Ethnography of Multimodal Communication: An English-Mediated University Classroom Interaction Analysis

Etnografía de la comunicación multimodal: un análisis de la interacción mediada por el inglés en una clase universitaria

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This study combines multimodal interaction analysis and ethnography of communication to examine the social dynamics of the English classroom. It investigates the ways in which norms of interaction are established and enacted, how such norms shape and transform the social roles that class members assume in interactions, and the extent to which these norms and social roles are conducive to communicative action in pursuit of learning. Rather than approaching multimodality as the mere use of videos and pictures in pedagogical pursuits, this study examines how human interaction is populated by numerous semiotic resources and communicative modes (i.e., proxemics, gaze, gestures), and how meaning is formed and transformed in their interplay.

Keywords: bilingual education, English as a medium of instruction, ethnography of communication, multimodal communication, multimodal interaction analysis

Este estudio combina el análisis de la interacción y la etnografía de la comunicación para examinar una clase en la que se emplea el inglés como medio de instrucción en relación con las formas en que se establecen las normas de interacción, cómo dichas normas forman y transforman los roles sociales en la clase, y la medida en que las normas de interacción y los roles sociales son conducentes a la acción comunicativa para lograr aprendizajes. Este estudio profundiza en la forma en que la interacción humana está poblada por numerosos recursos semióticos y modos comunicativos (es decir, proxémica, miradas y gestos), cómo estos forman y transforman el significado y, finalmente, cómo el aprendizaje es un efecto de la interacción en el aula.

Palabras clave: análisis de la interacción, comunicación multimodal, educación bilingüe, etnografía de la comunicación, inglés como medio de instrucción

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Introduction

English as a medium of instruction (EMI) has been gaining popularity in schools and universities due to the belief that it fosters learning, particularly, the acquisition of communicative competences in English. There are, however, dangers to oversimplifying this approach (Corrales et al., 2016; Escobar-Alméciga, 2022; Zhyrun, 2016). Such warnings are often founded upon reflections about what learning is and what it could potentially require of learners, educators, and the environment they inhabit (Escobar-Alméciga et al., 2024). The research at hand is not the exception. It departs from Fairclough (2011) and Kress (2011) as the basis for viewing learning as an effect of communication. In this view, the learner engages in unique ways of (inter)acting, (inter)being, (inter)feeling, and (inter)representing with others in social and physical environments and in pursuit of (inter)learning. Additionally, understanding, discovering, knowing, and participating are populated with the learner's emotional, experiential, and sociocultural backgrounds and can take an infinite number of directions, shapes, and forms as these processes surface—at different speeds—in interactions. While deliberations on this general relationship between communication and learning has had a central place in educational debates, less attention has been given, however, to the ways in which such aspects of communication and learning occur when English as a foreign language and its subjectivities is used for instruction and for learning (Escobar-Alméciga, 2022; Escobar-Alméciga & Brutt-Griffler, 2022; Macaro et al., 2018). Consequently, this research examines the ways in which class interactions are configured in an EMI university classroom, as well as their affordances and limitations for participation, collaboration, communication, production, and learning. The following questions guided this inquiry:

- What does the incorporation of ethnography of communication in a multimodal interaction analysis (MIA) unveil about the way communicative action is formed, transformed, configured, deployed, and exerted in the EMI class?
- What instructional, pedagogical, and learning implications arise from how communicative action is shaped and exercised in EMI classrooms?

The Reciprocities of Communication, Teaching, and Learning

In the ethnography of communication, Hymes (1967, 1972, 1974, 1979, 1994) begins by discussing the role that particular ways of communicating play in the reciprocal relations between communicative activity and community building. He asserts that, through time and interaction, groups of people create sociocultural conventions, which form and transform the ways in which they (inter)act with their physical and social environments. Such distinctive ways of (inter)acting, in turn, give way to the possibility for individuals to, on the one hand, see themselves as a part of something greater than just themselves (i.e., a community), and on the other, set symbolic boundaries between their own (speech) community and other communities. Put differently, the unique forms, manners, and textures that communication takes on as a result of collectively constructed social conventions and a mutual understanding of how it is used constitute a speech community. In educational settings, the classroom community embodies the essence of a speech community, with the shared objective of learning and socializing. Over time, class interaction creates shared experiences and knowledge, bringing the members' sociocultural backgrounds to bear on the process. This situates the study of classroom communication in a more social rather than linguistic domain (Escobar-Alméciga & Brutt-Griffler, 2022; Hymes, 1994).

Communication in EMI possesses two additional challenges: first, participants rely on a foreign language and its cultural referents for classroom communication, and second, EMI has the dual objective of developing

communicative competence in the foreign language while also teaching the subject matter (Escobar-Alméciga, 2022). Thus, inquiring into the type and quality of learning taking place in an EMI classroom is a matter of examining the extent to which the configuration of the EMI community grants or restricts access to the social, cultural, emotional, semiotic, and cognitive resources needed for full participation and, hence, learning.

In general terms, Hymes's speech community is determined and progressively configured by a series of elements—namely speech situations, speech events, and speech acts. Speech situations are the communicative arrangements bounded by distinctive sociolinguistic characteristics (e.g., ceremonies, meals, lovemaking). Within speech situations, speech events constitute the individual communicative exchanges shaped by the participants' mutually understood and collectively constructed social conventions—e.g., the exchanges of vows and rings at Western weddings (Escobar-Alméciga & Brutt-Griffler, 2022). They can consist of one or more speech acts and are contained within a culturally-organized sequence of speech events. Finally, speech acts are defined by the function they fulfill (apology, compliment, joke, etc.). Such an assessment should be based on the way in which semiotic resources and modes are configured, formed, transformed, and used in communicative action, as well as in light of the relationships that semiotic resources and modes have with broader communicative contexts, such as events, situations, and the community.

For such an ambitious undertaking, and in harmony with Hymes's perspective on the way communication should be assessed, Norris (2004) laid bare categorical themes of multimodal aspects of communication that were previously implied or addressed in abstraction from theories on multimodality in Hymes's framework. Hymes's face and body motion, for instance, is unpacked by Norris into gestures, gaze, proxemics, body orientation, posture, performance, and the like.

More precisely, Norris's (2004) MIA operates in two main domains. The first one has to do with the nature of actions and how they are deployed and accomplished, looking into lower-level, higher-level, and frozen actions. Lower-level actions are the smallest meaningful actions identified in an interactive situation. Higher-level actions are usually larger, compound actions that can be composed of a number of lower-level actions. Finally, frozen actions are those that must have taken place in the past for a present layout to be the way it is. The second domain pertains to the characterization of a communicative episode, focusing on the interplay of semiotic resources and communicative modes in communicative action. In this domain, Norris proposes three main categorical themes: (a) mode density, which refers to the number of modes interacting in a communicative action or a communicative episode; (b) mode intensity, which is concerned with the degree of importance that one mode had compared to the other modes in the negotiation of meanings; and (c) mode complexity, which is assessed looking at the density and intensity together.

Method

This study integrates MIA (Norris, 2004) with ethnography of communication (Hymes, 1967, 1972, 1974, 1979, 1994) to examine the ways in which interactions are configured, as well as how interactions and the classroom community influence each other reciprocally in EMI teaching and learning.

Context and Participants

The study took place at a private university in Bogotá, Colombia, where Spanish is the official language. The university's English program adheres to the standards of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR). Students majoring in English language teaching, international relations, or related fields are required to attain a C1 (advanced) proficiency level, whereas students from other programs

are expected to demonstrate proficiency at the B1 or B2 levels. The university is committed to improving the English proficiency of Colombian professionals by implementing EMI as a means of promoting the social and academic use of English within the classroom. To this end, the university initially identified particular academic programs for which a higher proficiency in English represented a greater asset. One such case is the International Business undergraduate program, which adopted EMI for the *Business Communication* course, typically taken in the sixth semester of a ten-semester plan of study.

This course was composed of 13 adult students and their teacher. The students' ages ranged between 18 and 24 years. The required linguistic knowledge and competence in English for this course should correspond to the B2 level of the CEFR (upper intermediate). The teacher was a 35-year-old Colombian man with a C1 English proficiency level, having lived in English-speaking countries as part of his professional development.

Data Collection and Analysis

The data were collected through audio and video recordings of the class sessions. Video recordings were collected twice a week for class periods of 90 minutes each, totaling 14 sessions, which corresponded to 1,260 minutes of recording time. Pseudonyms were used to protect the participants' identities. Similar to the work of Escobar-Alméciga and Brutt-Griffler (2022), the data analysis in this study focused on examining the processes through which participants appropriated, activated, transformed, and deployed their diverse social, cultural, emotional, and cognitive resources to co-engage, co-express, co-exist, and co-learn within the EMI learning environment. The analysis essentially sought to shed light on how such arrangements granted or denied access to, for instance, social participation and learning (Escobar-Alméciga & Brutt-Griffler, 2022; Hymes, 1994; Norris, 2004; Wilmes & Siry, 2021).

Resembling Escobar-Alméciga and Brutt-Griffler's (2022) and Wilmes and Siry's (2021) general approach to MIA, there were five general stages in the analytical process: video viewing; selection of the analytical focus; layering of multimodal communication through both a priori and open coding, combined with the creation of visual representations of mode interaction; and rich description.

As such, I conducted an initial level of analysis, which involved identifying communicative events (focal episodes) within the communicative situations that fit the five criteria shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Criteria for Episode Selection

1	In the event, the participants were grappling with class-related matters
2	Multiple semiotic resources and modes were present during the meaning-making process of the communicative event
3	There was a collective effort to try to understand the concept or topic (two or more people negotiated the meaning of the concept while interacting)
4	Multiple semiotic resources and modes were not only present but also taken up, validated, and used by participants, contributing to the collective and emergent construction of the interaction
5	The event was illustrative of communicative or learning phenomena

These five criteria yielded 17 communicative events, out of which three were brought to bear in this article to illustrate the discussion. For the subsequent stage of the analysis, Norris (2004) proposes assessing communication in terms of the role that semiotic resources play in configuring communicative modes. In her framework, there are two analytical phases. In the first phase, using the a priori codes identified in Norris (2004; see Table 2), semiotic resources are examined and characterized in their interplay with others as they are deployed in modes of communication.

Table 2. Semiotic Recourses-Related Codes

Code	Explanation
Gestures	Body movements that convey meaning
Proxemics	The way distance or closeness among individuals and objects conveys meaning
Speech	Talk
Gaze	The way eye direction indicates communicative action
Posture	The way the body position indicates communicative action
Layout	The way that the organization and distribution of objects, people, and places convey meaning
Images	The way meaning is achieved through visual representations

The second phase involves examining communicative events in terms of mode density, mode intensity, and mode complexity, which were also used as a priori codes (see Table 3). Visual representations of their complexity are included in the picture sequences in the findings.

Table 3. Mode-Related Codes

Code	Explanation
Density	The number of modes at play in communicative action or a communicative event
Intensity	The degree of importance or prevalence that one mode has in unlocking and negotiating meaning
Complexity	Intensity + Density

Once the interplay of semiotic resources and communicative modes in interaction was characterized following Norris (2004), Hymes's (1994) theory informed the examination on the ways in which these semiotic resources and communicative modes had an even greater role in forming and transforming broader communicative contexts like communicative acts, events, situations, and the community. In that respect, the analysis was based on five main concepts from Hymes' framework to generate a priori codes (see Table 4).

To develop this microanalysis into more meaningful heuristic narratives, the final coding cycle identified categorical themes by characterizing semiotic resources and modes, as well as their interplay with broader communicative contexts, to discuss the ways in which participants exerted communicative action (see Table 5).

Table 4. A Priori Codes and Code Description (Based on Hymes' Framework)

Code	Explanation
Context	The way objects, places, and people are positioned in relation to one another, and how that may shape and reshape the way people can interact with the social and physical environments
Norms	The actions that implicitly or explicitly indicate acceptable, desired, or undesirable interactional behavior (norms of interpretation/norms of interaction)
Roles	The social positioning of people and how this may influence interactional dynamics
Forms	The properties of utterances and language use (e.g., semiotic resources and modes) and the responses such properties generate
Genres	The communication styles

Table 5. Categorical Themes

Code	Explanation
Establishing norms of interaction that foster multimodal communication	Explored the type of behavior that was expected, desired, promoted, and understood, as well as the extent to which such behavior progressively became common in the classroom
Social roles emerging in the EMI multimodal interaction	Discussed the different roles in communication and their affordances and limitations for interaction
Extrapolating the notion of *speech act* onto multimodal communicative action for the EMI classroom interactions	Examined the ways communicative action was configured and what it indicated about the construction and appropriation of knowledge

Findings and Discussion

This section explains how semiotic resources were deployed in communicative modes to accomplish communicative actions (speech acts) in communicative events, and how communicative acts and events interacted in the formation and transformation of communicative situations, community building, and the possibilities for learning in the EMI classroom. As such, I first explore the ways in which norms of interaction are established in the classroom. Then, I describe how such interactions led to the development of particular social roles. Finally, I account for the ways in which such norms of interaction and social roles promote communicative action and the pursuit of learning, extrapolating the notion of speech act onto multimodal collective communicative action.

Establishing Norms of Interaction That Foster Multimodal Communication

One of the greatest affordances of interweaving Hymes's ethnography of communication with Norris's MIA is that we can examine how semiotic resources and modes come into play in the formation and transformation of social norms for communication within a given group. Norms consist of the explicitly and implicitly agreed-upon communicative behaviors that, through time and interaction, come to be accepted and desirable within social groups, as well as the subjective knowledge collectively constructed in interaction.

**Excerpt 1: Establishing norms through multimodal talk about appearance**

(1)   Teacher: Today, (2) in one part,

(2) we're gonna check all our personalities, and we have adjectives on this one.

(3) So, the first one, personalities.

(4) First, skin tone, tanned.

(5) What is a tanned person, who is tanned in this classroom? (Paola pats Juan's back)

(6) Juan, yeah, very good, you are tanned. (Teacher pointing finger)

(7) Then, what's fair in terms of skin? (Teacher pointing at his arm)

(8) What's fair?

(9) Tanned is like Juan, fair is (3) (Teacher pointing finger)

(10) David: *Blanco*. [White]

(11) Camila: Like me.

(12) Teacher: In the middle, in the middle.

(13) I would say Camila, Ryan too; it's like fair. (Pointing finger)

(14) It's not tanned, it's fair.

(15) Teacher: Who is pale in the classroom? (Hand gesture)

(16) Luisa: Daniel.

(17) Teacher: Michelle, no, look, pale.

(18) Look, look, look, boys, pale is the European. (Hand gesture)

(19) Daniel

(20) It's the European white, that person is like VERY, VERY, VERY WHITE, yeah?

(21) Michelle is getting a little bit close to that, but not too much.

(22) Ryan: That's racist, though. (Pointing finger)

(23) Teacher: No.

(24) It's alright.

(25) Ryan: No, no.

(26) Nicholas: It's originally right to say that people have black skin.

(27) Teacher: I'm not racist, but dark people have dark skin.

(28) Ryan: is black.

(29) Teacher: Ok, very good.

(30) So, let's go with hair.

(31) The style, what kind of hair is yours?

(32) Curly, very good.

(33) How about you, Michelle?

(34) Michelle: Straight.

(35) Teacher: Straight.

(36) And there's one that's not there, yeah?

(37) That is wavy, yeah?

(38) Wavy.

(39) Who has wavy hair?

(40) Not you, not you.

(41) Nicholas: *Como de…* [Like…]

(42) Teacher: It's not curly, it's in between straight and curly, you see? (Pointing finger)

(43) Probably Daniela, a little bit.

(44) Nicholas: No.

(45) Teacher: No, not too much.

(46) I WAS (1) wavy, ok? (Everyone laughs)

(47) No, I am this one, (1) shaved. (Pointing finger)

(48) Yeah, shaved, that's why, that's why. (Hand gesture)

Communication in the EMI promoted self-recognition as it involved discussing their own and their peers' physical appearance, thereby establishing the norms of interaction for the class. For instance, in response to the first question, "Who is tanned?", Paola participated by making a hand gesture that pointed at Juan, the dark-skinned student in the class (see Figure 1).

Paola tilts her head slowly and gently toward Juan, signaling that she has an answer to the question. In Picture 3 of the sequence, we can see that she repeatedly patted Juan with her hand, who was sitting on her left-hand side. This hand gesture accomplished two communicative acts: she exhibited some sort of knowledge about the topic and, instead of pointing, she patted Juan's back, which softened her response as it conveyed a caring gesture. We can also see in the sequence that her answer was taken up and validated through gestures when the teacher pointed his finger at Juan and verbally expressed, "Juan, yeah, very good,

Figure 1. Multimodal Responses
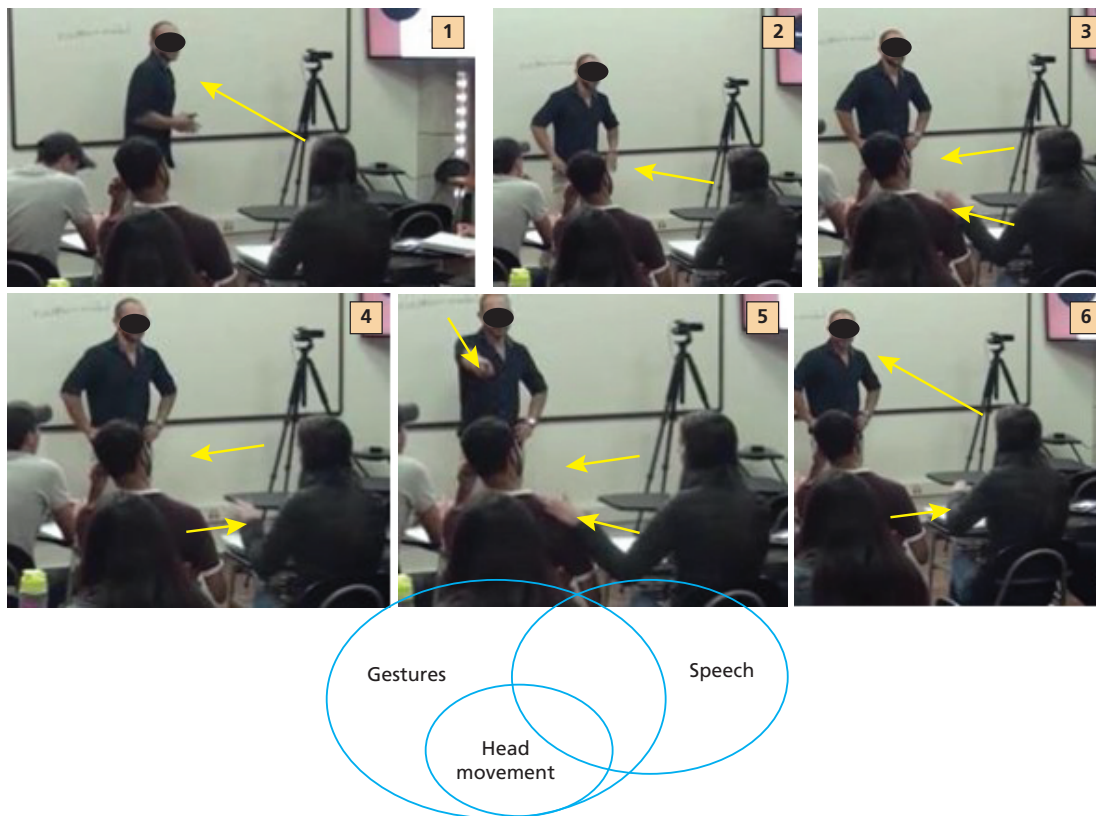
you are tanned" in Line 6. This is illustrative of Norris's (2004) concept of mode intensity, as this hand gesture exhibited greater importance than any other semiotic resource or mode in meaning-making in the situation illustrated in Figure 1.

Similarly, in the next question, "What's fair?", in Line 8, David answered "*blanco*" in Line 10, which is a word for white in Spanish, and received a response from Camila ("Like me") in Line 11. Then, the teacher, in response, showed and used his own body (see Figure 2). Then, in Line 16, he asked, "How about pale?", accompanying the question with a hand gesture (Picture 3 in Figure 2). This made students look and point around. Students thus demonstrated their understanding of the question, as well as their level of knowledge and appropriation of the concepts being discussed, when describing themselves and others (Fairclough, 2011; Kress, 2011). This connects

with Wilmes and Siry's (2021) embodied dialogism, where students responded to teacher discourse with their gestures, gazes, and movements, as illustrated in Figure 2.

While class members interacted with one another, they began to reflect upon aspects beyond forms of language, entering into debates more closely related to the politically appropriate uses of language. In Lines 22–28, for instance, students questioned the social appropriateness of expressions referencing skin color. It is significant here that students were moving past instrumental aspects of language use into more abstract and complex considerations of social pragmatics (Escobar-Alméciga, 2015). This begins to elucidate their appropriation of English as a complex array of arrangements that form a communication system—the social and cultural behaviors that are modeled and appropriated in interactions within social groups and situations (Norris, 2014).

Figure 2. Referring to Myself
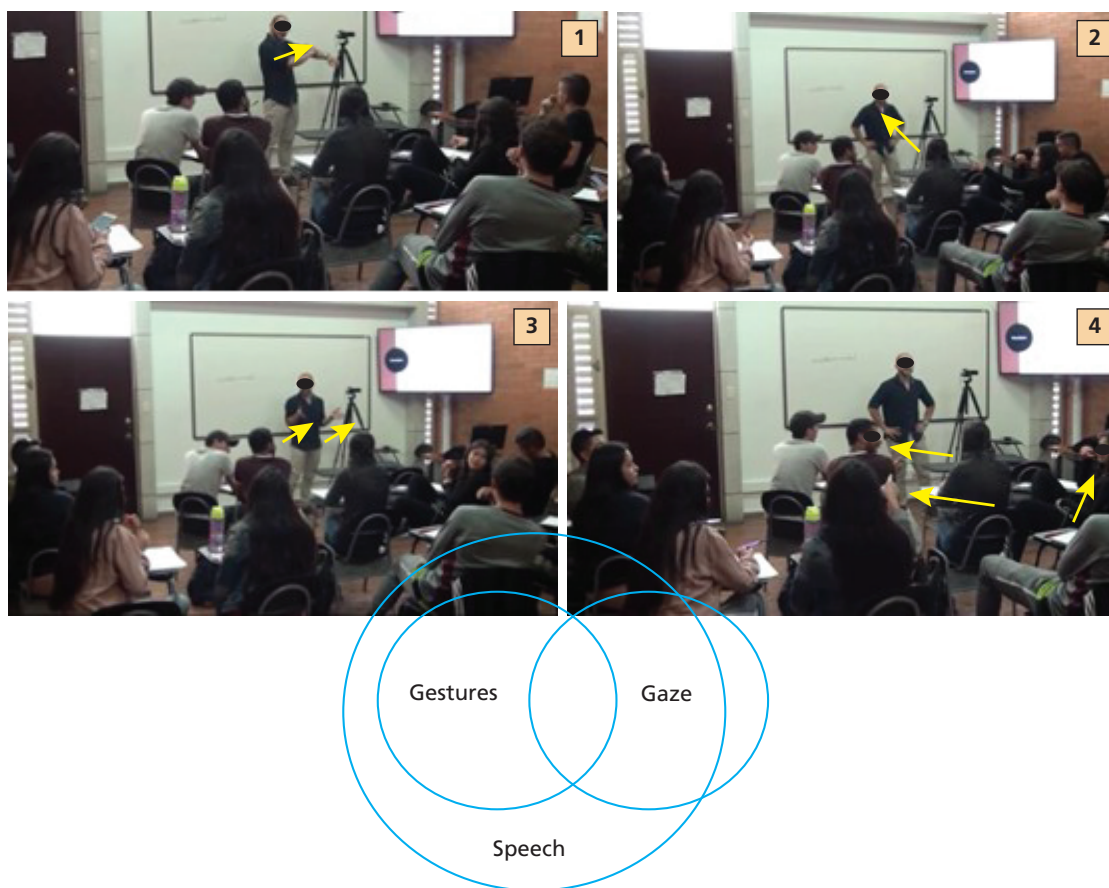
In addition, when the teacher introduced the expression "wavy hair" in Line 37, he stated that he used to have wavy hair, emphasizing the past tense (Line 46). As a response to his comment, the students laughed. In this situation, the students were doing far more with language than expected. They demonstrated that they understood the meaning of the word and what their teacher looked like, and from this contradiction, they grasped the irony. This made the teacher restate that he was now bald, making a hand gesture, which accomplished two things: it provided points of reference and interrupted the formalities of the class, allowing them to laugh at themselves and at each other, and to feel more at ease in a more inviting environment (Bakhtin, 1994). Aukerman et al. (2017) argue that

the teacher's discursive practices have an influence on the students' communicative behavior. Similarly, Escobar-Alméciga and Brutt-Griffler (2022) argue that, although the classroom's social climate for learning is collectively constructed, the teacher plays a central role in establishing, promoting, and/or modeling the norms of interaction that shape the social dynamics therein.

Social Roles Emerging in the EMI Multimodal Interaction

Hymes's EC and Norris's MIA prompted an analysis that identified relationships between the micro-level elements of communication—such as actions, semiotic resources, and modes—and broader social factors, including social organization, structures, and roles. As

such, the interactions in the EMI classroom provided us with a glimpse into the relationship between people's social roles and their communicative actions.

**Excerpt 2: From unquestioning reception to agentive and sarcastic acts**

(1) Teacher: We're gonna start playing. Today, I wanted to play. (Writes on board making a squeaky noise)

(2) Sofía: *Profe*, (inaudible) *¡que suene!* [Teacher . . . let it squeak!]

(3) Teacher: I really love that sound. (Hand gesture)

(4) Person, guess a person. (Hand gesture)

(5) So, look, (2) I'm thinking about a person, and you have to ask me usual questions using that (pointing finger)

(6) vocabulary we have, ok? (Pointing finger)

(7) So, I'm thinking about a person, this person, I'll give you a clue, it's a man, very good?

(8) Who can ask me questions?

(9) Questions, using that vocabulary. (Pointing finger)

(10) Is he blonde? Does he have bushy eyebrows? Or I don't know.

(11) Mariana: Does he has…?

(12) Teacher: Does he has? (Gaze shift to Mariana)

(13) Does he have.

(14) Woo, Mariana, does he have. (Hand gesture)

(15) Mariana: Have.

(16) Sofía: *Porque el* has *ya tiene*. [Because it already has the has] (Gaze shift to Mariana)

(17) Mariana: *Ah sí, claro*. [Oh, yes, of course] (Gaze shift to Sofía, nod)

(18) Teacher: Ah, yeah, oh my God.

(19) Mariana: Does he have (2) a pointed nose? (Teacher pointing finger)

(20) Teacher: Does he have a pointed nose?

(21) No, he does not. (The teacher walks over and takes a seat among the students.)

In an initial round of a *guessing the secret identity* game, and in order to model the dynamics, the teacher thought of a famous person's name, and the students asked him questions to gather information and make an informed guess. In subsequent rounds, the teacher chose to sit among the students and ask questions while a student led the exchange—an action that may be interpreted as an attempt to foster a more informal and collaborative classroom atmosphere (see Figure 3, Picture 5). This flow of class communication created opportunities for participants to take on different roles in interaction, creating a social climate where formalities were eased (Bakhtin, 1994), which in turn fostered multidirectional and purposeful communication. One such example of this phenomenon was when the teacher wrote on the board and made a squeaky noise with the marker. Sofía, in Line 2, made a sarcastic remark ("let it squeak!") subtly mocking the high-pitched noise of the marker on the whiteboard. The teacher responded with good humor by dramatically drawing an unnecessarily long line beneath his writing, intentionally prolonging the irritating sound the student had ironically commented on. "I really love that sound!", he added in Line 3 (Figure 3).

The student sarcastically remarked, "*¡Que suene!*" (let it squeak!), playfully mocking the unpleasant sound of the marker with a deliberately contradictory request for more of the very noise that caused discomfort. The teacher, responding in English, mirrored the irony and engaged in a moment of role negotiation through shared humor. The teacher used body movement, writing, and speech to accomplish his response, which was performed. Additionally, the mode complexity was ultimately articulated through the teacher's performance of higher- and lower-level actions, producing a collective response from the entire class—laughter. Building on the discussion of social norms, Boyd et al. (2018) highlight the role of students in creating social rituals over time through classroom interactions (e.g., a handshake). These rituals contribute to the gradual and collective establishment of a community in which students actively shape the social roles therein. Similarly, in Wilmes and Siry's (2021) view of dialogism as a

Figure 3. Negotiating Symbolic Roles Through Sarcasm
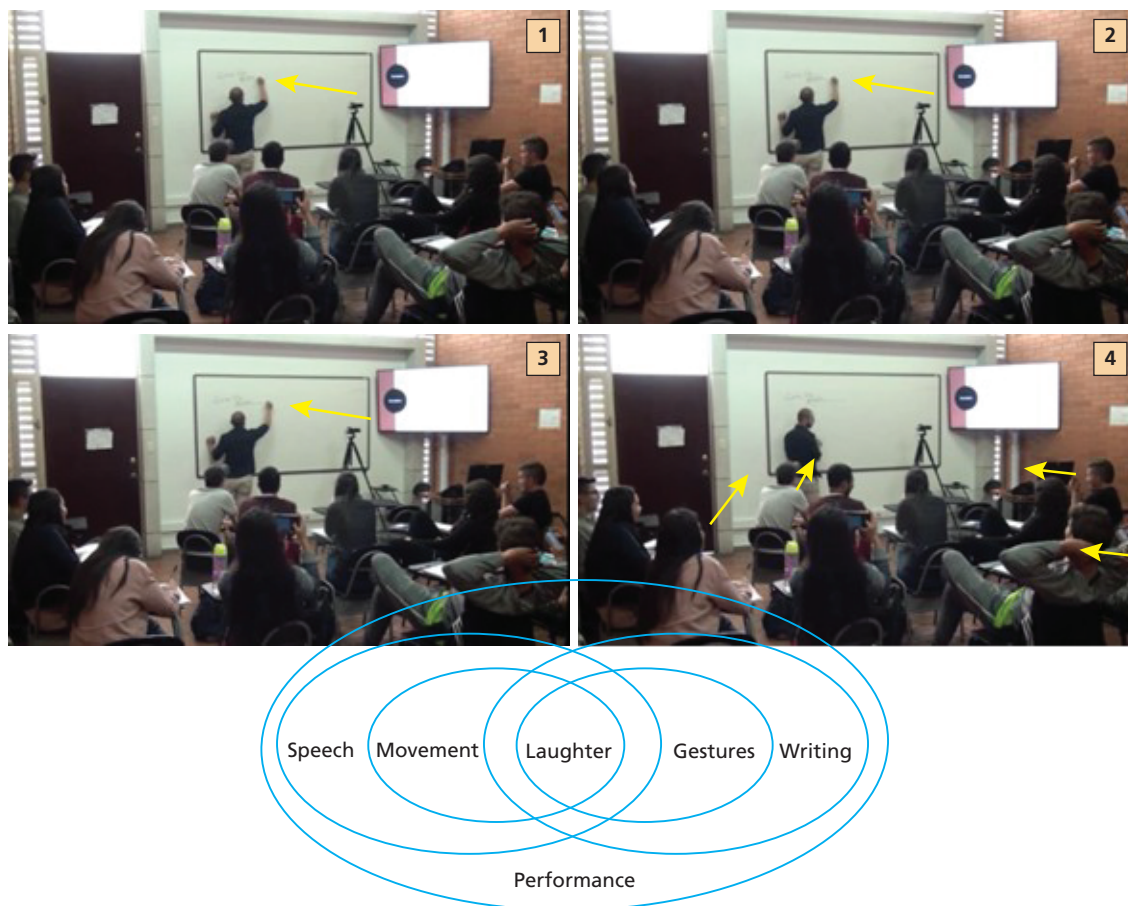
relational perspective, students navigate their similarities and differences, as well as their emotions toward themselves and others, through multimodal interactions. These processes allow them to define how they relate to one another and to the teacher, while continuously and fluidly challenging hierarchical roles by leveraging symbolic power, such as sarcasm.

This type of communication also provided opportunities for participants to model, practice, and refine both the syntactic and pragmatic aspects of language use. Line 11 illustrates how students approached asking yes/no questions, creating opportunities to model and explain the grammatical structure of such linguistic forms. The role of the teacher was sufficiently decentered that students also took an active role in correcting and

supporting the process of other classmates. In Line 11, for example, Mariana asked "Does he has" [*sic*] and the teacher restated the question in the exact same way the student asked, but he added a questioning tone in his voice. He then provided the proper way of saying it, but the student kept talking as if she had not caught the observation. The teacher did not let this go unnoticed. In Line 14, he made an exclamation noise to get the student's attention and restated the question for her. Mariana then acknowledged the teacher's correction, but her tone of voice was doubtful. In Line 16, Sofia intervened to explain to Mariana the reason why that was the right way to say it. When Mariana said (in Spanish) "ahh, right" in Line 17, she acknowledged that she understood, and in Line 19, she restated her

question correctly. What this adds to the discussion, in coherence with Gibbons Pyles (2017), is that even though students' voices are often overshadowed in the traditional school structures of power, the students' voice in this EMI classroom had gradually created a social space for themselves with academic authority, which also decentered the role of the teacher.

When the teacher asked the question about straight hair, Pedro turned to Alicia, who had straight hair (see Picture 2 in Figure 4). From Picture 3 on, Pedro reached out, grabbed Alicia's straight hair, lifted it, and let it go as if he were saying, "hair like yours." This action is evidence that Pedro was aware of what others were talking about and participated through this highly complex performance, which included gaze, hand, and head movements. Even though they were playing, their interaction suggested that they were engaged with the class content and demonstrated topic-related knowledge, taking diversified roles to exchange knowledge and relate to others in a multiplicity of directions, rather than addressing the teacher alone. In a similar situation, Roth (2001) reports on the role that gestures played in discussing physics-related content, particularly in the initial stages of the class when students lacked the technical language. As they engaged in topic-based conversations, body movements made up for what they may have lacked in terms of the linguistic code. Goldin-Meadow (2000) referred to gestures and body movements as "a window to the mind" and explained that these are opportunities to evidence or to interact with students' knowledge that cannot or does not surface in the spoken mode.

Extrapolating the Notion of Speech Act Onto Multimodal Communicative Action for the EMI Classroom Interactions

The term "speech acts" may misleadingly suggest that these are predominantly accomplished via the speech mode and its prosodic properties. Multimodality offers an additional opportunity to explicitly desegregate communicative action into the multiplicity of semiotic resources and communicative modes in which meaning is asymmetrically distributed, yet interconnected (Escobar-Alméciga & Brutt-Griffler, 2022). In this view, any given mode may play a central role in meaning-making and in performing and exerting acts of communication in particular situational contexts. In the case of the EMI classroom, the complexity of semiotic resources and communicative modes in interaction was often complementary (see Excerpt 3).

Excerpt 3: Multimodal descriptions and symbolic associations

(1)   Teacher: One, two, three, four, five, six, seven, Sofía. (Pointing fingers at students)

(2)   Where did you place…?

(3)   Now, what do you have under the (1) triangle?

(4)   Sofía: Ambitious.

(5)   Sofía: And bossy.

(6)   Teacher: And bossy.

(7)   Why do you have that?

(8)   Sofía: Because for me like triangle is like always on the top. (Hand gesture upwards)

(9)   Teacher: On the top.

(10)   Sofía: Like ambitious.

(11)   Teacher: Yeah.

(12)   Very good, that's a very good assumption, I've never heard that, excellent.

(13)   So now, it's not Daniela, it's gonna be Oscar.

(14)   What do you have under the heart, the square, sorry. (Pointing finger at Oscar)

(15)   Oscar: Narrow-minded and easy-going.

(16)   Teacher: Very good, why?

(17)   Oscar: Maybe, like the vision of a squared person is the, is a person that always stays (square hand gesture). (Postural shift of several students)

(18)   in what he lives but cannot get over or through (almost inaudible). (Hand gestures)

(19) Teacher: Very good, that's for narrow-minded.

(20)   And why do you have easy-going there?

Figure 4. Other Forms of Interacting

(21) It's kind of like different, but why do you have it?

(22) Oscar: I mean, it depends on the squared person. (Hand gesture)

(23) Teacher: Ok, yeah, very good. (Pointing finger)

(24) Ah ok, so you relate the square with the person setting, with the person mindset.

(25) That's an amazing one.

(26) Marta, what do you have under the bolt?

(27) Marta: (4) Bad-tempered.

(28) Marta: Impulsive.

(29) Marta: (3) Eccentric.

(30) Teacher: What else?

(31) No more?

(32) Marta: No. (Nod)

(33) Teacher: Why?

(34) Marta: Because it's a person that (3) (almost inaudible)

(35) Teacher: This person has what? (Gaze shift at Marta and hand gesture)

(36) Sorry?

(37) Teacher: Ok, don't worry about it, it's just relations, just relations. (Hand gesture)

(38) It's a person, like you have negative adjectives under the bolt, you have impulsive, eccentric and

(39) what is the other one? (Gaze shift at Marta)

(40) Marta: Bad-tempered.

(41) Teacher: Bad-tempered, yeah.

(42) So, there is a relation, yeah.

(43) Most of the people use the negative adjectives under the bolt because they relate it to violence,

(44) with aggression, yeah? (Pointing finger) (Marta nods)

In this activity, students were provided with a set of personality traits and asked to associate each trait with a particular shape or figure—such as a lightning bolt, triangle, square, or other symbolic forms—by placing the words either within or beneath the chosen images. The task aimed to encourage reflective thinking, explore the metaphorical relationships between visual symbols and personal characteristics, and prompt students to explain their choices, thereby fostering student talk and interaction. In Line 1, the teacher asked Sofía about her choices. Sofía justified her decision to place the words "ambitious" and "bossy" under the figure of a triangle. She said that ambitious people wanted to be at the top. Simultaneously, she made a multiple stroke gesture in which she took her left hand progressively up to the top of her body representing the elevation of someone who climbs to the top (see Figure 5).

**Figure 5.** Movement Complementing Speech
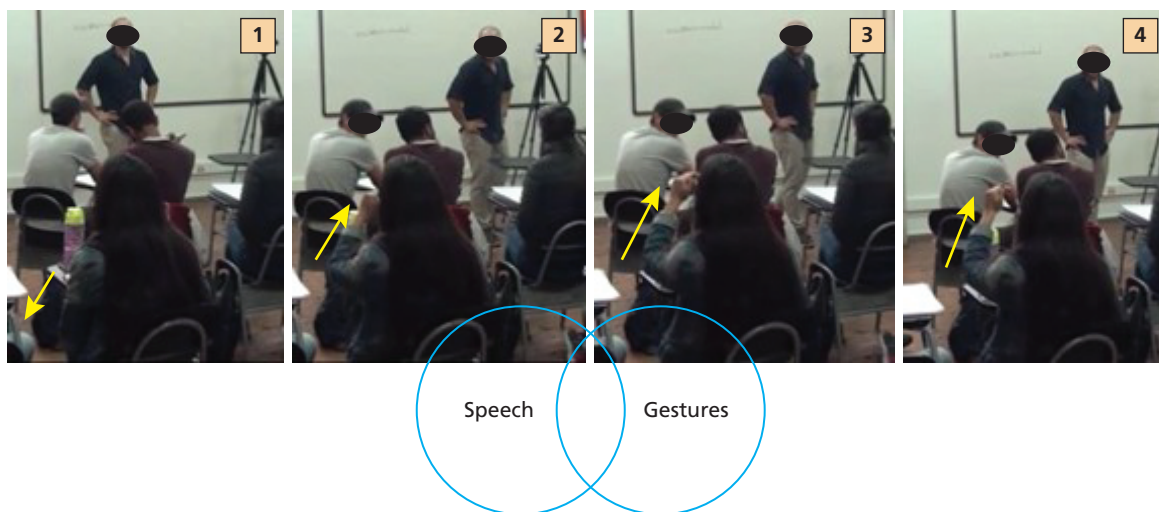
As such, this communicative action was accomplished through many actions deployed through two modes: speech and gestures. Such combinations of modes sought to deliver the same idea, complementing each other and enhancing meaning in interaction.

Similarly, in Line 14, the teacher nominated Oscar to explain his choices. From Lines 14 to 18, Oscar explained that he associated the word "narrow-minded" with the square. For Oscar, the square represented the box that narrow-minded individuals cannot think outside of. As he explained that, he made a hand gesture representing the square (see Figure 6). He mediated his speech with hand movements (Franks & Jewitt, 2001; Goldin-Meadow, 2000; Hostetter & Alibali, 2008; Roth, 2001).

Figure 6. Iconic Gestures
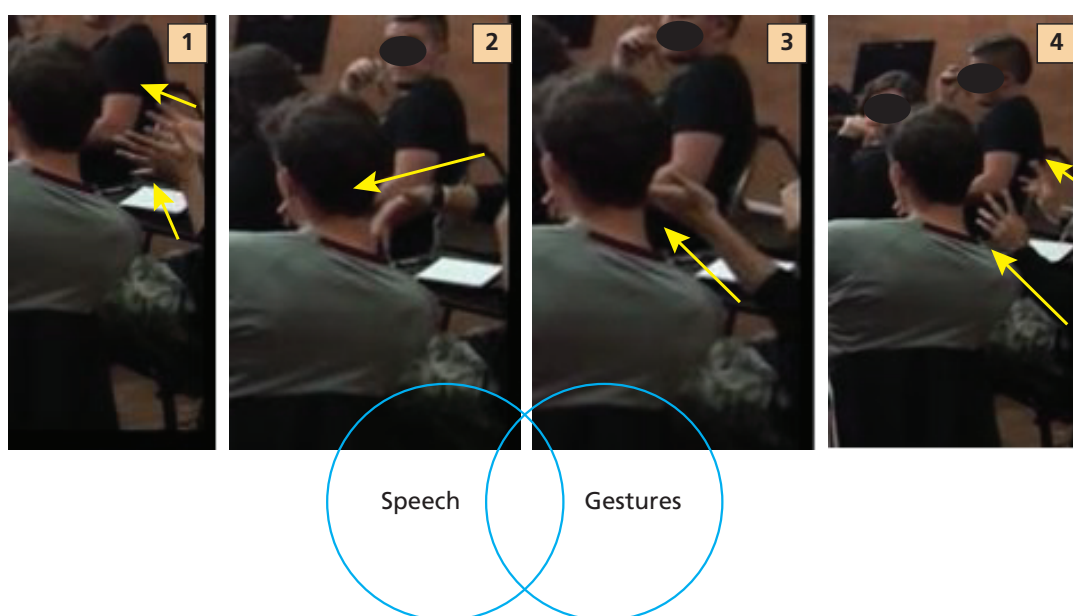
Other students showed interest in what Oscar had to say, turning their bodies toward Oscar, who was seated in the back of the classroom. That is, students accomplished the communicative actions of recognizing, validating, and expressing interest through body orientation. Hostetter and Alibali (2008) explained that body movements are not only expressions of language and cognition, but that they have been systematically associated with language and thought processing. That is, students were not only accomplishing communicative action through body movement, but they were also articulating, mediating, and deploying thought through it.

The teacher and students also engaged in the construction of social relationships and the expression of personal feelings through multimodal interaction. These interactions encompassed a diverse range of semiotic resources and communicative modes, highlighting not only the richness and complexity of meaning-making within the classroom but also how affective moves were accomplished through both verbal and non-verbal means.

Marta explained that she placed the words "bad-tempered," "impulsive," and "eccentric" under the lightning bolt (Lines 27–29). The teacher asked her why in Line 33, and she mumbled something that the teacher was unable to understand in Line 34. So, the teacher asked, "It's a person that what, sorry?" (Lines 35–36), drawing near Marta, taking a hand to his chin, and focusing his gaze on Marta, conveying attentiveness and solidarity. Then, he turned away to take pressure away from Marta (Picture 3 in Figure 7) and complemented his communicative act with "don't worry it's just…". In Line 37, Marta restated the word "bad-tempered" and, despite the lack of an explanation for her choice, the teacher validated her intervention by saying "bad-tempered, yeah" and took it up stating that there was, indeed, a valid association there, that people usually related negative adjectives with the lightning bolt (Lines 41–44). The teacher performed a relational act of communication in which proxemics carried more intensity than any other mode. This nonverbal gesture conveyed sensitivity and consideration, contributing to the co-construction of dialogic norms within the interaction. In doing so, it also created an opportunity for Marta to demonstrate her understanding and briefly express her opinion (Wilmes & Siry, 2021).

Figure 7. Proxemics
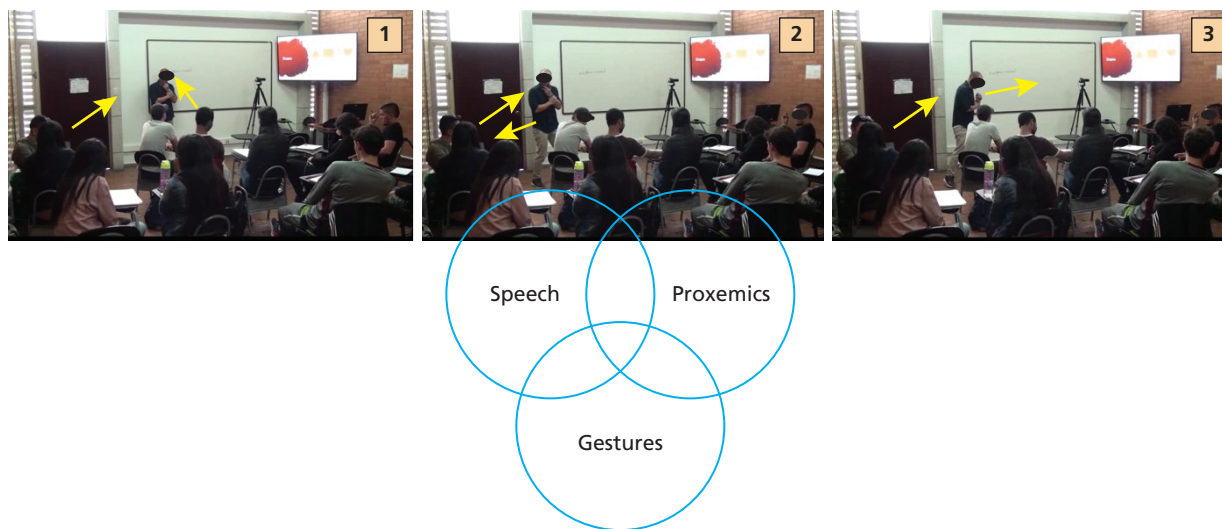
Conclusions

Bringing together Norris's MIA and Hymes's ethnography of communication to examine social dynamics in the EMI classroom presented a broad array of possibilities for understanding the interplay between the micro aspects of communication (i.e., semiotic resources, communicative modes, and higher- and lower-level actions) and the corresponding macro social framings (i.e., speech acts, speech episodes, speech events, speech situations, and speech communities) in teaching and learning. In the endeavor of assessing communication in light of learning and learning in light of communication, the analysis unveiled ways in which semiotic resources and communicative modes were configured and deployed to gradually establish norms of communication that created social spaces, opportunities, and roles where the students and the teacher accomplished

individual as well as collective communicative action in pursuit of teaching and learning in the EMI classroom. This fuels the discussion about the strong and reciprocal relationship that communication, teaching, and learning share with each other, as well as the extent to which the teacher's approach to classroom interaction influences students' communicative behavior and, thus, their learning (Escobar-Alméciga & Brutt-Griffler, 2022; Escobar-Alméciga et al., 2024).

The accounts above offered a glimpse into the nature of multimodal interaction in the EMI classroom. They exhibited an intricate interplay of semiotic resources and modes, including gestures, body orientation, gaze, proxemics, body posture, tone of voice, and speech, that came together to accomplish communicative actions conveying understanding, approval, solidarity, and attentiveness (Escobar-Alméciga & Brutt-Griffler, 2022). This contributed to the gradual construction of a dialogic classroom climate (Wilmes & Siry, 2021) where the students and the teacher deconstructed expected social structures and roles in the classroom to create opportunities to access, grapple with, and evidence knowledge, which is often unspoken (Escobar-Alméciga et al., 2024; Goldin-Meadow, 2000). In doing so, they challenged approaches to EMI practices that situate knowledge as static, spoken, and centered on the teacher.

Here, the teacher played a vital role in establishing norms of interaction that promoted the semiotic work and sign-making of everyone. He welcomed atypical ways of knowing, cultural signs of understanding, spontaneous ways of constructing and expressing feelings, and diversified ways of relating to one another and to the environment they inhabited (Fairclough, 2011; Kress, 2011; Wilmes & Siry, 2021). His approach to instruction empowered students to take on active roles in constructing social spaces, where they could draw on their own historical, sociocultural, emotional, and intellectual (semiotic) resources in pursuit of their own learning and social and intellectual objectives. Understanding the influence that teachers and their

discursive practices have on everyone's communicative behavior therein could potentially have an impact on the way instructional designs are thought out and deployed in the quest for the type of interactions that could be conducive to dialogic classroom environments and, consequently, to learning (Boyd et al., 2018; Escobar-Alméciga & Brutt-Griffler, 2022; Escobar-Alméciga et al., 2024; Wilmes & Siry, 2021).

From a speech community-based perspective, second or foreign language teaching can be better understood through the lens of how social roles and positions influence learners' communicative behavior (García & Bartlett, 2007). Three critical yet often underemphasized aspects emerge from this perspective: first, the way learners are socially situated in the classroom community, which frame their opportunities for engagement and participation; second, the dynamic relationship between language learning and the construction of social identity, where language becomes a means of expressing and negotiating who learners are; and third, the subtle yet powerful influence of classroom hierarchies and institutional and symbolic power structures on communicative practices. Together, these dimensions deeply inform which roles students can perform and how they engage in language use and communicative action in pursuit of learning. Viewed through this lens, evidence from the EMI classroom demonstrates that flexible, multimodal, and co-constructed interaction creates opportunities for student voices to emerge and identities to be negotiated. In contrast, when teacher-led discourse dominates, student participation tends to be constrained. Ultimately, educators' comprehension of how interaction shapes learning gives them the power to either perpetuate rigid, hierarchical classroom environments or to redefine the learning experience—using communication as a medium for fostering inclusive, participatory, and identity-affirming language education.

Furthermore, the norms of interaction and the fluidity of social roles in the EMI classroom opened up

an ample array of opportunities for students to exert communicative action, exhibiting their existing knowledge as well as pursuing new knowledge in interaction. They unveiled diversified ways of understanding and grappling with the topic being addressed, the feelings they experienced, and the ways in which they related to the spaces, people, and topics in class. The particularities of the norms of interaction and social roles in the EMI classroom shifted the dynamics of interaction from mechanical question-and-answer exchanges to more abstract conversations that required students to make choices and justify their decisions. In a way, these norms of interaction were gradually reclaiming a space for student agency in the classroom, where students were no longer considered empty vessels ready to be filled, but instead, they were legitimate contributors to the emerging knowledge construction in interaction (Escobar-Alméciga & Brutt-Griffler, 2022; Rojas & Escobar-Alméciga, 2023).

Spanish was used in conjunction with other semiotic resources to accomplish various communicative acts, including clarifying, asking, requesting, and expressing feelings, among others. The instances in which Spanish was used did not suggest a breakdown in communication; on the contrary, they served to keep communication going. The sporadic use of Spanish also showed the students' commitment to using the language of instruction in class. In this sense, Spanish is a valuable semiotic resource available to EMI students that helps bridge semiotic representations across cultural referents. Restricting its use in interaction may also constrain communication and cognitive processes in the EMI teaching and learning endeavor.

These reflections have implications for pedagogy and learning in that instructional designs for the EMI classroom need to promote the type of communication that allows students to grapple with each other's ideas, perceptions, identities, cultures, and knowledge (Aukerman et al., 2017; Escobar-Alméciga, 2022; Escobar-Alméciga & Brutt-Griffler, 2022; Escobar-Alméciga

et al., 2024). They should strengthen social relations, building a community around the learner. Instructional designs also need to acknowledge, respect, and value different types of knowledge, different ways of knowing, and different ways of understanding, (inter)acting, and (inter)learning (Escobar-Alméciga & Brutt-Griffler, 2022). They must create safe learning environments where interaction facilitates understanding and learning, as evidenced through students' semiotic work and agency (Escobar-Alméciga et al., 2024).

This shift of focus in classroom research transitions from examining the impact of implemented pedagogical interventions to exploring more abstract dimensions of the interplay between teacher behaviors, decision-making processes, and discursive practices. It emphasizes understanding how these elements influence students' opportunities for active engagement, participation, and collaboration within the classroom, and consequently, their learning outcomes.

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