的口味是什么样子? 然后你朋友是什么样子?
(16) S: 呃= =嗯= =其实他们都不一样...
(17) T: 嗯。
(18) S: 一个朋友他比较喜欢吃, 嗯=波兰菜或者嗯=<S 欧洲菜 S>。
(19) T: 哦=欧陆-欧洲菜系、波兰菜, ^嗯。
(20) S: 还有我另一个朋友, 他比较喜欢意大利菜。
(21) T: <LW 意大利菜 LW>...诶↑, 那这个刚才你说的这个欧洲菜里面也可以包括意大利菜啊= =。
(22) S: 应该可以, 但是我还是觉得意大利菜就有点..有点跟别的...
(23) T: 啊有点要再特别一点...
(24) S: 对。
(25) T: 意大利还有披萨、意面什么的啊=, 对。
(26) S: 嗯=所以-
(27) T: 那你呢?
(28) S: 那-我-因为我不太喜欢吃波-就是我在家里的时候常常会吃波兰菜...
(29) T: 所以去餐厅外出吃饭的话就想说不吃波兰菜了啊=。
(30) S: 对, 是想吃别的。
(31) T: 尝试一点新鲜的。
(32) S: 对对, 然后意大利菜其实我..我蛮喜欢的, 但是其实我只因为有点..油腻了, 所以...
(33) T: @@@意大利菜也油腻啊。
(34) S: 对, 所以我吃以后就肚子有点不舒服, 所以我也不太兴趣@@。

Communicative Goal (Expression of personal preference topics): Emergent Goal

- (35) T: 那真的是像我在聊天的地方写的一样, 你读一下吧。
(36) S: 这是...众口难=难-难调。
(37) T: 什么意思呢?
(38) S: 嗯= =就嗯=每个人的口味有点...嗯不一样。
(39) T: 很难调和, 就是说每个人的口味都不一样。如果我是一个厨师, 我要做饭, 我很难做出这个饭, 让每个人都觉得这个口味很棒, 好吃。众口难调, 意思是-本来的意思, 当然是说我很难做出来一道菜, 一个-一顿饭, 让每个人都觉得好吃。
(40) S: @@@。
(41) T: 这个地方的调是调味, 我们说那个做饭的时候要用调料, 用这些调料来调味, 那当然这个成语现在的意思就是说, 嗯, 你很难让每个人都满意, 很难让每个人都高兴, 很难让每个人都满意。

Knowledge Goal (Learning of linguistic knowledge): Emergent Goal

- (42) S: ..还有我觉得我最喜欢的是亚洲菜..
- (43) T: ^嗯=, 那其实有一种- 给你们一个小的建议, 但不知道这个建议怎么样? @@。你们可以找那种 fusion 的饭馆儿...是吧? 就是...嗯..现在有很多饭馆他们会做这种所谓的 fusion 就是...
- (44) S: <F 对对对 F>就是=有别的菜= =就[有亚洲]菜=
- (45) T: [是吧]。
- (46) S: 但是...因为我住 CC, 还有我觉得 CC 其实没有太多好吃的餐厅, 所以==
- (47) T: 没有这种很多这种 fusion 的饭馆是吧?
- (48) S: 没有, 所[以=]如果有的话很贵@@。
- (49) T: [哦=], 有的话可能价格又比较高=。这种, 我们一般就叫做^融合菜, ^融合菜。把世界上不同地方的菜..的特点融合在一起。
- (50) S: 嗯。

Communicative Goal (Expression of personal preference topics): Emergent Goal

Similar to Extracts 4 and 5, this case starts without a rigid pre-planned structure. The specific goal is generated dynamically as the dialogue deepens, and both participants maintain High Contingency to achieve this goal. In the final stage, the teacher exercises some control to ensure the interaction stays aligned with the newly formed goal, often concluding with a summary turn.

The teacher starts the micro-context with a communicative goal, using daily life topics to practice the students' speaking skills. By catching a useful piece of information from the student's real-life experience, the teacher refines the student's Chinese expression and uses it as a "hook" to lead the conversation into a specific topic. For example, the teacher invites the student to discuss their preferences for different Chinese cuisines. Here, the teacher successfully integrates linguistic knowledge into a meaningful discussion. This practice follows the principle of contextualized language input (Kumaravadivelu, 2003), where language form and function adapt to communicative needs and social contexts.

Figure 6: Mapping from Extract 8

T: 口味。
↑ ↑
S: 对。口味不一样。

This segment represents a highly effective and balanced micro-context. The goal is not forced upon the student but grows out of their own input. There is a clear symmetry between the teacher's guidance and the student's active participation. Knowledge points (like idioms) are taught not as isolated facts, but as necessary tools for the current conversation. Extract 8 is a perfect example of a "dialogic micro-context." It proves that when teachers and students maintain high contingency, they can co-construct a space

where language learning and authentic communication happen at the same time. The emergence of the idiom shows that students learn best when the language is tied to their own “voice.”

Table 2: Pattern summary of the cases

Pattern	Start	End	Goal Nature	Key Characteristic
I	High G / Low C	High G / Low C	Pre-set	Transmission-oriented; Teacher-led
II	High G / Low C	High G / High C	Pre-set	Developmental; Increasing engagement
III	High G / Low C	Low G / High C	Goal Drifting	Student-led diversion; Authentic focus
IV	Low G / High C	High G / Low C	Emergent	Incidental teaching; Goal crystallization
V	Low G / High C	High G / High C	Emergent	Collaborative; Highly dialogic
G = Goal; C = Contingency				

In summary, the five patterns identified above demonstrate that the classroom micro-context is a fluid and dynamic space. The transition from Pattern I to Pattern V reflects a shift from traditional “knowledge transmission” to “collaborative meaning-making.” Specifically, when interaction moves toward high contingency (as seen in Patterns II, III, and V), student agency is activated, and language learning becomes more authentic. These findings suggest that teachers should not only focus on achieving pre-set goals but also remain sensitive to emergent goals that arise from students’ own voices. This flexibility is the key to unlocking the true learning potential within the classroom.

6. Discussion

This study has examined how micro-contexts are constructed and developed in Chinese L2 classroom interaction, with particular attention to the relationship between pedagogical goals and interactional contingency. The findings point to a fundamentally dynamic view of classroom context, in which micro-contexts emerge through the ongoing negotiation between instructional orientation and participants’ locally contingent responses.

The relationship between pedagogical goals and interactional contingency is not fixed, but dynamically negotiated in the unfolding interaction. Rather than functioning as predetermined endpoints, goals are continuously reshaped as participants respond to one another on a turn-by-turn basis.

The analysis shows that when interaction is tightly constrained by pre-set goals, student contributions tend to be limited to brief and display-oriented responses. In contrast, when teachers orient more closely to students’ prior turns, allowing interactional contingency to guide the development of conversation, micro-contexts become more dialogic and open-ended. In such cases, pedagogical goals are not abandoned, but are reconfigured through interaction, resulting in more flexible and emergent trajectories of classroom discourse.

This suggests that the effectiveness of classroom interaction does not lie in the strict implementation of instructional plans, but in the ability to balance goal orientation

with responsiveness to unfolding interaction. Micro-contexts, therefore, can be understood as sites of dynamic tension, where structure and emergence are continuously negotiated.

The findings also contribute to a reconsideration of the IRF sequence in classroom discourse. While IRF has often been associated with teacher control and asymmetrical participation, the present study shows that its interactional function depends largely on the degree of contingency embedded within it.

In sequences with low contingency, IRF tends to function as a display structure, in which student responses are evaluated but not further developed. However, in more contingent interaction, similar sequential formats are transformed through teacher practices such as reformulation, expansion, and alignment. These practices enable student contributions to be taken up and extended, thereby creating opportunities for more sustained participation.

From a dialogic perspective, such transformations are closely related to the phenomenon of resonance, where linguistic structures are reused and adapted across turns. Through these processes, interaction becomes less strictly hierarchical and more collaboratively organized, as participants jointly construct meaning. This finding supports and extends previous claims that classroom interaction can move beyond rigid structural patterns toward more dialogic and participatory forms.

Finally, the analysis provides empirical support for understanding classroom interaction as a space in which key principles of interaction-based learning can be realized. In particular, the development of micro-contexts illustrates how learner participation, authenticity of interaction, and the achievement of pedagogical goals are closely intertwined. Micro-contexts provide a useful analytical lens for capturing how learning opportunities are created in real time. Rather than viewing learning as the outcome of isolated instructional moves.

Learner involvement becomes more visible in sequences where students' contributions actively shape the direction of interaction. Similarly, authenticity emerges when interaction extends beyond predetermined exchanges and incorporates participants' own meanings and intentions. In such contexts, achievement is not limited to the production of correct linguistic forms, but includes the ability to engage in extended, meaningful interaction.

7. Conclusion

By foregrounding the role of interactional processes, this study calls for a shift from viewing classroom context as a static construct to understanding it as an emergent and co-constructed phenomenon.

This study has examined the dynamic construction of classroom micro-contexts through the interplay between pedagogical goals and interactional contingency. The findings demonstrate that micro-contexts are not merely pre-planned instructional segments, but fluid interactional environments that are continuously shaped through

teacher-student engagement. Rather than being fixed in advance, both goals and interactional trajectories are negotiated in real time, resulting in varying patterns of classroom discourse. Effective classroom interaction depends not only on the clarity of instructional goals but also on the extent to which teachers are able to respond contingently to students' contributions. When interaction is more closely attuned to prior turns, it creates greater opportunities for participation, meaning-making, and the co-construction of knowledge. In this sense, micro-contexts provide a useful analytical lens for understanding how learning opportunities emerge within classroom interaction.

At a practical level, these findings indicate that a balance between goal orientation and interactional responsiveness may contribute to more flexible and effective teaching practices. Rather than treating lesson plans as fixed scripts, teachers may benefit from engaging with classroom discourse as an evolving process, in which instructional goals can be adjusted in response to unfolding interaction.

At the same time, this study also points to several directions for future research. Further work is needed to explore how micro-contexts develop across different instructional settings, learner populations, and modalities. In addition, developing more systematic approaches to identifying and evaluating interactional contingency may provide a more robust basis for analyzing classroom discourse. Such efforts would contribute to a deeper understanding of how interactional processes shape language learning in diverse educational contexts.

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Conflict of Interest Statement

The author declares no conflicts of interest.

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