Developing Interactional Competence at the Workplace

Learning English as a Foreign Language on the Shop Floor

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7   Discussion

Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group
NEW YORK AND LONDON

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Introduction

At the start of this study, we asked, *What is it about social interaction that makes competence development possible?* Now that we have joined Xuân and Lành in their guest-escorting walks for about a year, in this chapter, we step back for an overview of their changes over time and discuss possible answers to that question. We will consider how our findings provide additional purchase on the nature of interactional competence and its development. We will also assess how this study advances research on L2 acquisition and learning in general, as well as EMCA research on human social interaction, especially in institutional settings. Bringing the findings to the practical level, we discuss how our study may inform language learning, teaching, and testing. Finally, we consider some of the limitations of the study and suggest directions for future research.

7.1 The *what*, *how*, and *why* of interactional competence development in hotel guest-escorting walks

This study has revealed many changing threads in the evolving tapestry of interactional competence in a given speech-exchange system in an L2. Over the course of about one year, many components of Xuân's and Lành's work as guest-relations officers underwent modification (Nguyen & Malabarba, forthcoming, covers other changes not discussed in this book). Table 7.1 provides an overview of the changes reported in the previous chapters. These changes can be viewed from three angles:

1. The *what*: Activities in the speech-exchange system that were affected by change
2. The *how*: How the interactional practices found in these activities changed
3. The *why*: Aspects of social interaction that might have stimulated the changes

Table 7.1 Summary of Xuân's and Lành's changes over time in guest-escorting walks

What changed	How it changed	Why it changed
1. Small talk about the duration of guests' stay (Xuân, Chapter 3)	■ Fewer interactional troubles, brought about by: ● Replacement of trouble-source with another expression: "what time [tail]" → "how much time [tail]" → "how long" ● Replacement of trouble-source with material appropriated from guests' response turns: "how long" → "how many night [nai]," "you stay with us X night [nai]"	■ Repair initiation by guests ■ Turn design of guests' post-repair responses
2. Small talk about guests' trips (Xuân, Chapter 3)	■ Fewer interactional troubles, brought about by: ● Replacement of trouble-source with another expression: "(did) you have a good trip" → "how is your trip (in Vietnam)" ● Replacement of trouble-source with another expression that incorporated guests' response content: "how is your trip (in Vietnam)" → "you (will) go around Vietnam"	■ Repair initiation by guests ■ Content of guests' post-repair responses
3. Informing about Wi-Fi access (Xuân, Chapter 3)	■ Fewer interactional troubles, brought about by: ● Elaboration of contextual information, using non-problematic linguistic resources: zero context → "in the hotel" → "in your room" → "everywhere" ● Manipulation of semiotic resources: slowing tempo, pausing ● Destabilization of deviant pronunciation in repair context: "password [pakwuək]/[patwuək]" → "password [patswuək]" ■ (No replacement of trouble-source with an alternative expression that was infrequent and less effective: "password" was not replaced by "code")	■ Repair initiation by guests

(Continued)

Table 7.1 (Continued)

What changed	How it changed	Why it changed
4. Small talk about the hotel architectural style (Lành, Chapter 3)	■ Elimination of interactional troubles, brought about by: ● Dropping problematic formulation ("architecture [a:kɪtɛ(t/k)ə:]/[atɪkɛtə:]") among several options in repertoire	■ Repair initiation by guest
5. Assessments of guests' trips (Xuân, Chapter 4)	■ More effective displays of affiliation with guests, achieved by: ● Diversifying resources: adding assessment terms "beautiful," "long way" ● Increasing agency: responses only with recognition and receipt tokens → added terms used in second position assessments → first position assessments	■ Guests' frequent use of certain linguistic resources in assessments of their own trips ■ Interactional practice of producing repetition for affiliation displays
6. Assessments of room (Lành, Chapter 4)	■ More effective displays of affiliation with guests, achieved by: ● Diversifying resources: adding assessment terms "lovely," "beautiful," "amazing/amazed"	■ Guests' frequent use of terms in assessments ■ Guests' upgrading practices
7. Informings about calling the reception desk (Xuân, Chapter 5)	■ Higher sensitivity toward co-participants' actions and contingencies in sequence organization, achieved by: ● Simplification of turn format: *if*-clause + calling action → calling action (routinization of practices) ● Elaboration of turn format: adding "for everything," "please"	■ Guests' frequent repeats of key information ■ Self-repeat and self-repair in response to guests' questions ■ Informing expansions in response to guests' displayed interest
8. Informings about calling reception desk (Lành, Chapter 5)	■ Higher sensitivity toward turn construction design, achieved by: ● Switch in turn formats: calling action + rationale as *if*-clause → rationale as a phrase + calling action → rationale as *if*-clause + calling action (routinization of practices)	■ Integration of a material object in informings ■ Guests' overlapped talk in a two-component turn construction unit

Table 7.1 (Continued)

What changed	How it changed	Why it changed
9. Informings about luggage handling (Xuân, Chapter 6)	■ Increased efficiency, achieved by: • Compacting of turn format: one turn, one focus → two turns, two focuses → one turn, two focuses	■ Recurrent performance of the same action
10. Informings about breakfast (Xuân, Chapter 6)	■ Increased efficiency and effectiveness, achieved by: • Compacting formulation: "you have breakfast" → "your breakfast" • Replacement of formulation: "speak" → "inform" • Elaboration of formulation: "tomorrow" → "every morning" → "tomorrow morning"	■ Recurrent performance of the same action
11. Informings about key card's location in wall socket (Xuân, Chapter 6)	■ More effective overall structural organization to create sequential space for room assessment, achieved by: • Shifting sequential slot of key-card informing: room entry + key-card informing → room entry + assessment + key-card informing → room entry + assessment + other informing(s) + key-card informing	■ Recurrent performance of the same action
12. Small talk about the welcome mat (Xuân, Chapter 6)	■ Increased contribution to ongoing talk, achieved by: • Shifting response turn size and sequential slot: no response to guests' noticings → minimal response → delayed substantial response → timely substantial response	■ Recurrent performance of the same action
13. Responses to guest-initiated assessments of hotel (Xuân, Chapter 6)	■ Increased contribution to ongoing talk, achieved by: • Shifting response turn size and sequential slot: minimal responses → expansion aligning with guest's assessment → expansion introducing a new focus	■ Recurrent performance of the same action

(Continued)

Table 7.1 (Continued)

What changed	How it changed	Why it changed
14. Small talk about hotel history and architectural style (Lành, Chapter 6)	■ Increased contribution to ongoing talk, achieved by: ● Shifting position of tellings: response position → initiating position	■ Recurrent performance of the same action
15. Informings about room views (Lành, Chapter 6)	■ Increased recipient design, achieved by: ● Shifting formulation of local landmarks: including local proper names → omitting the names except when guests showed interest	■ Recurrent performance of the same action
16. Small talk about the weather (Lành, Chapter 6)	■ Increased agency, achieved by: ● Shifting talk about weather: bare informing/assessment → embedded positive spin for bad weather/enhanced positivity via contrasting and personalizing for good weather	■ Recurrent performance of the same action

7.1.1   *Activities affected by modification*

Regarding *what* changed overall, the two guest-relations officers modified their interactional practices in three main types of interactional activities:

1. *Informings* about the complimentary breakfast, luggage handling, key card's location in the wall socket, Wi-Fi access, views from the room, and how to call the reception desk. Over time, their informings encountered fewer interactional troubles and became more efficient, sequentially effective, recipient-designed, and sensitive toward co-participants' actions and contingencies in sequence organization.
2. *Assessments* of guests' trips, the room, and the hotel. Over time, their assessments showed more effective affiliation with guests.
3. *Small talk* about the duration of guests' stay, guests' trips, the welcome mat, the weather, and the hotel's history. Over time, the two guest-relations officers' small talk encountered fewer interactional troubles. Additionally, they contributed more to ongoing talk and exercised a higher level of agency in positive stance projection.

These activities took up the bulk of talk on the guest-escorting walks, with content that was either fairly fixed (informings) or open-ended (small talk, assessments).

7.1.2   *Learners' trajectories of practice modification*

How the two guest-relations officers changed in interactional practices can be summarized as follows:

1. Xuân, the novice officer, *encountered fewer interactional troubles*, a trend further strengthened by comparison with Lành, the more experienced officer, who had fewer and briefer interactional troubles overall (Chapter 3). Xuân's reduction seemed to be the outcome of three types of modifications: (a) the *replacement* of the trouble-source with another expression, which sometimes appropriated and sometimes incorporated guests' turns in the repair sequences; (b) *creative solutions* in which she retained the trouble-source but elaborated her turns with contextual details or manipulated semiotic resources such as speech tempo and pauses. These changes seemed to be triggered and contributed to by guests' repair initiation and post-repair responses. Although much less frequently, Lành also handled interactional troubles by eliminating a problematic formulation among the several resources she had at her disposal to carry out the same action. Her *replacement* of the trouble-source with another expression was done immediately in the same conversation after the guest's repair initiation and maintained subsequently throughout the rest of the data collection.

2. Both officers *diversified their resources* for assessments by appropriating guests' frequently used or upgraded assessment terms (Chapter 4). The added assessment terms were not necessarily new to them; rather, they were newly mobilized as appropriate resources for the specific actions of assessing the guests' trips and the hotel room. This diversification of assessment terms allowed them to achieve further affiliation with the guests.

3. Both officers *modified their formulations* in several informings (Chapters 5, 6). Both Xuân and Lành adjusted the formats of their informings about how to call the reception desk. However, whereas Xuân simplified one part and elaborated the other parts of her informings, Lành switched her two-component turn construction unit around. These adjustments showed sensitivity to co-participants' responses and sequential aspects of turn construction design. Additionally, Xuân increased the efficiency and effectiveness of her turn formats in informings about the complimentary breakfast by compacting, elaborating, and replacing different parts of the informings. A related change was observed in her informings about luggage handling, where she first used one turn to deliver an informing with only one focus (the luggage), then later added a new turn with another focus (the "porter") and finally combined both focuses in a single turn.

4. Both officers *increased their contribution to ongoing talk* over time (Chapter 6). Xuân changed in how she responded to guests' noticings and assessments. While she provided no or minimal responses in the beginning, in later months, she produced more substantial and timely responses and sequence expansions. Lành's tellings about the hotel shifted from being only responses to guests' inquiries or assessments to being also volunteered tellings to reopen small talk conversations with the guests or enter guest-guest conversations.

5. The novice officer *shifted the sequential slot* of her informing about the key card's location in the wall socket (Chapter 6). By withholding it until later in the in-room talk, Xuân opened up a sequential space for room assessments upon room arrival. This can be logged as a change toward a more effective overall structural organization.

6. The experienced officer produced *more recipient-designed formulations* of landmarks when talking about the views from the room (Chapter 6). In later encounters, Lành dropped the landmarks' proper names in most instances to cater to guests' perspective as visitors (vs. locals) and only mentioned the proper names when guests displayed interest.

7. Both officers showed *increased agency* (Chapters 3, 6). Xuân's production of assessments about guests' trips changed from being in second position to first position. Lành's tellings about the hotel changed from being launched in second position to first position. Additionally, Lành embedded a positive stance to shape guests' perceptions. She added a positive spin when talking about bad weather or enhanced the positivity of good weather by contrasting it with previous weather or relating it to the guests personally.

These are changes to semiotic resources as well as methods of organizing actions and the overall sequential structure of the speech-exchange system.

In the context of professional apprenticeship, Goodwin (2013) referred to "the *historical sedimentation* of ways of knowing developed by predecessors" (p. 19, emphasis added). In this study, we have explored the sedimentation of interactional practices at the workplace over a period of time by L2 learners as part of their competence development. This development was possibly informed by institutional tutorials (in the form of a written manual with suggested language to use with guests, Chapter 2) and workplace apprenticeship (in the form of shadowing the guest-relations head, Chapter 2). However, more importantly, competence development was shaped by the learners' own *situated performance of work*. As we have discovered, it was the learners' moment-to-moment shop-floor experience that brought into practical existence the institutional tutorials.

7.1.3   Interactional catalysts for practice modification

Regarding the *why* question—w*hat it is about social interaction that makes competence development possible*—our analysis has revealed a few catalysts for the learners' changes in their interactional practices, namely:

1. Interactional troubles
2. Co-participants' turn materials
3. Specific and emergent aspects of interactional infrastructure
4. Recurrent nature of practices in the same speech-exchange system

With respect to *interactional troubles* as a catalyst for competence development, we found that guest-initiated repair triggered changes in both learners' practices, especially the novice's (Chapter 3). First, we observed that for Xuân, not just any repair sequence stimulated changes; only more extended and frequent ones did. Further, co-participants' self-repair, turn format, turn content, and turn focus after the repair sequence seemed to also contribute to her changes: Xuân appropriated the linguistic materials and incorporated the focus of the guests' responses into her own turns. That is, practice modifications might happen as the coalescence of multiple aspects of repair sequences. Additionally, we discovered that when alternative resources or formulations failed to achieve intersubjectivity, the novice deployed creative means, such as adding pauses, prosodic layering, and contextual information to render her turns more recognizable. In this regard, our findings show the range of solutions that L2 learners may use to deal with interactional troubles. They also suggest that it is progressivity and goal achievement, not accuracy or target-likeliness, that drives interactional changes. Lastly, the finding that Xuân's changes associated with guests' repair initiation took place in subsequent encounters points to the prospective effects of other-initiated repair: How repair is resolved in one

encounter can influence the next encounters in the same speech-exchange system.

With respect to *co-participants' turn materials* as a catalyst for competence development, our analysis showed that guests' turn materials in assessments provided in situ resources for appropriation by both officers (Chapter 4). Although these appropriated linguistic resources were likely known to the learners, the guests' language use seemed to inform them about what expressions would be suitable for the accomplishment of the action at hand. For Xuân, guests' frequent assessment terms about their trips appeared to give her access to the guests' perspectives about their own past experiences. These publicly displayed perspectives together with the associated linguistic resources to express them must have enabled her to pick them up and use them in her own assessments about the guests' trips. From seeing previous guests' assessments, Xuân could respond with similar assessment terms to affiliate with the next guests, and later, even initiate assessments using similar terms with other guests. Likewise, for Lành, guests' positive stances toward their rooms upon entry were exhibited publicly via high-grade assessment terms and prosody (and most likely also embodied actions not captured by the audio data). By reproducing the previous guests' high-grade assessment terms, she could project a level of positive stance that was more likely to match the next guests' stance. Perhaps due to the entailment of stance display in assessments, the clearest evidence of appropriation in our data was found in assessments.

With respect to the *specific and contingent affordances of interactional infrastructure* as a catalyst for competence development, our analysis revealed how changes in both learners' formats of informings about calling the reception desk seemed to be furnished by the unique interactional ecology that each learner was in (Chapter 5). Xuân's changes might have been brought about by the guests' frequent repetition of core information, her own interactional need to self-repeat and self-repair in responses to guests' questions, and the sequential environment of her expansion of another informing prompted by guests' displayed interest. Lành's changes might have been nudged by the need to integrate a material object (the information folder) in the informing and to minimize the possibility for overlap in a two-component turn construction unit. It is important to note that the changes that were initially set off by particular configurations of interactional infrastructure later became "detached" from their original environment and occurred routinely without the triggering contextual elements. These changes highlight the consequences of the co-constructed and situated nature of interaction on competence development: Learners' modification of interactional practices can be intrinsically dependent on the emergently co-operative conduct of themselves and others as well as specific features of the physical environment that are contingently made relevant in social interaction.

With respect to the *recurrent nature of practices in a given speech-exchange system* as a catalyst for competence development, our analysis demonstrated that doing the same activities time and again enabled gradual and incremental modifications to one's own interactional conduct (Chapter 6). The guest-escorting walks' stable structure, tasks, physical setting, and participation framework made it possible for the learners to use prior interactions as a substrate (see Goodwin, 2013) for the tweaking of interactional practices in order to achieve higher efficiency and effectiveness. This tweaking was agentive in the sense that it was not prompted by problems of intersubjectivity, facilitated by co-participant-provided turn materials, or spurred by interactional affordances. The fact that the novice's fine-tuning of her turn designs (in informings about the complimentary breakfast and luggage handling) and adjustment of the sequential slot (for the informing about the key card's location) were incremental and gradual suggests that these changes were dependent on the recurrence of her participation in similar activities. Also, by participating continually in the same action environments with familiar sequential organization and topical content, the two learners could contribute more to ongoing talk, such as responding more timely to guests' noticings, adding response expansions in assessments, and initiating tellings. Additionally, by performing the same activities time after time, Lành learned to recipient-design her formulations of nearby landmarks to better fit guests' perspectives as non-locals. Finally, recurrent participation in the same activities led to elaboration and attention to co-participants' perspectives. After talking about the weather with guests time and time again, Lành laminated her talk on bad weather with a positive spin or projected a positive stance to play up good weather.

In sum, the catalysts identified in our data had to do with guests' interactional conduct as well as the learners' own choices to act in certain ways in situated, co-constructed interaction.

7.2   Contributions to research on interactional competence development

In our journey to examine what it is about social interaction in guest-escorting walks that propels competence development, we have advanced the field with discoveries regarding:

1. Interactional competence development in a particular type of speech-exchange system
2. Interactional factors that can bring about competence development
3. The range of abilities involved in interactional competence development
4. Routinization as a process of becoming less dependent on the context of the initial modification of a practice

5. Hybridity and transitionality as a part of interactional competence development
6. Interactional competence development as coordinated modifications of sequence organization practices and semiotic resources
7. Interactional competence development in learners with different proficiency and experience levels
8. Interactional competence development as both social and individual

7.2.1   *Interactional competence development in a speech-exchange system as a whole*

One of the major contributions of this study is the analysis of L2 competence development in a given speech-exchange system as a whole. Previous research has informed us about how L2 competencies develop in specific actions (or activities), e.g., task openings (Hellermann, 2007), dispreferred response using *no* (Hellermann, 2009b), self-initiated self-repair in language lessons (Hellermann, 2009a), transitioning between talking with peers to consulting one's own computer screen in video-mediated language learning tasks (Pekarek Doehler & Balaman, 2021), complaints in conversations for learning (Skogmyr Marian, 2022), storytelling in daily conversations (Berger & Pekarek Doehler, 2018; Pekarek Doehler & Berger, 2018), and small talk in convenience store transactions (S. Kim, 2023), to name a few. Our study is the first to investigate the development of L2 interactional competence in an entire speech-exchange system (see Nguyen, 2012a, for a comparable L1 study). Doing so has revealed that interactional competence development may be action-specific and involve modifications resulting from the convergence of multiple factors. These aspects have not been previously documented.

We found that at a given time, each learner was making various types of modification simultaneously to multiple parts of the speech-exchange system. As Xuân was adjusting her practices to deal with interactional troubles in ongoing talk about the guests' duration of stay and the guests' trips, she was also modifying her practices in informings about the hotel's Wi-Fi access (Chapter 3). During the same period, she was appropriating guests' assessment terms about their trips (Chapter 4), modifying her informings about calling the reception desk (Chapter 5), fine-tuning her informings about the complimentary breakfast and luggage handling (Chapter 6), as well as adjusting the sequential slot of the informing about the key card's location in the wall socket (Chapter 6), among other things. Likewise, Lành was appropriating guests' assessment terms about the room (Chapter 4) while also modifying her formats in informings about the reception desk (Chapter 5), contributing more actively to ongoing talk (Chapter 6), recipient-designing formulations of landmarks (Chapter 6)

and embedding a positive perspective or enhancing associated positivity in talk about the weather (Chapter 6). What this suggests is that the learners were capable of developing competencies on multiple trajectories at once. An ongoing change in one area did not appear to interfere with a change in another area. This indicates that competence development may be *action-specific* rather than some kind of system-wide shift in an overall strategy. This extends current understandings about the specificity of interactional competence, which has either been defined in general terms such as "situation-bound," "context-bound" (e.g., Pekarek Doehler, 2019, p. 30) or "context-specific" (J. K. Hall & Pekarek Doehler, 2011, p. 1) or considered to be specific to "interactive practices" (J. K. Hall, 1995b, pp. 38–39; see also He & Young, 1998), or speech-exchange systems (Nguyen, 2012a, 2019a).

Also, by looking at the entire speech-exchange system, we were able to identify the multiple forces that converge into the same modification of practice. In Chapter 5, we saw how Xuân modified her informings about calling the reception desk from a long format, "if you like more information, you call number seven for receptionist" to a short format, "number seven for anything/everything." The emergence of the new format was found in two distinct contexts: second informings with self-repeats and self-repair, and expanded informing of the hotel's massage service. In addition, guests frequently repeated only the number to call ("number seven"). All three interactional factors could have led to Xuân's change. Similarly, Lành's change in her turn design to delay the delivery of the core information about what number to call might have been prompted by the need to project a compound turn construction unit as well as to minimize the chance of overlap. These cases show that more than one interactional force might be at work to lead to the same change.

7.2.2 Aspects of social interaction that contribute to competence development

Although previous research has implicitly touched on what may trigger interactional competence development (e.g., Hauser, 2013a, 2017; Nguyen, 2012b), the present study is the first systematic exploration into these interaction-endogenous factors. Based on detailed descriptions of specific changes in the learners' interactional practices over time, we have attempted to understand the *interactional processes leading to these changes*. As discussed in Section 7.1.3, learners' changes in interactional practices may be brought about by interactional troubles, co-participants' turn construction materials, affordances in the interaction's infrastructure, and recurrent participation in the same speech-exchange system.

Qualitative research's strength lies in its import to the understanding of *causal processes*, identifiable in specific events or situations (Maxwell, 2019). Instead of assuming causality as unobservable and thus only inferable through variable analysis as in quantitative research, qualitative research seeks to examine contextualized *local causality* (Miles & Huberman, 1994):

> Qualitative analysis, with its close-up look, can identify *mechanisms*, going beyond sheer association. It is unrelentingly *local*, and deals well with the *complex* network of events and processes in a situation. It can sort out the *temporal* dimension, showing clearly what preceded what, either through *direct observation* [emphasis added] or retrospection [emphasis removed].
>
> (p. 147, other emphases original)

In particular, detailed longitudinal case studies can show how causal processes unfold in the complex world with "all its grittiness and granularity" (Neale, 2021, p. 659). Finely-grained longitudinal studies can reveal the complexity and fluidity of causal processes, in which multiple interacting elements might be at work and changes might take non-linear, cyclical, and multi-directional trajectories (Neale, 2021).

While this view has been adopted in fields such as political science, social policy, anthropology, and education (e.g., Jensen, 2022; Maxwell, 2019; Neale, 2021), an explicit focus on causality has not been in the forefront of research on competence development. Our study thus expands the scope of inquiries in this research area as well as in qualitative research concerning causality 'on the ground' (Neale, 2021). In using microanalysis to trace the same learners longitudinally on the shop floor, we were able to identify spontaneous changes to respond to local demands in interaction, such as the need to repair a trouble-source (Chapter 3), upgrade an assessment (Chapter 4), or deliver informings in ways that fit the sequential unfolding of the conversation (Chapter 5). When these modified practices reappeared systematically in subsequent encounters, it is reasonable to attribute their source to the earlier in situ adjustments. That is, *competence development is driven by in-situ interactional forces*. We believe that by looking inward at social interaction from the participants' perspectives, we can identify where changes emerge and later become part of learners' repertoires as more competent members (see also Brouwer & Wagner, 2004; Firth & Wagner, 1997; Markee, 2008).

7.2.3   *Further specification of abilities involved in interactional competence development*

As described in Section 7.1, our study has expanded the current conceptualization of what abilities *L2 interactional competence* involves.

Corroborating previous studies, we provided further empirical evidence on the development of the abilities to:

- employ creative solutions to handle interactional troubles (Chapter 3; see also S. Kim, 2018)
- manipulate linguistic resources to be sensitive to sequential organization (Chapter 5; see also Pekarek Doehler & Berger, 2018)
- contribute to ongoing talk in both responding and initiation positions (Chapter 6; see also Burch, 2019; Greer, 2016b)
- recipient-design turns to orient to co-participants' perspectives (Chapter 6; see also Skogmyr Marian, 2022)

What is newly uncovered in our study is the development of the abilities to:

1. incorporate the content of co-participants' turns in repair sequences to form one's own turns: While appropriation has been documented as a mechanism for interactional competence development (e.g., Greer, 2016; Pekarek Doehler & Eskildsen, 2022; Yagi, 2007), the incorporation of co-participants' turn content has not been reported before. In Chapter 3, we showed how Xuân changed her question format from "how long" to "how many nights" in order to inquire about guests' duration of stay, a change possibly linked to the guests' responses in which they consistently mentioned the number of nights. This involves *extrapolation* rather than reproduction of co-participants' turns.
2. maneuver components of compound turn construction units to minimize overlap: In Chapter 5, we detailed how Lành shifted her informings about calling the reception desk around so that the core information is delivered later in the turn, thus projecting a compound turn construction unit and minimizing the chance for being heard in overlap. While this sequential sensitivity is often observed in fully competent members (see Couper-Kuhlen & Selting, 2018, p. 39 on syntactic projection), we believe our study is the first to document this in L2 data.
3. compact content into fewer turns, e.g., going from expressing two focuses in two turns to expressing two focuses in one turn: In Chapter 6, we traced how Xuân's informing about the guests' luggage became shorter as she merged the two focuses of the informing (the luggage and the concierge) into one single turn. While previous L2 IC research (e.g., Pekarek Doehler & Balaman, 2021) has documented changes in the lexico-syntactic aspects of formulations, our finding highlights learners' ability to manage the interplay of turn design and sequential organization.
4. adjust the sequencing of actions to accommodate desirable actions such as room appreciation: In Chapter 6, we observed that Xuân's informing

about the room key's location, which was initially her first verbal action upon arriving at the room, was withheld in later encounters until assessments of the room were produced. To the best of our knowledge, although changes in sequence organization have been documented (e.g., from "assessment + account" to "account + assessment" in complaints, Skogmyr Marian, 2021), no previous work has documented a change in the ability to manage the overall structural organization of a speech-exchange system as part of L2 learners' interactional competence development.
5. project a positive stance to shape co-participants' perception: Although stance management has been theorized to be a part of interactional competence (Kasper, 2006), until our analysis in Chapter 6, little was known about how stance projection changes in L2 interactional competence development (see Skogmyr Marian, 2022 for a rare study).

These are newly charted territories in investigations on L2 interactional competence development that can form the starting points for further research.

7.2.4   *Routinization as becoming independent from initial context of change*

Our analysis has revealed a form of routinization that, to the extent of our knowledge, has not yet been documented. Previous research found routinization as a change from multiple alternative linguistic forms to one stable linguistic form in order to achieve the same action (e.g., Pekarek Doehler & Balaman, 2021). In our study, we discovered that semiotic resources and interactional practices initially emerged as tied to specific interactional environments, then later were used independently of these environments. This transition from context-specific modification to context-adaptive modification was shown in Chapters 5 and 6. Xuân's new informing format about calling the reception desk emerged in the contexts of second (repeated) informings and expanded informings; however, it later appeared as part of a series of informings outside these specific sequential contexts (Chapter 5). Likewise, Lành's use of a new format in informings about the reception desk first emerged from the temporal juxtaposition of the informing and the information folder, but later occurred without invoking the folder (Chapter 5). Another case was reported in Chapter 6, in which Xuân's informings about the key card's location in the room became less dependent on both the sequential immediacy to her action of inserting the key into the wall socket and her proximity to the key card itself. In the beginning, she delivered the informing right after entering the room, but later, she delivered it after other in-room informings and after she had moved away from the key-card socket (Chapter 6). It appears that as a

formulation becomes more routinized in learners' practices, it no longer relies on particular contextual elements to occur.

7.2.5 *Hybridity and transitionality in interactional competence development*

Our study expands and strengthens recent findings (e.g., Nguyen, 2019c; Skogmyr Marian, 2023) about the presence of hybridity—interim practices/formats that bear features of both previous and future ones—in interactional competence development. Hybrid practices/formats were fleeting and typically deviant compared to common usage. Hybrid formats can be seen in Xuân's transition from one form to another in topic initiations and pursuits about the guests' trips, producing "how is your good trip" when switching from "did you have a *good trip*" to "*how is your* trip in Vietnam" (Chapter 3). Additionally, in initiating small talk about the guests' duration of stay at the hotel, Xuân went from "what time [tai] have you stay" to "how much time [tai] have you stay" to "how long will you stay" then "how many night [nai] will you stay" (Chapter 3). The hybrid format "how much time" clearly contained "time" from the earlier format and the incipient use of "how" in later formats. Along the same lines, evidence of hybrid forms can also be found in how Lành's new practices for doing high-grade room assessments were used in a "wobbly" manner when they first appeared (her first use of "amazing/amazed" in "you will amazing" and "you will be ama:::zed [meiz]," Chapter 4).

Hybridity is a specific form of *transitionality*—transitional formats/practices used by learners before settling down on more routine ones. Transitional formats/practices can be fleeting (as in hybridity) or used a few times. They may involve deviant usage compared to common usage (as in hybridity) or not. The learners in our data typically traversed through transitional formats/practices in their changes over time. For instance, Xuân's informings about calling the reception desk, she went from "*if you like more information* you call number seven for receptionist" to "*if you like anything*" then finally to "please dial number seven for reception *for everything*" (Chapter 5). Likewise, Xuân transitioned from no response to guests' noticings of the welcome mat to minimal responses to delayed substantial responses to timely substantial responses (Chapter 6). Transitionality can also be seen in Lành's shift in informings about calling the reception desk, from the format 'calling action + rationale as *if*-clause' to 'rationale as a phrase + calling action' then to 'rationale as *if*-clause + calling action' (Chapter 5).

The occurrence of these transient forms, on the one hand, attests to the dynamic and in-situ nature of learning-in-interaction and, on the other hand, suggests that learners' semiotic systems are in flux and open to being disrupted by interactional forces toward changes in interactional practices.

7.2.6   *Interactional competence development as coordinated modifications of practices*

Another contribution of our study is the discovery that modification to an interactional practice sometimes occurred in coordination with another modification in the same action. A case in point is Xuân's changes in assessment practices. Her appropriation of the guests' assessment terms about their trips involved three different stages. In the first stage, she produced only next-turn recognition displays and receipt tokens after guests' assessments; in the second stage, she used the appropriated term in second-position assessments; and in the third stage, she used it in first-position assessments. These gradual stages indicated Xuân's sensitivity to the interactional properties connected to the appropriated resources. By first appropriating guests' terms in second-position assessments, Xuân could affiliate with guests' displayed stance, and then later, by using these terms in first-position assessments, she was able to fish for guests' affiliation with her stance towards the assessed places. This suggests that the process of competence development through appropriation involves not only novel recruitment of certain linguistic resources to achieve a specific action, but also the performance of that action in different sequential positions, achieving different interactional outcomes. Along the same lines, the appropriation of assessment terms by Lành seemed to be closely related to both the assessing terms' semantic import and their upgrading potentials in the sequential organization of assessments. By appropriating guests' high-grade assessments, Lành was also able to expand the assessment sequences.

The intricate interplay between action sequencing in the overall structure and the use of L2 linguistic resources was clearly observed in Xuân's shifting of the sequential slot of the informing about the key card's location to later in the in-room talk. Once this change in the overall structure had taken place, she subsequently adjusted its internal aspects, namely, the deictics used in the formulation (from "your key is *here*" to "your key *over there*"). This provides evidence of the learners' own orientation to the structural change. The coordinated modifications of action sequencing and linguistic resources concretely demonstrate that interactional competence development in an L2 entails the management of language-specific semiotic resources that are bound to the accomplishment of interactional functions. While this position has been put forth previously (e.g., Eskildsen, 2018a; J. K. Hall, 2018; Pekarek Doehler & Eskildsen, 2022), our finding provides important empirical evidence to argue against a separation of universal interactional mechanisms from the language-specific means to realize those mechanisms in L2 interactional competence development.

7.2.7 *Interactional competence development in learners with different proficiency and experience levels*

Our study has the advantage of the combined data from two learners at different levels of language proficiency and amounts of work experience. This is in contrast with most longitudinal research on the development of interactional competence in non-instructional settings, which so far has focused on learners at similar levels of language proficiency or experience (e.g., Barraja-Rohan, 2015; S. Kim, 2019; Y. Kim, 2016; Nguyen, 2012a). By examining the two L2 users in the data, we have gained a more expanded view on learning trajectories at different stages of development.

First, as noted in Section 7.1, the novice officer, Xuân, encountered more repair initiations by guests compared to Lành, the more experienced officer (Chapter 3). This might be because the more experienced officer had more L2 linguistic resources at her disposal. For example, while Xuân mainly pronounced *password* as [patwuǝk] or [pakwuǝk], Lành consistently pronounced it as [paswuǝk], closer to guests' pronunciation pattern. Additionally, Xuân and Lành resolved their interactional troubles differently. While Xuân resorted to interactional resources (pauses, slowed speech tempo, contextual details), Lành opted for other linguistic expressions. This might be due to the fact that Lành started out with several linguistic expressions to do the same action (e.g., "architecture," "French style," "colonial style") and could simply drop the problematic one ("architecture").

The more experienced officer also showed a higher level of agency compared to the novice. For instance, Lành produced room assessments in first position and small talk initiations more than Xuân. Lành also designed her turns to shape guests' perspectives, something not observed in Xuân's data. Relatedly, the fact that Lành produced longer tellings about the hotel than Xuân suggests that, over time, learners develop a growing capacity to manage more extended tellings. This might come with access to more L2 linguistic resources to carry out the tellings and more institutional knowledge required to build their content.

Furthermore, the novice officer appeared to change mostly in basic aspects of task accomplishment, such as intersubjectivity achievement (Chapter 3) and efficiency in informing formulations (Chapter 6). In contrast, the experienced officer appeared to change mostly in additional aspects that make interaction more effective, such as recipient-designed formulations tailored to guests' perspectives or the projection of a positive perspective to shape guests' perceptions (Chapter 6). Perhaps as learners gain more proficiency and familiarity with workplace tasks, they can attend more to the relational layers of interaction.

Taking the two learners' data together, we can conclude that as interactional competence develops, learners may

- encounter fewer interactional troubles due to stronger control of linguistic resources and a wider range of linguistic choices at their disposal
- exercise more agency in action initiation and contribution to ongoing talk
- attend more to stance projection and co-participants' perspectives for goal achievement

With a longitudinal analysis of each learner's changes over time and a cross-sectional view of the two learners, we have been able to sketch a fuller picture of interactional competence development.

7.2.8   Interactional competence development as both social and individual

A thorny but fundamental question in research on interactional competence development is: Is competence and, by extension, its development socially co-constructed or individual?

To begin with, we need to consider the question about the extent to which social interaction itself is individual. Writing on human relationships in communication, Arundale (2020) argued that the social and the individual are intertwined: "what is social and what is individual are linked dialectically in person-to-person communicating" (p. 21). The social and the individual aspects of human interaction exist in a dynamic and complementary interplay:

> Rather than understand the human world in terms of *either* social phenomena or individual phenomena, a yin/yang dialectic demands understanding that world at all times *both* in terms of what is social and in terms of what is individual.
>
> (p. 20)

Given this nature of social interaction, it follows inescapably that interactional competence—and the process of competence development—is also both individual and social.

In our study, we have examined competence development by the same individuals with different co-participants (see also e.g., Hellermann, 2011; S. Kim, 2019, 2022, 2023). This has allowed us to see the individual's agency in making modifications across interactions that were not a part of mutually shared histories with the same co-participants. While interaction in each guest-escorting walk was socially co-constructed, the learners drew

on their own experiences with previous guests to inform their conduct to achieve joint actions with the current guests. The social aspect of competence development is evident in how each learner's changes were sensitive to their unique co-constructed interactional ecology, while the individual aspect is evident in how the learners' cumulative experience with prior co-participants served as a resource for their action accomplishment at hand. Together with research on the evolution of interactional histories among the same co-participants (e.g., Beach, 2001; Deppermann, 2018; Skogmyr Marian, 2022), our study has highlighted the import of prior interactions at a given moment in co-constructed interaction. Importantly, we have shown that a longitudinal study grounded in EMCA can lay bare how an individual's interactional patterns are shaped by past interactions with different members of the same category.

7.3   Contributions to research on L2 learning

This book has provided empirical evidence to advance current understanding of the trajectories of and explanations for L2 learning 'on the shop floor' (see Chapter 1 for an account on Garfinkel's (1996, 2002) use of this term). By examining an under-studied learning context and drawing from EMCA, we have gained further understanding about the L2 learning process and product, and the acquisition of language forms in social interaction.

The learning context examined in our study is distinct from other non-instructional, naturalistic or 'in-the-wild' settings in two regards. While research on L2 learning in these contexts has mainly covered settings where learners are surrounded by the target language (e.g., DuFon & Churchill, 2006; Freed, 1995; Hellermann et al., 2019; Ioup et al., 1994; Kinginger, 2013; Klein & Perdue, 1997; R. Schmidt, 1983; Schumann, 1976; Taguchi, 2015; Teutsch-Dwyer, 2011; Wagner, 2015), we have explored learning in a context where learners have limited access to the target language: the *English-as-a-foreign-language (EFL) context* (see Malabarba & Nguyen, 2019 on the contrast between EFL and ESL [English-as-a-second-language] contexts). Further, unlike most research on L2 learning in non-instructional contexts, we have examined *learning on the job*, where learning goals, processes, and consequences are determined and afforded by the parameters of practical workplace task achievement (see also Brouwer & Wagner, 2004; S. Kim, 2019, 2023).

In contrast to learners in other contexts "in the wild," such as in study abroad programs or conversations for learning, for whom learning is a practical and shared concern that may be explicitly oriented to in social interaction, learners on the shop floor are learning while performing work-related tasks. They not only lack the mutual orientation of their co-participants

to learning but also have to perform their work *as* being competent while they learn the very things they are doing. As Garfinkel (2002) wrote on the "Shop Floor Problem," properties of workplace-specific performance are "unavoidable; without remedies; without alternatives; without substitutes. They do not permit passing, hiding, or time out" (p. 111). In other words, on the shop floor, participants cannot opt out of doing work-related tasks. L2 learning in such a context is thus fundamentally different from language learning in other "in-the-wild" contexts. On-the-job language learning "is undertaken incidentally and marshaled in the services of institutionally-mandated work tasks and responsibilities," and this results in the development of "a relativised interactional and communicative competence that aims to fit the particular interlocutor and the locally-situated work task" (Firth, 2009a, p. 132). Whereas Garfinkel's (2002) argument came from ethnomethodological reasoning and Firth's (2009a) insight came from episodic analyses of workplace lingua franca interactions, our study has provided longitudinal empirical evidence of the actual L2 learning process on the shop floor.

With respect to a conceptual framework and research methodology to understand L2 learning, this study demonstrates that a *longitudinal*, *data-driven*, *micro-sequential*, and *emic* analysis of competence development can draw on the concepts and principles of ethnomethodology (e.g., Garfinkel, 1967, 1996, 2002, 2019; Garfinkel & Liberman, 2007; Maynard, 1991; Rawls, 2008; Roth, 2009) and conversation analysis (e.g., Have, 2007; Heritage, 1999; Hutchby & Wooffitt, 1999; Sacks et al., 1974; Sacks, 1995; Schegloff, 2007a) without resorting to abstract theories of learning such as sociocultural theory (Vygotsky, 1978) and situated learning theory (Lave & Wenger, 1991), as in earlier longitudinal studies on interactional competence development (e.g., Hellermann, 2011; Nguyen, 2012a; Taguchi, 2015; Young & Miller, 2004). This book, therefore, extends and supports the argument made by Hauser (2011), Kasper (2009a), Markee (2019), and Nguyen (2017, 2019a, 2019b, 2019c) that EMCA, though not originally conceived to study learning, is capable of both documenting and explaining locally situated competence development.

Our EMCA-based study also dialogs with socially oriented perspectives in SLA, especially the emergentist approach and the usage-based approach. It lends empirical support to one of the key assumptions of usage-based approaches in SLA, that "use is the driving force of language emergence" (Eskildsen, 2020b, p. 60; see also Ortega, 2015; Cadierno & Eskildsen, 2015). For instance, it is evident that the officers in our data learned through trial and error. A case in point is Xuân's attempt to use the word "code" to resolve repair of "password" as a trouble-source. Since "code" did not prove to be effective, she marshaled other means instead (Chapter 3). Also, in several places, we saw how guests' frequently used linguistic materials

entered the officers' turns (Chapters 4, 5). The finding that Lành's and Xuân's development followed different trajectories due to their distinct interactional experiences also attests to the emergentist view that language learning is "adapting to changing contexts" (Larsen-Freeman, 2006, p. 590; see also Bates et al., 1979; Ellis & Larsen-Freeman, 2006). Although EMCA remains deliberately unconcerned with the cognitive processes of learning, it is compatible with these approaches' data-driven methodology and core assumption that language learning is socially based.

By using EMCA to examine L2 learning at the workplace, our episodic analysis of a series of single moments lined up in a longitudinal research design has provided evidence of learning as both a *product*, i.e., as observable changes in interactional practices over time, and a *process,* i.e., the here-and-now emergence of new practices in situ in interaction. The *product of learning* can be seen each time the learners used a modified method of performing the same action, such as an altered formulation, turn design, or sequential structure. By virtue of the appearance and use of these changes along a temporal dimension, learning must have happened (see also Skogmyr Marian, 2022). The *process of learning-in-interaction* (Firth, 2009a; Firth & Wagner, 2007; Koschmann, 2013; Pekarek Doehler, 2010) was "witnessable" in multiple cases where locally triggered modifications later became integrated into the learners' repertoire of resources and methods. Our analysis has revealed many instances of this. For instance, Xuân's pronunciation of "password" as [patwuək]/[pakwuək] was agitated in the context of other-initiated self-repair of this word as a trouble-source, yielding [patswuək], which approximated guests' pronunciation more closely and resembled Lành's pronunciation (Chapter 3). A second example can be found in how Xuân's informings about calling the reception desk were gradually adjusted on the spot as she dealt with interactional needs, such as repeating herself in a second informing or expanding her previous informing about the hotel's massage service (Chapter 4). The learning-in-interaction process was also evident concretely in how Lành self-repaired a trouble-source ("architecture [aːkɪtɛ(t/k)əː]/[atɪkɛtəː]") with an alternative expression ("colonial style") as a response to the guest's repair initiation, and from then on in subsequent encounters, abandoned the term "architecture" in favor of trouble-free expressions (Chapter 3). It was through an iterative process of examining specific cases close-up and comparing learners' practices over time that we have come to demonstrate empirically that competence development in an L2 is a long-term process built on a series of situated modifications. The *local* becomes the *longitudinal* in interactional competence development.

With respect to *how L2 linguistic forms* are learned, our findings shed new light on the learning of pronunciation, vocabulary, and grammar. First, our study suggests that in workplace interaction, learners may not

resolve deviant or challenging *pronunciation* by correcting or perfecting them; rather, they use alternative expressions or creative solutions to get the message across (Chapter 3; see also S. Kim, 2018). Second, although it is generally acknowledged that *vocabulary* acquisition involves learning form, meaning, and use (e.g., Newton & Nation, 2021), little is known about the process in which a learner actually learns to use a word in workplace contexts. Our analysis of how the two officers appropriated guests' assessment terms (Chapter 4) provides an in-depth account of the gradual mobilization of previously learned words for action accomplishment in a specific action. With respect to *grammar*, our analysis of learners' adjustments to their formats of informings about calling the reception desk (Chapter 5) demonstrates that interactional affordances play a key role in spurring grammatical adjustments—not to go from ungrammatical to grammatical constructions, but to arrive at constructions that serve interactional purposes more effectively. Additionally, recurrent participation in the same activities also led to fine-tuning of phrases already grammatical but which could be tweaked to be more efficient (Chapter 6). Interestingly, we also witnessed a change that did not result in a grammatical expression, which involved the novice's informings about how to claim the complimentary breakfast (from "speak your room number" to "inform your room number," Chapter 6). This deviant expression stayed until the end of data collection, perhaps because it did not result in interactional troubles. This again attests to the powerful role of interaction in shaping learners' language acquisition.

About five decades ago, Wagner-Gough and Hatch (1975) spearheaded empirical research on the role of social interaction in language acquisition. They ended their study on children's language learning in interactions with a recommendation for L2 learning research: "we should not neglect the relationship between language and communication if we are looking for *explanations* for the learning *process*" (p. 307, emphasis added). This recommendation still rings true today, and our study demonstrates that by looking at L2 learning in interaction, we can appreciate the observable forces that bring about learning.

7.4   Contributions to learning sciences

A central question in learning sciences is, how do people learn? To answer this question, a standard approach in education is to use tests to measure people's behaviors, which is presumed to indicate the outcomes of learning (Thorndike, cited in Koschmann, 2011). However, this approach has been criticized for being exogenous, in the sense that it comes from a top-down set of criteria and therefore fails to capture the emergence of knowledge and skills (Stevens, 2010). In an endogenous theory of learning, the focus

is on "the documentation of learning as it is co-constructed in and across events between people, and between people and things, in everyday life" (Stevens, 2010, p. 83; see also Koschmann et al., 2014). This view of learning as "a member's phenomenon" aims to understand the observable learning process in its natural habitat: social interaction.

So far, research within this approach in learning sciences has relied mostly on episodic analysis of "learning as a social activity," to use Kasper and Wagner's (2011) categorization. Learning activities from participants' perspectives have been documented across a wide range of settings in and outside the classroom, e.g., science classes (e.g., Lehrer & Schauble, 2011; Sahlström, 2011), math classes (e.g., Stevens, 2010); surgery operations at a teaching hospital (e.g., Koschmann et al., 2014; Zemel & Koschmann, 2014), family conversations at home and during forest walks (Keifert & Stevens, 2019; Marin & Bang, 2018), and skate parks (Ma & Munter, 2014). Proposing an "ethnographically adequate science of learning," Stevens (2010) posed the question, "how do members themselves connect, stitch, and build together *moments of learning* as an *extended achievement over time and space*?" (p. 93, emphasis added). In the same vein, Lehrer and Schauble (2011) pondered, "how do episodes at a local level of time—which have their own structure and form—contribute to long-term accounts?" (p. 349). We believe that our longitudinal EMCA study provides some empirical evidence to dialog with these questions.

7.5   Contributions to research on social interaction

Although our main focus has been on the two guest-relations officers' L2 interactional competence development, our analysis makes several contributions to research on institutional interaction and social interaction more generally.

7.5.1   *Guest-host interactions in hotel contexts*

Our study contributes specifically to understandings about service interactions at hotels. Previous research on hotel guest-host interaction has only focused on stationary conversations between guests and hosts at the reception desk (e.g., Bengsch, 2016; Blue & Harun, 2003; Purnomo, 2014; Thongphut & Kaur, 2023; Vu, 2015). Our study is the first to reveal the overall structure of the ambulatory guest-escorting walk and the types of actions therein (see the overview in Chapter 2 and the analysis in Chapters 3–6). Unlike front-desk interactions, talk on guest-escorting walks is sensitive to and draws on elements of the material world of the hotel on the unfolding route from the lobby to inside the guests' room. The guest-relations officers we observed recruited hotel features, history, and

objects in their talk. Further, our analysis reveals the fine-grained details of talk in which the hosts not only delivered information about the hotel but also affiliated with guests and strived to construe guests' experience at the hotel as a positive one. In short, our study explicates the actual interactional practices involved in the guest-escorting tasks of "explaining the facilities and services of the room, answering questions, and trying to make the guest feel welcome" (Baker et al., 2000, p. 136), which so far has been only mentioned in hotel management textbooks. Additionally, by analyzing guest-escorting walks, this study responds to recent calls in CA research to analyze more mobile activities (De Stefani & Mondada, 2018; Haddington et al., 2013).

7.5.2   *Informings, assessments, and small talk in service encounters*

The present study also sheds new light on the "institutional shaping" (Mondada, 2023) of repair, informings, assessments, and small talk in service encounters.

In analyzing workplace interactions by not-yet-fully-competent participants, we discovered methods of resolving the interactional troubles that were beyond fixing the trouble-source. While analysis of *repair* by fully competent members shows that other-initiated self-repair typically involves a repair solution that modifies the trouble-source until intersubjectivity is achieved (see Kitzinger, 2013, for an overview), data from the novice guest-relation officer suggests that intersubjectivity can be achieved alternatively by resorting to pauses, slowed speech tempo, and adding contextual information (see also S. Kim, 2018).

While *informings* have been studied in mundane (Thompson et al., 2015) and institutional settings (Fox et al., 2023; Nguyen, 2012a; Peräkylä & Silverman, 1991; Ross & Stubbe, 2022), it has remained largely unexplored in hospitality settings. Our investigation fills this gap by focusing on informings delivered during mobile activities. As our analysis demonstrates, informings can be sensitive to the physical environment (objects and surroundings). For instance, informings can be in response to not only questions as previously shown (e.g., Nguyen, 2012a; Thompson et al., 2015) but also noticings by clients of their surroundings, such as the garden, the pool, the stairs, and so on (Chapter 6). These noticings became available and relevant as the walks progressed. For instance, guests' noticings of the breakfast garden typically occurred as they walked by the garden or rode the elevator with a view of the courtyard through the glass window. Further, the shape of the informing turn can be influenced by the object enlisted in the service of delivering the information, such as the in-room information folder (Lành's data, Chapter 5). These findings add to what is currently known about informings in institutional interaction.

With regards to *assessments*, our findings extend previous studies by showing that in institutional settings, assessments are instrumental in implementing workplace-specific agendas (Chapter 4; see also Lindström & Mondada, 2009). Our analysis points to the interactional jobs done through assessments in the hotel context. For example, assessments served as an entry ticket for the officers to produce related tellings about the hotel or further assessments to affiliate with guests (Chapter 6). Furthermore, positive assessments upon room entry can function as the successful delivery and acceptance of the hospitality goods. In a few rare cases where guests withheld positive assessments in this sequential slot (not shown in this book), they indicated a problem with the room (e.g., wrong number of beds) and requested to change rooms. Future research can further explore these functions of assessments discovered in our study.

The present study also extends previous work on *small talk* in institutional settings, defined as "*concrete conversational sequences* not necessary to the instrumental task itself" (Maynard & Hudak, 2008, p. 4, emphasis original). Our data corroborates existing research in showing that small talk facilitates work-related task completion (Coupland, 2000; Holmes, 2003, 2005; Maynard & Hudak, 2008; Nguyen, 2012a). In the hotel guest-escorting walks, small talk helps to achieve affiliation with the guests, thus supporting the implementation of the hotel's overarching goal of making guests feel welcome. At the same time, our analysis questions the assumption that small talk is independent of participants' institutional identities (Coupland, 2000; Holmes, 2003, 2005; Maynard & Hudak, 2008). In the small talk sequences in our data, the officers maintained their role as institutional agents by drawing on institution-specific knowledge (e.g., the hotel's history and features) or profession-specific information (e.g., tourist destinations). Even with a ubiquitous small talk topic such as the weather, the officers treated it as being relevant to the guests' stay, such as playing up good weather or framing rainy weather as a suitable reason for the hotel's massage service (Chapter 6).

7.5.3 Reconceptualization of 'competence' in ethnomethodology and conversation analysis

As discussed in Chapter 1, due to EMCA's focus on the workings of interaction and not on the individuals that staff them, *how members become competent* has been largely left out of the EMCA's main research program. Our study, with its focus on not-yet-fully-competent individuals over time, is therefore an attempt to formulate how the EMCA's research program can be expanded to account for how competence emerges as a result of recurrent participation in the same speech-exchange system. Our longitudinal analysis expands previous work by highlighting that moment-by-moment

social interaction is organized in relation to interactions that transcend it as "linkages are made to prior conversations" (e.g., Beach et al., 2018, p. 331; see also Deppermann & Pekarek Doehler, 2021). We have shown that what an individual does at any given moment in talk is the coalescence of both what is happening at that particular moment and what has happened before in previous similar encounters. Interactional competence is *both a local achievement and a longitudinal achievement* (see also Nguyen, 2008, 2019c).

In tracing how competence develops in social interaction, our study empirically reveals the specific ways that social interaction is inherently "instructable" (Garfinkel, 1967). For instance, we have demonstrated that the sequence organization of assessments is instructable in the sense that learners can produce newly introduced assessment terms initially in second position and then subsequently in first position (Chapter 4). Additionally, the mechanism for upgrading assessments, which includes higher-grade evaluative terms, prosodic changes, and sequence expansions, renders assessing terms especially visible for learners to pick up. Mechanisms in the infrastructure of social interaction can therefore afford competence development.

7.6   Pedagogical implications

On the practical level, our findings bear important implications for L2 teaching, especially in English for Specific Purposes (ESP), where the goal is to develop workplace interactional competences. They can also inform L2 teaching in EFL contexts, where opportunities for language learning 'in the wild' tend to be limited.

The data and analyses in this study can inform an interaction-centered approach to ESP teaching in at least five practical ways:

1. Teachers and learners in hotel industry management can use the data samples presented in this book as a glimpse into the real-life work of guest-relations officers. Hands-on teaching materials and activities can be developed based on the data excerpts (see the pedagogical cycles proposed by Betz & Huth, 2014). They can guide learners to notice guests' common questions, comments, and repair initiations and how the hotel staff members actually handled them. In the process, learners can discover what worked well or propose their own ways of handling them (see Brouwer & Nissen, 2003; Eskildsen, 2022; Lilja & Piirainen-Marsh, 2019; and Wagner, 2015 for examples of how students' experiences "in the wild" in target-language environments can inform classroom teaching and activities).

2. ESP teachers and materials developers can identify the challenges encountered by the learners in our data (e.g., pronunciation of certain key words, selecting appropriate assessment terms, formatting turns in effective ways, recipient-designing formulations, and embedding a positive stance) and design materials and activities to help their students overcome similar challenges.
3. Since we found that interactional troubles can be ameliorated by a range of solutions besides repairing the trouble-source (Chapter 3), ESP students should be encouraged to come up with creative solutions in addition to correction of language forms, especially when they are not ready to produce these forms.
4. The finding that the novice learner took time to fine-tune her turn formats to approximate prefabricated expressions given in instructional manuals suggests that one cannot assume that what is provided external to interaction will be incorporated into actual interaction immediately and completely. Time should be given for ESP learners to try things out and finesse what works for them on the shop floor.
5. The situated nature of competence development in interaction suggests the importance of experiential learning, where learners immerse themselves in actions with actual co-participants. Practicum learning on the job with guided self-reflection, peer discussion, and supervisor intervention (e.g., through feedback and modeling) can potentially accelerate competence development.

Our findings also bear implications for EFL teaching and learning in general by demonstrating the value of learning in and through interaction. It is through dealing with interactional troubles, seeing co-participants design their turns to achieve actions, and acting in accordance with interactional affordances—all spurred by in-the-moment and co-constructed social interaction—that learners can adjust their interactional conduct and develop interactional competence. Our study supports the suggestion that language learning need not be bound by classroom walls (e.g., Reinders et al., 2022; Wagner, 2015); instead, learners should be given opportunities to *use* language for meaningful communication with others and to carry out the same activities *recurrently*. These opportunities can be created by connecting learners with speakers of the target language in their location (e.g., tourists, expatriates, immigrants, fellow students), abroad (e.g., home-stay hosts), or online (e.g., class-exchange partners, tandem-learning partners, members of communities in the digital global spaces). Learners like Xuân and Lành, who are in an EFL context but have access to "the wild," though limited to their workplace, could benefit from discussing and reflecting on their experiences at work in a community of practice such

as a language class or workplace support group. These activities may take extra work on the teachers' or facilitators' part to set up and manage, but we believe that based on our research findings, their gains are worth the effort.

Finally, our findings may inform L2 interactional competence assessment. A growing body of work, including the edited volume by Salaberry and Kunitz (2019) and the special issues in *Language Testing* by Plough et al. (2018) and *Applied Pragmatics* by Betz et al. (2023), has attempted to operationalize interactional competence as a testing construct. This operationalization is informed by research on the "generic orders of organization" (Schegloff, 2007a, p. xiv; see also Pekarek Doehler, 2019, 2023), such as turn taking, repair, action formation, sequence organization, and overall structural organization in naturalistic settings. Our study provides concrete details about L2 learners' management of generic orders of organization at different proficiency levels. The L2 IC features documented here (see Section 7.1) can thus inform the design of L2 oral proficiency tests. A novel contribution of this study is the documentation of L2 learners' practices to manipulate turn designs and exercise agency in social interaction, such as stance projection to shape others' perspectives. Researchers on assessment of L2 interactional competence may find Xuân and Lành's changes related to these two features of talk relevant in considerations of testing materials and procedures, especially those targeting professionals.

7.7 Study's limitations

The present study is not without limitations. First, a longer observation window with more frequent data collection points and with no gap in data collection might reveal the changes in interactional practices more clearly and fully. Weekly or daily data collection would have captured a more complete picture of the learners' changes. Within our span and frequency of observation (10 months and 14 months, every month), we witnessed changes in some threads of the interactional competence tapestry. It is highly possible that in a different time window, other changes would occur, depending on the dynamic interplay between the learners' competence at a given time and the contingent configurations of their social interactions. On a related point, several of the changes observed took place in the last few months. It would be helpful to see whether they became more routine practices and what might lead to this routinization.

Second, the lack of video data limited the scope of our analysis. For example, we could not fully analyze spatio-temporal contingencies in which the guest-relation officers' activities were embedded. We had to rely on audio data (verbal references, utterances in Vietnamese and other

non-English languages, environmental sounds) to discern contextual information whenever possible. In addition to audio data, a system of cameras in multiple key locations at the hotel would have resulted in a richer database.

Third, we only followed two guest-relations officers. The findings could be more robust had we observed more learners. Between Xuân and Lành, we saw several differences in how they carried out their work. For example, Xuân never invoked the city map while this was a routine for Lành. While Xuân only mentioned the hotel's history briefly, Lành often engaged in extended sequences on this topic. Data from more learners could reveal wider arrays of interactional methods in the same speech-exchange system and how they might change over time.

7.8   Future research directions

The findings from this study have opened up new directions for future research. First, we found some important interaction-endogenous catalysts for interactional competence development in social interaction. Further research could explore other interactional forces that may spur modifications to interactional practices. Second, we analyzed competence development by a novice worker with a lower language proficiency and an experienced worker with a higher language proficiency. Future studies can help tease apart the effects of language proficiency versus work experience on competence development. Third, we have focused on the development of interactional competence within one speech-exchange system. Future research can investigate competence development across different speech-exchange systems. So far, very few studies have pursued this direction (e.g., Nguyen, 2018b) and future research can fill this gap. Fourth, our study touched on some aspects of interactional competence development that deserve further investigation. For instance, there seems to be a critical threshold for changes in interactional practices to take place, such as extensive repair sequences or frequent occurrences of repair and linguistic resources. Future research can investigate the nature of this threshold. Finally, although our study contributes to research on competence development at the workplace, this is an understudied area. More research is needed to explore how learning takes place on the shop floor in a diverse range of workplaces around the world, in monolingual, lingual franca, and multilingual contexts.

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