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What Counts as Learning for Teachers and  
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On Designedly Incomplete Utterances: What Counts as Learning for Teachers and Students in  
Primary Classroom Interaction

**Abstract**

The paper analyses instances of Designedly Incomplete Utterances (DIU) as they are produced in whole-class, teacher-led instruction sequences held in two third-year groups in an Italian primary school. The device, one of whose basic pedagogic functions is to solicit displays of knowledge from students in the shape of utterance completion, is a recurrent feature of teacher-student interaction in this setting. The study focuses on one specific and locally managed use of the device, whereby the teacher's orientation to the pedagogic goals of the organization of interaction surfaces in features of talk. I found systematic features in the construction of what I call *main-clause DIUs*, which teachers recurrently use to cast students as learners, by treating their verbal behaviour as providing evidence that some type of learning has occurred in prior talk. The findings provide grounds for a critique of the IRE model and for a characterization of questioning in instruction sequences, both of which account for the specific institutional relevancies of interaction in this setting.

**(1) INTRODUCTION**

Classroom interaction has long been analysed as the setting where students' participation is both organized and curtailed by means of the shared orientation of teachers and students to the three-part sequence (IRE or Initiation-Response-Evaluation).<sup>1</sup> Since the first seminal studies on classroom interaction (Sinclair and Coulthard, 1975; Mehan, 1979), the so-called 'ubiquity' of the three-part model has been generally considered the template for instruction talk-in-interaction (McHoul 1978, Drew 1981; Lerner 1995; Nassaji and Wells 2000; Nystrand et al. 2003; Hellerman 2003 and 2005). Large portions of the talk between teachers and students can be described as shaped according to this three-part structure: teachers elicit information through questioning students and then evaluate their answers. In particular, the regular presence of the confirmation of the 'correctness' of the answer in the third position (Sinclair and Coulthard 1975; McHoul 1978; Heritage 1984), or the implementation of 'correcting' practices in case of a 'wrong' answer (Drew, 1981), is an indication of the non-informative nature of the questioning in this setting. This characterization, however, leaves unexplored in great part the sense of what teachers and students actually achieve in terms of

the specific institutional relevancies of their interaction (Drew and Heritage 1992: 15). For instance, one major issue for both parties—and for those who take part in any instruction activity—is the identification of and achievement of consensus as to what exactly counts as learning: that is, how teachers and students make their behavior accountable by showing to be oriented to a particular learning process that has been implemented through the organization of their interaction. Another closely related issue concerns a more specific and cogent characterization of the actions that are performed through questioning; teachers ask questions frequently, and so describing their function as eliciting displays of knowledge is far too generic.

This paper analyses one specific way of questioning students in instruction sequences. This form of questioning-- known as Designedly Incomplete Utterances (or DIU as it will be henceforth referred to in the paper) and previously identified in literature by Koshik (2002)-- consists of incomplete utterances produced by teachers as a means to elicit missing information in the shape of utterance completion. Koshik has described one particular use of the practice, as it occurs in 1-on-1 second-language writing conferences to elicit the student's self-correction. In this paper I will investigate another use of DIU, as it takes place in whole-class instruction sequences in an Italian primary school. I am concerned here with a type of instruction activity known as the 'talk and chalk' method, whereby teachers involve the whole class in a special type of 'language game' (Wittgenstein, 1921; Levinson, 1992), specifically designed to help students acquire new forms of knowledge through a series of linked question/answer pairs, starting from students' implicit knowledge (Mercer, 1995).

I describe these sessions of talk as having an *argumentative* line of reasoning because, as the analysis will show, in these instruction sequences the teacher designs questions that are closely related to one another, so as to build an argument.<sup>2</sup> Rather than constructed as one single unit, with its own individual scope and somehow disentangled from the surrounding talk, each question/answer pair is designed to lead to the next question/answer sequence, so as to build a line of reasoning that will gradually guide students towards new forms of knowledge. This way of

approaching classroom instruction talk contrasts with the characterization of question/answer pairs in instruction sequences as self-contained units, each reaching its conclusion with the teacher's third evaluative turn, as is the case, for example, with examination questions.

Using Conversation Analysis, I will investigate the specific pedagogic relevancies of DIU as one specific questioning practice very commonly used by teachers in this setting. In order to give the reader an idea of what DIUs look like in my data, I have chosen the following example as one explicit case of the phenomenon. The fragment takes place during one instruction sequence in a Geometry Hour.

The fragment isolates one of the questions of the series because, for the moment, I am interested only in pointing out to the reader some very basic features of the phenomenon that make it recognizable as such and that are shared by all similar occurrences in my data. The characterization of the phenomenon as far as its sequential deployment and its pedagogic function are concerned will be developed from section 3 onward.

Prior to the excerpt below, the teacher has invited one girl, Caterina, to walk around the desk in order to show how many times one has to change direction before completing the full round. This is done for the purpose of demonstrating that the number of angles on the surface of a shape (here the desk) is correlated to the number of changes of direction (here Caterina's changes of direction when walking around the teacher's desk). Throughout the whole duration of Caterina's demonstration, the teacher engages the class in commenting on the performance by addressing the students with a number of linked questions, of which the following is one instance:

**(1) Angles (PM:LT:5a.geometry)**

01	T:	il pia::no	della	cattedra,	(1.4)	è ve:ro,
		<i>the surface</i>	<i>of the</i>	<i>teacher's desk</i>		<i>right</i>
02		(0.2)				
03	→	prese::nta?	quattro?			
		(IT) presents	four			
		<i>has</i>	<i>four</i>			
04		(0.6)				
05	Sts:	a::[ngoli				
		<i>angles</i>				

06 Sts:           [a:ngoli  
                  **angles**

07 T:             [a:ngoli:.  
                  **angles**

As the transcript makes clear, the teacher's turn that begins in line 1 presents a cluster of prosodic features (intonation, pauses, sound-stretching) which culminates in the premature halting of the turn before its grammatical completion (line 3). This practice is evidently taken by students as an invitation to supply the missing word. By providing the word 'angles', students display (1) that they are paying attention to the teacher's talk, (2) that they know what the teacher is talking about, (3) that they know the technical name of that specific part of the surface of the teacher's desk,<sup>3</sup> and (4) that they are willing to take part in the activity underway. Thus, by withholding in this way the last word of the utterance, the teacher elicits a display of knowledge in the shape of utterance completion. Questioning students in order to elicit displays of knowledge, which teachers confirm or correct, is a type of activity that occurs frequently in instruction sequences. Both characterizations of the activity –'questioning' and 'eliciting displays of knowledge'—are far too generic and do not provide an account of the specific pedagogic relevancies of classroom interaction as related to its instructional goals.

DIUs like the one occurring in line 3 share with other classroom questioning devices the 'known' nature of the missing information (Mehan, 1979). But it is exactly because teacher and students are oriented to this quality of the action (as evidenced by the teacher's repetition of the students' response in line 7), that classroom questions simultaneously make *other* actions relevant, besides eliciting information. These actions include checking students' knowledge about a specific topic; setting topics as more or less pedagogically relevant; highlighting key-notions; inviting preferred responses both in terms of content and shape; conveying assumptions about the students' state of knowledge; doubting or accepting prior answers; initiating repair; and also achieving, maintaining and sustaining students' participation in the activity underway. This is an issue that has been somehow neglected in studies on classroom interaction,<sup>4</sup> probably owing to the success of the

IRE model (Sinclair and Coulthard, 1975; Mehan, 1979) which has favoured a certain atomization of classroom interaction into isolated exchanges.

Through the analysis of (1) the specific design of one variety of DIUs and of (2) the way in which occurrences of this type are linked to other questioning practices in a series of questions, I will identify the distinctive functions of the device, demonstrating the way in which DIUs reflect pedagogically relevant aims in instruction. Thus, starting with the analysis of one of the questioning devices that is more frequently used by the teachers in my data, the paper aims at dissecting the IRE model which has long been considered the ‘molecule’ of instruction talk. The way in which the practice is constructed and deployed within a *series of questions* will disclose patterns of larger sequences of instructional talk, and the way in which teacher and students are oriented to them in relation to the specific pedagogic goal of their interaction.

The study is based on a specific sub-set of Designedly Incomplete Utterances (DIU) which I have called *main-clause DIUs* and of which fragment 1 is a clear example. This characterization relies on the fact that these special types of DIUs are produced to *elicit completion of self-standing, full-formed main sentences*. Their construction differs from that of other sub-sets of DIUs with different functions, as is the case, for example, of DIUs embedded in secondary clauses (fragment 2) or of those that follow prior unanswered questions (fragment 3). The brief description of the next two cases aims at showing how their different deployment, in comparison to that of the DIUs with which the paper is concerned, is related to their equally different pedagogical function.

## (2) Friday [PM:FZ:22.geography]

01 T: → BE::NE:: ↑ALO::RA `STA:: MATTI::NA ↓che è ve:ne::r,  
**well now this morning which is Fri,**

02 (0.2)/((some children are talking))

03 Sts: ↓dî:↑:.,  
**day**

04 T: `indi ci sarà il compito- da- fare::- ca::sa  
**hence there will be the homework to do at home**  
 ((The teacher starts speaking with cuts after each word))

The DIU in line 1 elicits completion of ‘*venerdì*’, the Italian word for ‘Friday’. Syntactically, the DIU operates here on a *secondary relative clause* (‘which is Friday’) which adds information about its antecedent (‘this morning’). Grammatically speaking, the type of relation that the relative clause in the fragment has with the main clause, is a ‘non-restrictive apposition’. The definition indicates a special type of relative clause (also called ‘parenthetical’), which typically adds information about the ‘antecedent’ of the main clause (here ‘today’) without changing the meaning of it. ‘Non-restrictive appositives’ or ‘parenthetical clauses’ (similar to ‘which is Friday’) differ significantly from ‘restrictive’ relative clauses. The latter are syntactically constructed to restrict the meaning of the antecedent to which they are linked.<sup>5</sup> Therefore, by deploying the DIU in this position, the teacher treats the completion thus elicited as a non-crucial task in terms of the informative organization of the discourse at that point; the specification of the name of the day is constructed as parenthetical; that is, as adding information that is not particularly relevant. Pedagogically speaking, the device is designed *to elicit information based on a type of routine knowledge well known to the students*.

A third subset of DIUs includes instances, like that in example 3, where the device occurs *after a question*; it is designed *to prompt an expected answer after a prior unanswered question* (a similar example is discussed in Lerner, 1995: 117).

### (3) Justice [extended PM:LL:1:history/prehistory]

01	T:	bisognava quindi	tenere sotto controllo	che	co:s[a,=
		<b>one needed therefore</b>	<b>to keep under control</b>	<b>what</b>	
02	St:				[vivere in
					<b>live in</b>
03		pace			
		<b>peace</b>			
04	T: →	=amministrare bene	che cosa	<u>la</u> ,	giu,
		administer well	what	the ju,	
		<b>to administer well</b>	<b>what</b>	<b>ju</b>	
05	St:	la giusti[zia			
		<b>justice</b>			

The answer produced by the student in line 2 is treated by the teacher as not satisfying the request of the question, as confirmed by the successive re-issuing and re-formulation of the question (line 4). The prompting is further re-enforced through the DIU which is deployed on the unfinished production of the expected answer. As these examples show, despite the device presents the same basic features of talk delivery that make the device recognizable in the three occurrences, each accomplishes a different and very specific pedagogical function, owing to features of turn construction.

This study focuses on the first sub-set of instances of which fragment 1 is a clear example. I have called this variety of the device *main-clause DIUs*, owing to the type of syntactic units on which it operates. I will show that the device is used to highlight some key notions in the argumentative line of the activity. DIUs occurring in main clauses are also built to be successfully completed by means of a special mechanism systematically used in this sub-set. Due to their sequential deployment, completion is designed to be a repetition of a prior occurrence of the same item that is to be completed through the DIU. Both features—the *repetition format* and the request to complete an unfinished *main clause*— give salience to the notion on which the DIU operates, as compared to the information elicited through other questioning devices within the instruction sequence. I argue that DIUs of this type construct these notions as the teaching goal of the activity and demonstrate that both parties (teacher and students) have reached consensus as to its importance within the whole instruction sequence. Furthermore, because the completion task is a repetition of a prior occurrence of the teacher's own talk or of another student's prior 'correct' answer, with these DIUs teachers construct students' responses as evidence that their knowledge-displays occur during and by means of the talk underway, and not as the result of some prior implicit knowledge. Through the way in which the DIU is constructed, students' responses are treated as evidence that some kind of learning has taken place 'then and there' and as the product of talk.

## **(2) DATA**

The research draws on video-recorded data from lessons that took place in 1999-2000 in two third-year groups (ages 7-8) in an Italian primary school where I was working as a teacher (nevertheless, none of the recordings were taken in the group I used to teach). The recordings lasted one week (8 hours a day) for each of the two groups, and involved around 50 pupils and their 4 teachers. Teachers adopted teacher-led methods of instruction and forms of classroom management. For most of their lesson time, pupils were seated in parallel rows, with the teacher facing the class. Two cameras were used in each classroom in order to capture the interaction from both points of view. The corpus consists of approximately 80 hours and about 40 lessons on different topics, which were not shaped for the purpose of the study. Data collection was approved by the participants and their families who provided informed consent recorded prior to the study. All the names used in the transcriptions have been anonymised.

## **(3) DESIGNEDLY INCOMPLETE UTTERANCES: BASIC FEATURES AND PEDAGOGICAL FUNCTIONS**

Since Schegloff's paper on the ambiguities of the notion of 'question' in conversation (1984), the term has to be used with particular care (but see Steensig and Drew 2008 for an outline of the principal research traditions on questions and questioning). In its vernacular meaning, with reference to classroom interaction, the term 'question' is normally used to indicate a set of practices that teachers adopt to elicit displays of knowledge from students in the shape of verbal responses.<sup>6</sup> By describing the teachers' questioning activity as a way of 'eliciting knowledge displays from students (rather than 'asking questions'), two main aspects of the questioning activity are highlighted: First, teachers' initiating actions are separated and distinguished from the implicit and

erroneously exclusive identification between teachers' questions and the interrogative format. Second, these actions are characterized as a particular type of questioning.<sup>7</sup>

In their study on the English spoken by teachers and pupils in the classroom, Sinclair and Coulthard (1975) have provided the most basic characterization of teachers' action of questioning students: 'A teacher rarely asks a question because he wants to know the answer; he asks a question because he wants to know whether a pupil knows the answer' (36-37). This fundamental difference between 'real' and 'instruction' questions has been addressed by Mehan with his oft-cited definition of the latter as 'known-answer questions' (Mehan, 1979b), which explicitly points to the knowledge-issue in the action of questioning. The teacher's knowledge is made evident 'interactionally' in what follows the answer. As Heritage (1984) argues in commenting on a sequence from McHoul's work (1978), it is what the teacher does in the third position that makes the interaction 'pedagogical':

It will be apparent from even the most elementary inspection of this sequence that each and every one of the teacher's responses to the answers to his questions, by accepting or rejecting those answers, proposes independent knowledge of the answer. Each response thereby proposes the prior question to have been an 'exam' question. Furthermore, across a sequence of such question-answer-comment triplets an overwhelmingly 'pedagogical' frame of reference is established. (Heritage, 1984: 288)

The teacher's independent knowledge of the answer is evidenced also in the work of reformulation of the answer which teachers do when students fail to answer:

It is specifically because these reformulations are built to show the child another route to a correct answer (and do not merely 'clarify' what was asked) that they display the speaker's prior knowledge of the answer. It is on that basis that we – and recipients of such questions/reformulations – can begin to distinguish questions to which the speaker does know the answer, from those to which he does not (the latter being a 'genuine' request for information). (Drew, 1981: 260)

This specific work of *drawing out* from students the 'right' answer to their question has been variously described in literature as 'cued elicitation' (Mercer 1995: 26) and 'cluing' (McHoul 1990: 355). Through this practice of 'wording a question in a certain way' (Mercer 1995: 26) teachers 'lead students to correct answers by small steps' (McHoul 1990: 355). DIU is precisely one such distinct way of *wording a question*, whereby the questioner both exhibits that he knows the answer

and provides clues as to which answer is required, in terms of turn design, content, and sequential deployment.

Before addressing main-clause DIUs, in what follows I will describe the basic constructional features of the device and some of the pedagogical functions it accomplishes in instruction sequences. I will also illustrate how DIUs differ from interrogative utterances and what teachers can do with them that cannot be done with syntactically-formatted questions.

### (3.1) *THE PHENOMENON'S BASIC FEATURES (sub-heading)*

In the type of instructional activities with which I am concerned here, teachers elicit utterance completion very frequently. The request is implemented through prosodic patterns and specific features of turn construction. The following fragment illustrates a further clear occurrence of the phenomenon (see arrowed lines):

#### (4) **Neolithic** [PM:LL:1a.history/prehistory]

01 T: 'biamo fatto GIÀ: u:n passo avanti nell' evoluzione e  
 we made already one step ahead in the evolution and  
**we've already made some progress in evolution and**

02 → siamo già entrati, ↓nel,  
 we already entered [COMPOUND PREP: IN + THE]  
**we've already entered into the**

03 (1.0)

04 T: → n[el?  
 [COMPOUND PREP: IN + THE]  
**into the**

05 St: [ne- neo-l:i[tico  
 ne- neolithic  
**ne- neo-lithic period**

06 St: [°neo[litico°  
 neolithic  
**neolithic period**

07 T: [neo°litico°  
 neolithic  
**neolithic period**

The fragment captures the interaction at the beginning of a History Hour. In introducing the topic of the activity, the teacher refers to the content of prior lessons. However, the utterance is not produced in a complete manner by the teacher; in line 2 she withholds completion after the



shorter (micro-pauses) and, again, they are unanswered. All three occurrences can be described as ‘failed DIUs’; by not allowing more time for the silence before continuing her talk, the teacher seems to display that she considers students unable to provide the completion of the answer. It is precisely on this basis that the characterization of the pause in DIUs can be rather controversial. In fact, it is designed as an intra-TCU silence (that is, deployed in non-transition space) precisely in order to make recipients hear that the utterance is not finished and, thereby, elicit completion. The sense of ‘incompleteness’ provides for turn transition by way of TCU completion, which, subsequently, makes the pause into an inter-turn pause (however, for clarity they will be referred to as ‘intra-TCU pauses’ in the paper).

Yet, we already know that DIUs are also, at their minimum, requests for displays of knowledge in the shape of TCU completion. Silences after a request for a knowledge-display in instruction sequences have an additional meaning: they ‘can display recipients’ understanding that it is expected that they should know the answer, not merely that they might know the answer’ (Drew, 1981: 260). In other words, by remaining silent when not knowing the answer (instead of, for instance, claiming their lack of knowledge) students ‘treat their problem as being, not that they just happen not to know the answer, but that they ought to know (are being expected to know) and don’t’ (Drew, *ibid.*). Having said so, let us now, return to example 4. That *also* the teacher has such an assumption about what the students ought to know when she interrupts her turn in line 2 is indeed confirmed by the fact that the request for completion is re-issued given the students’ failure to complete the utterance in the time allotted in the pause. This is done with a simple repetition of the proposition and with a more distinctive rising intonation (line 4). By doing so, the teacher implies that students do not need to be addressed with a more explicit question in order to supply the expected information, nor do they need any additional help. Consequently, she casts them as ‘knowledgeable recipients’ (Goodwin, 1987).

Thus, the *first* salient aspect of the deliberate nature of the practice is the presence of *intra-TCU pauses* in positions where turn transition is not relevant (Sacks, Schegloff and Jefferson 1974).

Although students do not provide the expected completion, the pause in line 3 is indeed deployed as a device to elicit completion. This is also so because it separates two elements of a prepositional phrase, which in the Italian language is grammatically very tight. Thus, the deployment of a pause in a position where transition is not relevant poses the question: ‘why that now?’ (Schegloff, 1998: 415).

The *second* relevant feature of the phenomenon concerns a distinct prosody pattern in approaching the point where the teacher withholds part of the TCU. In all instances examined here and in general in all DIUs in my data, the final items uttered by the teacher before the pause are delivered with distinct *upward intonation* (NB: sometimes it occurs only in the last one, but often in the final two words or syllables). One basic function of this intonation pattern is to highlight that the TCU has not reached completion. For instance, in fragment 4 the teacher uses a combination of emphasis and slightly rising intonation in the last vowel of the verb (*entrati,*)—a prosodic pattern then repeated in the delivery of the preposition (*↓nel,*) before the pause. This use of prosody differentiates the last two words from previous talk and seems specifically designed to alert students that some kind of request is forthcoming. A third element, which confirms this characterization in the fragment, is the way in which the teacher pursues completion in line 4, once students fail to provide the expected response.

In sum, with regards to turn design, the phenomenon is characterized as a request for knowledge-displays by means of two main basic features: (1) the deployment of intra-TCU pauses and (2) the repeated use of upward intonation in approaching that pause. The same features are shared by the DIU we have examined in fragment 1, here reproduced as fragment 6:

**(6) Angles (PM:LT:5a.geometry)**

01	T:	il <u>pi</u> a::no della cattedra, (1.4) è <u>ve</u> :ro, <b>the surface of the teacher's desk right</b>
02		(0.2)
03	→	<u>pre</u> se::nta? quattro? (IT) presents four <b>has four</b>
04		(0.6)



produces the expected completion, with other students soon joining in the activity. Instances of DIUs similar to fragment 7 above, in which teacher and students coordinate the co-production of a word, are rather frequent in the data of my corpus. Another clear case of the phenomenon is the following (seen earlier as fragment 2):

**(8) Friday** [PM:FZ:22.geography]

01 T: → BE::NE:: ↑ALO::RA `STA:: MATTI::NA ↓che è ve:ne::r,  
**well now this morning which is Fri,**

02 (0.2)/((some children are talking))

03 Sts: ↓dì:↑:.,  
**day**

04 T: `indi ci sarà il compito- da- fare::- ca::sa  
**hence there will be the homework to do at home**  
 ((The teacher starts speaking with emphatic cut-offs after each word))

In this case, the teacher uses sound-stretching to separate the word into its syllables: the vowel sound of the first two syllables of the name (here indicated in bold characters: ‘*ve/ner/dì*’) of the day is stretched. The syllable spelling stops for two-tenths of a second after the second component and is followed by the students’ completion in 3.<sup>11</sup>

Examples like 7 and 8 clearly show that DIUs of this type rely on the expectation that the request for completion will be fulfilled also on the basis of a *third* feature which is shared in all instances of my corpus. Such DIUs are specifically designed to *provide students with all resources to successfully complete* the unfinished utterances, with very little cognitive effort on their part. By halting the syllable-by-syllable spelling of the name of the day after the second syllable, the teacher has reached the last possible point where students can actually provide completion of the name of the day. Similarly, the DIU in example 7 works on the recognition of the expected word, of which the teacher provides the first syllable. In this case, the teacher is commenting on a previous answer given by a student which mentions ‘work’ as an important aspect of social organization. Therefore the teacher seems to rely on the students’ short-term memory to elicit completion as repetition of prior talk. Another explicit case is the following:

**(9) Temperature** [PM:FZ:22:geography]

01 T: →           quindi LA (.) tempe:: ↓ra::,  
                   so       the       tempe     ra (FIRST SYLLABLES OF THE WORD 'temperature')  
                   **so       the       tempe     ra**

02                    (.)

03 Sts:            tu:::ra::?  
                   **ture**

04 T:               cosa fa                    <si alza                o si abbassa  
                   what (DOES IT) do   (DOES IT) rise   or fall  
                   **what does it do   does it rise   or does it fall**

05                    di n[otte.  
                   **at night**

06 Sts:               [si [abba::ssa::  
                           **it falls**

07 Sts:               [si abba::[ssa::  
                           **it falls**

08 Sts:                                   [si abbassa::  
   **it falls**

Here the DIU *precedes* rather than follows the question which is produced in line 4 and, therefore, it cannot be a case in which the DIU is used to prompt the answer to a prior question. The pause is deployed in a position where the word—similarly to the case illustrated in fragment 8—is highly recognizable. By the same token, the pause does not occur in a competitive or talkative context. Thus, by leaving the last two syllables of the word unsaid in such position and context (in Italian very few words have a different continuation after such a beginning), completion is likely to be successfully produced by the majority of the students, as indeed occurs with the choral response in line 3.

Through this specific way of delivering words, the *componential aspect* of words is highlighted, thus enabling students to project and produce the remaining part that would complete the word. The device exploits a mechanism that has been described by Lerner (1991), whereby one participant can complete the utterance-in-progress of another participant via the inspection of the utterance as a 'multiple component turn-constructural unit'. As Lerner describes, the features of talk that can be described as 'compound turn-constructural units' and that can enable the joint production of an utterance in ordinary conversation are various and mainly involve syntax: the *if X-then Y* format, quotations, parenthetical inserts, list structures, prefaced disagreements, and the *instead of X-Y* format. However, also prosody and certain features of turn delivery can work as

additional devices to encourage joint completion. Lerner discusses a case where the syllable spelling of a name ‘can provide a ‘projectable compound format’ as based on its phonological feature’ (p. 450).

As the analysis of the three examples above shows, the phonological feature of the item on which the DIU operates can be used as a variable feature: depending on how many syllables the teacher produces before the pause, the final component is more or less likely to be projected by recipients. Thus, recognizing the full words ‘*venerdì*’ and ‘*temperatura*’ in the teacher’s unfinished production of ‘*vener-*’ and ‘*tempera-*’, is indeed a much easier task than projecting the word ‘*lavoro*’ from the first syllable only. As the analysis of main-clause DIUs will show in the later sections of the paper, when teachers cannot rely on the phonological composition of the word to enable students to project the expected completion, they employ other methods to ensure that the DIU will be successfully completed. One of these methods is to make the DIU operate on items that have occurred in prior talk and elicit a repetition based on the students’ short-term memory of prior talk.

### (3.1.1) SILENCE AS A VARIABLE FEATURE IN DIUS’ INTRA-TCU PAUSES

The duration of silence in the intra-TCU pauses is a variable feature of DIUs, and it is linked to the students’ ability to recognize the missing part that would provide for the completion. The length of pauses ranges from that of a micro-pause, to two-tenths of a second, to one second. Moreover, as shown in the fragment below, completion can be produced even without *any silence* intervening after the implicit request for completion.

#### (10) Justice [PM:LL:1:history/prehistory]

01	T: →	amministrare bene che cosa administer well what <i>to administer well what</i>	la, giu, the ju, <i>ju</i>
02	St:	la giusti[zia <i>justice</i>	

03 Sts:                           [la giustizia  
                                      *justice*

In line 1 the teacher produces the typical prosodic pattern, followed by the students' response in lines 2 and 3, without any intervening pause. It is worth highlighting that, in this case, students do not produce a proper 'completion' of the word, but instead the *whole word*. This behaviour seems related to the specific pedagogic function of the DIU that is here accomplished: mainly, that of prompting an expected answer after a prior unanswered question. Notice that the device follows a 'rear-loaded question' which is often produced in this type of classroom instruction activities. With this term I am referring to instances in which teachers change their statements into interrogatives simply by substituting part of the sentence with the corresponding wh-element (what, why, where, when, etc.). One reconstructed example would be 'You want *what?*' instead of '*What* do you want?' Furthermore, as shown in the following extended version of the fragment, the DIU is produced to elicit the answer to a previous question, which students failed to answer as expected. The vertical arrows indicate the right-dislocated wh-element in the questioning turns preceding the DIU.

**(11) Justice** [extended PM:LL:1:history/prehistory]

01 T:	bisognava quindi	tenere sotto controllo	che	co:s[a,=
	<i>one needed therefore</i>	<i>to keep under control</i>	<i>what</i>	
			↓	
02 St:				[vivere in <i>to live in</i>
03	pace <i>peace</i>			
			↓	
04 T: →	=amministrare bene	che cosa	la, giu,	
	administer well	what	the ju,	
	<i>to administer well</i>	<i>what</i>	<i>ju</i>	
05 St:	la giusti[zia <i>justice</i>			
06 Sts:	[la giustizia <i>justice</i>			

The response provided by the student in line 2 is not the 'expected' answer. First, it isn't grammatically conforming to the constraint of the question.<sup>12</sup> The open interrogative, and precisely the 'what', makes a noun phrase relevant as the direct object of the verb 'to administer', whereas the student offers a verb phrase ('*vivere in pace*'/'to live in peace'), hearable as the argument of

*'bisognava quindi'*/'one needed therefore'. Probably owing to this non conformity of the student's turn as the expected answer to the question, the response passes unnoticed. Instead, the teacher re-issues the question, followed by the beginning of the 'correct' answer in the shape of a DIU. Thus, it seems that here students produce the entire noun phrase, rather than just the missing syllables that would complete the noun because here the DIU has the function of prompting the answer to a previously unanswered question. This can also explain the absence of a pause before the students' responses, as I will explain in the next section.

To conclude, in this section I have outlined the basic features of the phenomenon as it is produced in argumentative sessions of whole-class 'talk and chalk' instruction sequences. The analysis, so far, has focused only on aspects of turn design and speech delivery that characterize the device, independently from the functions it accomplishes. In the following section I will address issues concerning the uses of DIUs in this setting as related to the local pedagogical agenda.

(3.2) *THE PHENOMENON AND ITS PEDAGOGIC FUNCTIONS IN 'TALK AND CHALK'*  
*INSTRUCTION SEQUENCES [sub-heading]*

DIU as a phenomenon is not new to conversation analytical studies on classroom interaction (Lerner, 1995; Koshik, 2002; Jones and Thornborrow, 2004). Actually, the acronym that identifies this practice stems from Koshik's work, in which the author describes its use in 1-on-1 second-language writing conferences as a means *to elicit the student's self-correction*. The same device has been analyzed by Lerner (1995) as it takes place in whole-class instruction activities *to prompt an expected answer after a prior unanswered question*. In his discussion on the possible uses of the device in classroom interaction, Lerner also suggests that 'this seems like an apt procedure to employ with a talkative class, since it musters, coordinates and limits the participation of all those students who are prepared to reply' (Lerner, 1995: 117). These two pedagogic functions (or rather

three, if we include the more general one suggested by Lerner) cover only *some* of the functions of DIUs in the various settings and multiple activities that take place in classrooms.<sup>13</sup>

For instance, a large number of the DIUs occurring in my corpus are not sequentially linked to a prior unanswered question, nor are they produced in a competitive and talkative setting, nor used to elicit self-correction. Furthermore, as shown earlier, one feature that DIUs in my corpus seem to have in common is that they are specifically designed to be successfully completed with very little cognitive effort. This aspect—together with the observation that the device can operate on different turn-constructive units such as words, phrases, clauses and sentences—suggest that DIUs can be extremely flexible in terms of the pedagogic functions they can serve. One way to address this issue is to explore what can be done with DIUs that interrogatives cannot achieve.

### (3.2.1) WHAT DIUS CAN ACCOMPLISH THAT INTERROGATIVE-FORMATTED QUESTIONING CANNOT

#### *(sub sub-heading)*

In what follows, I will compare the way in which questioning is accomplished with a *DIU* and with an *open interrogative* (see arrowed lines in fragment 12); both instances are from the same instruction on angles reported below with which the reader is already familiar (fragment 1). The talk is produced to comment on Caterina's performance. The teacher has invited her to make a full turn around the teacher's desk in order to count how many times she has to change direction. The demonstration is designed to suggest the correlation between changes of direction and angles (see lines 23-28). The fragment starts when Caterina is about to complete her turn around the desk and to change direction for the fourth and last time. The two arrows indicate the open question and the DIU that I will compare.

#### **(12) Four angles on the teacher's desk (PM:LT:5a.geometry)**

01 T:                   allo:ra cosa deve fare.                   <de:ve-                   (0.8) fa::re? (.)  
                          so                    what does she have to do. she has to-                   to make

- 02 un altro? (.) ca::mbio ↑di direzio::[ne.  
*another change of direction*
- 03 St: [i:o (lo so )  
 I (know )
- 04 T: ed è: [il?  
*and it is the*
- 05 St: [io lo [so!  
 I know
- 06 Sts: [qua[:rto  
*fourth*
- 07 St: [il qua[:rto  
*the fourth*
- 08 T: [qua::rto:::  
*fourth*
- 09 (1.0)
- 10 T: i:nfa:tti se ↑no:i guardia::mo il pia:no della?  
*so if we look at the surface of the*
- 11 (0.6)/((makes a circular gesture with her hand above  
 the surface of her desk))
- 12 T: `l pia[no della cattedra,  
*the surface of the teacher's desk*
- 13 St: [è'na li:nea spezza::ta!  
 it's a line broken  
*it's a broken line*
- 14 T: → quanti angoli ha il [piano  
 how many angles has (IT) the surface  
*how many angles are there on the surface*
- 15 St: [uhn' qua:[ttro  
 [uhn' four
- 16 Sts: [quattro  
 [four
- 17 Sts: quattro  
*four*
- 18 T: qua[:::ttro. uno, due, tre?  
*four one two three*
- 19 Sts: [quattro  
*four*
- 20 (0.8)
- 21 T: ↑e uno? quattro. (.) è chia::ro?  
*and one four is it clear*
- 22 (0.4)
- 23 T: quattro cam[bi di direzio::ne;  
*four changes of dire::ction*
- 24 St: [è 'na li- (.) però- (.) è una linea spezza::ta.  
 it's a li- but- it is a line broken  
*it's a li- but- it is a broken line*
- 25 (2.0)
- 26 T: quattro cambi di direzio:ne? quattro?  
*four changes of direction four*

27 (0.4)

28 T: a:ngoli.  
**angles**

29 (0.2)

30 T: hai capito Caterina?  
**did you understand Caterina**

31 (1.0)

32 T: Alo::ra,  
**so now**

33 (0.6)

34 T: ↓vai pure al po::sto, gra::zie,  
go rather to place thanks  
**you can go back to you seat thank you**

35 (0.6)

36 Sts: ((some children claps))

37 T: → il pia::no della cattedra, (1.4) è ve:ro,  
**the surface of the teacher's desk right**

38 (0.2)

39 pre:se:nta? quattro?  
(IT) presents four  
**has four**

40 (0.6)

41 Sts: a::[ngoli  
**angles**

42 Sts: [a[:ngoli  
**angles**

43 T: [a:ngoli:  
**angles**

In both cases, the teacher solicits specific information and confirms the correctness of the response through the repetition of the answer in the third position (lines 18 and 43). It is worth highlighting also that both instances address the same observational datum (the presence of four angles on the surface of the teacher's desk). Yet each format pursues a different aspect as relevant in the local pedagogical agenda. The open question elicits the *quantity* of angles on the desk, whereas the DIU pursues *the word* 'angles'. Other similarities concern the collective production of the answer: in each case, two cohorts of students answer in unison.

It is to be noted, however, that after the open question one student leads the answering session by producing the answer as it overlaps with the teacher's turn, whereas the DIU has the pause before the response. The different timing of the answer in the two cases seems related to the

linguistic resources that each format uses to accomplish the questioning.<sup>14</sup> In order to indicate that a questioning is being accomplished, the open interrogative exploits syntax and the position of words in the sentence—the interrogative pronoun ‘*quanti*’ / ‘how many’ is deployed in the TCU initial position—, whereas the DIU uses prosody—mainly rising intonation and a type of delivery that can be described as ‘*not-forthcoming talk*’. These features of the DIU alert recipients that a request is made *only when* talk reaches the position where the item is due or is in the close vicinity of the missing item. Owing to this mechanism, this questioning device does not permit recipients to anticipate on which item the DIU will operate and, thus, to respond in advance to—and not concurrent to, as overlapping—the questioning. This occurs even if there might be some variation in the timing of the completion elicited through DIUs. Therefore, the resources used to accomplish questioning in the two formats involve different types of responses (full answer and syntactic completion) and have different sequential consequences for the structuring and the timing of the responses.

These observations also raise issues related to the directness/indirectness of the question. First, right from the beginning and unequivocally, the interrogative pronoun in the open question indicates the ‘object of the question’ (or ‘*the questionable*’) as relating to a definite and clear piece of information. The questioning turn that is thus formatted also projects the content of the answer, to be produced when the question reaches its intonational, syntactic, and pragmatic completion. I am referring to these notions as they are defined by Ford and Thompson (1996). Therefore, returning to fragment 12, the turn beginning in line 10 reaches its syntactic completion point when the TCU introduced by ‘*quanti*’ / ‘how many’, as well as the whole turn, has reached its terminal boundary. From the point of view of intonation, the interrogative clause in line 14 seems lacking in the typical prosodic features that are usually associated with finality: a marked fall/rise in pitch (Ford and Thompson, 1996: 147). The clause is produced here with plain intonation, thus contrasting with the various rising intonation contours the teacher has produced in the course of her turn at the previous possible completion points. However, although no conventional final intonation

(rising or falling) is used, the contrast with the prosody employed in previous talk (as well as syntax) enables recipients to hear the interrogative as accomplishing turn completion. Finally, as for the pragmatic completion, the interrogative clause carries a sense of pragmatic completion insofar as, being a first pair-part of an adjacency pair, it conveys a strong expectation for an answer. All these features characterize the open interrogative as accomplishing questioning unequivocally and directly.

By contrast, the resources which DIUs exploit to convey the expectation of completion are not as explicit. The ambiguity of the device plays at two levels, at least. The first level concerns the fact that DIUs seem to mobilize *mainly* intonational and/or prosodic resources to mark that a request for completion is accomplished. Indeed, also syntax is at play here, but in the reverse way to how it works in the open interrogative. DIUs base their pragmatic force precisely on recipients' understanding of the *non-finality* of the talk-so-far (or its non-completion) exactly in those points where marked prosody is used. It is also worth considering that prosody—in contrast to syntax—includes *gradient* and *not segment-based phenomena* rather than discrete ones (Couper-Kuhlen and Selting, 1996: 11). This means that, despite the effort of some linguists to identify the components of intonation contours (for a related and detailed discussion see Couper-Kuhlen and Selting 1996: 17-21), intonation patterns are not unambiguously associated with their functional meanings *per se*.

For example, in the turn beginning in line 37, there is neither an interrogative pronoun nor any other syntactic marker to tell the student that a question is being posed. Instead, the mechanism here functions according to the contrast between the syntactic non-completeness of the utterance precisely where the rise in pitch and the pause are produced (the pitch is emphasized also by means of other co-present features of talk delivery, like sound stretching and harder pronunciation). These features convey a sense of 'transient' and 'relative' finality, as related to the item on which the DIU operates, alerting students that the focus is on that precise item.

This way of constructing the questioning has a number of consequences. For instance, owing to this ambiguity and indirectness, the device maintains a certain ambiguity about whether the

teacher is *actually* posing a question or if s/he is just pausing in talk. This ambiguity conveys what I call a certain ‘resistance to qualify the action as an explicit questioning’. The indirectness and therefore weakness of the action (as compared to the way in which questioning is done with open interrogatives) are also grounded in the occurrence of the so called ‘failed DIUs’ whereby the device favours a ‘reversible’ type of questioning. In other words, when students do not provide the requested completion, the teacher can continue and finish the utterance her/himself, thereby avoiding any apparent disruption of the ongoing talk and hence nullifying the unanswered question. This is visible in lines 1-2, 25, and 27 in the fragment above. In these occurrences, the device imposes a *weaker* constraint on recipients than interrogatives do. Evidence for this is provided by the fact that the teacher does not pursue further the fulfilment of the request when students fail to provide the expected completion. This weaker pragmatic force exhibited by DIUs might account for the device’s high distribution in instruction interaction in whole-class and ‘talk-and-chalk’ classroom management. The device permits teachers to address the group-class or individual students at any moment in the course of the teachers’ ongoing talk, without much disruption in the case that recipients fail to fulfil the request. If students fail to answer, the teacher can continue talking, transforming a request for completion into a pause or, retrospectively, into a hesitation or even an emphatic delivery of the talk. On the other hand, owing to the fact that device is mainly based on prosody, it can be *repeatedly applied to any syntactical unit* that composes the utterance: word, phrase, clause, and sentence. This permits the teacher to invite a large group of students to participate in many ways and often.

On the other hand, and almost paradoxically, the indirectness of the device attests to the questioner’s expectation that the response is highly accessible to recipients. By posing the question so indirectly, the teacher seems to consider recipients as fully ‘knowledgeable’ on the matter and as able to finish the utterance almost spontaneously or with minimal indication that a request has been put forward. DIUs, like other ways of managing utterance completions in ordinary talk-in-interaction (Sacks 1995; Goodwin 1979; Lerner 1991), such as word searches (Schegloff, Jefferson

and Sacks 1977; Goodwin, 1987) and list constructions (Jefferson, 1990), exhibit the speakers' understanding of the recipient as knowledgeable about the matter at hand. In the classroom context, by eliciting completion of the ongoing utterance, rather than requiring an answer to a question, the teacher holds students to be 'on board' about the matter at hand so as to be capable to complete the syntactic unit that is left unfinished, as if they were reading the teacher's mind (Jones and Thornborrow, 2004: 419). Each of the collaborative practices mentioned above are worth considering in their own right, but I would like to point out the quality they have in common and which also DIUs share. This quality is described by Sacks in the 'automobile discussion' example, in which three teen-age participants in a group therapy session collaborate in producing one sentence:

Joe:	(cough) we were in an automobile discussion
Henry:	discussing the psychological motives for
Mel:	drag racing in the streets

Sacks describes the phenomenon as follows: 'In the way that these fellows fit their talk together, which would involve a hearer in seeing that they 'know what's on each other's mind', he could presumably as well take it that what it is they are talking about, they also know' (Sacks, 1995, vol.1: 147). In conclusion, it can be argued that what the device conveys is the teacher's assumptions that students would be able to complete the utterance because *they know (or they are guided to know) what the talk is about*.

#### **(4) MAIN-CLAUSE DIUs: ELICITING A DISPLAY OF LEARNING**

So far, the phenomenon has been described in terms of its basic constructional features and some of its pedagogic functions. I will now focus on the specific sub-set of DIUs which I call *main-clause DIUs*. The analysis will show that, although the device generally demands little of students in terms of the cognitive effort necessary to accomplish the task, this type of DIUs has a rather crucial

function in the instructional sequence where it occurs, owing to the syntactic unit on which it operates and its linkage with prior talk.

I will show that occurrences of this variety of DIU are produced to highlight specific pieces of information that have been mentioned in previous talk and re-proposed in the context of a main clause to be thus jointly produced by the teacher and the students. This specific construction of the DIU provides students with the opportunity to produce a display of knowledge shaped as a completion and as a *repetition of prior talk*. The two features—the fact that (1) the DIU occurs in *main clauses* and that (2) the item on which the device operates is a *repetition* of the same information earlier mentioned—permit the teacher to accomplish the specific pedagogical function of main-clause DIUs: to highlight the information on which it operates as a *key-notion* and as newly *acquired knowledge*, which in turn casts students as *learners*.

I will start the description of this variety of DIUs by focusing again on the ‘angle’ example with which we are already familiar.

### (13) Angles (PM:LT:5a.geometry)

01 T:            il pia::no    della        cattedra,        (1.4) è ve:ro,  
                  **the surface of the**        **teacher's desk**        **right**

02                    (0.2)

03            pre:se::nta?    quattro?  
                  (IT) presents    four  
                  **has**                    **four**

04                    (0.6)

05 Sts:            a::[ngoli  
                  **angles**

06 Sts:            [a:[ngoli  
                  **angles**

07 T:                    [a:ngoli:  
                  **angles**

One of the features that distinguish this particular type of DIUs from other occurrences of the device is its embedding in a simple, independent main clause, rather than in secondary clauses in a compound sentence. I argue that this specific deployment in the turn seems to be responsible for the emphasis which is thus given to the item being elicited. As a result of this emphasis, it qualifies as a key notion in the local pedagogical agenda enacted through the ongoing instructional activity.



25 T:           ↓vai pure       al       po::sto, gra::zie,  
                   go    rather   to    place    thanks  
                   **you can go back to your seat    thank you**

26                   (0.6)

27 Sts:           ((some children clap))

28 T: →        il pia::no   della       cattedra,       (1.4) è veiro,  
                   **the surface of the    teacher's desk       right**

29                   (0.2)

30                   prese::nta?   quattro?  
                   (IT) presents four  
                   **has                   four**

31                   (0.6)

32 Sts:           a::[ngoli  
                   **angles**

33 Sts:           [a[:ngoli  
                   **angles**

34 T:               [a:ngoli:  
                   **angles**

Our target case starts in line 28 (arrow). The turn is shaped as a full, well-formed simple main clause. The structure of the sentence has the regular format of Italian simple sentences (SVO: Subject Verb Object), composed of subject ('the surface of the teacher's desk'), verb ('has'), and object ('four angles'). The turn occurs at the end of Caterina's performance (her full turn around the desk) and seems to be produced precisely to mark the end of it, as indicated by the teacher's invitation to Caterina to return to her seat, produced immediately before the DIU (line 25). The sequence closure is also indicated by the disjunctive marker the teacher produced in line 23 ('*Alo:::ra*'). The disjunctive function of the item is emphasized by the increased volume of the teacher's voice used in the initial vowel sound and by the stretched middle-syllable vowel. The fact that talk has reached a crucial point is also indicated by the one-second pause that precedes the disjunctive marker (line 22), and by the routine understanding-check question which the teacher addresses to Caterina in line 21. All these features bring the ensuing talk to the fore, and as a result the turn with the embedded DIU qualifies as a key point in that instruction activity.

Let us now focus on the item on which the teacher chooses to make the DIU operate, and its relation with prior talk. I have already pointed out that generally all DIUs have the property of being specifically constructed to be successfully accomplished. I have described one mechanism that

facilitates students' identification of the missing part: in delivering the missing part of a word, the teacher uses particular features of talk delivery that emphasize the phonological pattern of the word on which the DIU operates and that highlight the compound pattern of that item (syllable composition). The item, however, on which the DIU in line 30 is built (like all the other main-clause DIUs in my corpus) is a *full word* ('angles'), not a part of one. The task is therefore more 'open' and, thus, less likely to be successfully accomplished by students. We will see that, under these circumstances, the teacher uses a different strategy to ensure that students accomplish the task. This strategy consists of asking students to complete the utterance with a word that has occurred before; thus, students are asked to recall that word and repeat it, albeit in a different utterance context.

It is important, however, to see the mechanism actually in action. As we see in fragment 14, the closest occurrence of the word 'angles' is indeed in the vicinity of the DIU. The teacher produces it in line 19, soon before the question-check she performs on Caterina. It is worth recalling that the whole sequence is about angles or the fact that a rectangular-shaped object like the teacher's desk has four angles (lines 5 and 9) and that angles are generated by changes in direction (lines 14-19). In order to guide students to become aware of this datum, the teacher organizes the instruction activity as a demonstration in which Caterina walks around the desk, and the class counts the times she has to change direction.

I will now focus on the different requests that the teacher makes of the class and their sequential deployment within the larger sequence of questions in a series; in this way, I will reconstruct how the DIU in line 30 refers back to prior occurrences of the item thus elicited. The sequence opens in line 1 with an open interrogative prefaced by a secondary if-sentence that contains a failed DIU. Apparently, the DIU in line 1 is designed to make students focus on the object (the teacher's desk) about which the teacher will formulate the question in line 5. This is also indicated by the teacher's pointing to the desk that she wants the students to mention. The DIU fails to elicit the requested completion which is subsequently produced by the teacher, as is often the

case with this sub-set of secondary-clause DIUs. The question is promptly answered by students in lines 6-8 and line 10 (see discussion above on the comparison between open-interrogatives and DIUs), but the teacher decides to elaborate further on this datum by counting again the number of angles (line 9). A second DIU is then produced; it is embedded in the counting and insists on the number of angles on the teacher's desk (line 9). Once more, the DIU fails to elicit the final item of the counting, which is provided by the teacher in line 12. It is noticeable that here the teacher seems to pursue the completion of the counting despite the students' failure: in line 12, before articulating 'four', she pauses, and postpones the place where 'four' is due, by inserting the calculation 'and one'. The reason for the insistence on the *number* of angles (actually, on number 'four') becomes clear in the talk that develops from line 14 to 19; here the teacher sets the equation between the number of angles and that of the changes of direction that Caterina made in walking around the desk and which seems to be the teacher's goal for the activity.

The two DIUs (lines 9 and 17) that follow the open interrogative in line 5 are thus constructed as linked to and elaborating on the notion of four angles that the open interrogative has elicited. This emphasis on the specific datum (the number of the desk's angles) emerges also in the syntactic formats of the turns that contain these DIUs and in the type of action that they are designed to carry out. In line 9 the teacher counts the angles, to confirm the 'correctness' of the students' answer and to highlight the datum 'four angles' which then will constitute one of the terms of the equation. Syntactically speaking the turn is an expansion of the answer and does not have the status of a main clause.

By contrast, the turn beginning in line 14 with the equation has a rather different status. First, grammatically speaking, the utterance is a 'nominalized' statement;<sup>15</sup> the absence of the verb indicates that the speaker designs the utterance to refer back to an implicit, shared knowledge and contributes to make the structure of the sentence more compact and more similar to a single, independent main sentence. Syntactically speaking, it can be observed that the same referential content of the equation could be expressed more broadly with a compound correlated sentence (of

the type: ‘*when* there are four angles on a surface. *then* there are also four changes of direction), or more concisely with a single main sentence (of the type: ‘four angles mean four changes of direction’). In this case, by omitting the verb, the teacher avoids to make the choice, but obtains an even more compact resulting effect than with the explicit main sentence. It seems, therefore, that the turn beginning in line 14 is produced to be heard as one of these main clauses that are designed to mark a salient step in the argumentative line of the instruction sequence. The ritual understanding check in line 12 (ə chia:ro? / *is it clear*) and the pause in line 13 typically preface this type of utterance. In short, the structure of the sequence can be described as follows: It initiates with an open interrogative, whose answer, after the teacher has acknowledged it (line 9) is expanded by the counting. This action, in turns, confirms and emphasizes the datum which, in turn, is used to lead students to become aware of the correlation stated in the equation (line 14-17) that function as the core of the activity so far.

However, it is worth considering that often, as is the case here, the teacher’s pedagogic agenda can remain unfulfilled by students. In fragment 14 there is evidence of the disalignment between the teacher’s pedagogical goals and the students’ contributions to the interaction. The first indication of this disalignment is constituted by the fact that the DIU in line 17 fails. The second is represented by the two instances where one student produces twice an unsolicited observation (line 15) about the edge of the desk—a proposal that passes completely unnoticed by the teacher, probably because it conflicts with her pedagogic plan.

Interestingly, however, the teacher seems to modify the argumentative trajectory of the instruction sequence. Once the two subsequent failed completions on the students’ part (lines 11 and 18) show that students are not aligned with the teacher’s pedagogic project, the teacher seems to return to the earlier step in the discourse: the discussion of the four angles on the desk (line 28). In this context, the DIU produced in line 30 is clearly designed to summarize *what the students’ responsive behaviour indicates they have understood so far* and, specifically, that the surface of the desk has four angles. With the main-clause DIU here produced, the teacher provides a context

where the noun phrase ‘four angles’—which remained incomplete in line 17—now finds a new slot where it can be newly and appropriately assembled with the students’ joint production of the final item.

It would be therefore erroneous to infer that since the same word (‘angles’) is elicited in order to be collocated in the same noun phrase (‘four angles’), the DIU in line 30 accomplishes the same function or elicits the same type of information as the DIU in line 17, or that the teacher is pursuing the same response all along. As shown in the analysis, I claim that the pedagogic functions of DIUs are inextricably linked to their sequential deployment within a series of questioning actions. Knowledge-displays that are thus elicited from students are, in turns, responsible for the teacher’s subsequent question, as well as of the question’s format, content, and deployment in the talk. In other words, as the analysis has shown, teachers’ questioning is *highly reflexive of the students’ responsive behaviour and of their understanding of the talk* so far.

With regard to the main-clause DIU in line 30, parallel and partially contrasting with the cognitive paucity of the task is the emphasis that is given to the task as related to prior talk and to the activity underway. It is worth recalling once more that the turn in which the DIU occurs is produced at a closure boundary of Caterina’s performance, as indicated in the following organizational points of the talk: the teacher’s ritualistic way of checking Caterina’s understanding in line 21<sup>16</sup> (it should be recalled the teacher attempts to move into this stage earlier in line 12 before the failed main-clause DIU in lines 14 and 17 ); the disjunctive token ‘*allora*’, which is used to mark the shift from one phase of the lesson to the other (line 23) and in particular the marked delivery of that term; the invitation to Caterina to return to her seat and the subsequent thanking, whereby the teacher further underlines that the activity has reached its closure (line 25); and finally the pause in line 26. All these features provide a framework that gives salience to the forthcoming talk.

Owing to the fact that the turn in which the device is embedded is brought to the fore, the DIU in line 30 sets the topic on which it works as particularly relevant in the local agenda of the activity



- 02 St: si gi[ra  
**it turns** (REFLEX.)
- 03 Cat. St: [ha cambiato direzione  
(IT) has changed direction  
**it changed direction**
- 04 T: si gi::ra:.  
**it turns**
- 05 (0.4)/((she holds the posture with her arm))
- 06 T: eh, cioè? (.) ruo::ta:, ↑fa una rotazio::ne:.  
eh that is (IT) rotates (IT) does a rotation  
**eh in other words it rotates it does a rotation**  
^((the teacher turns right with her arm facing the class))  
^((starts a very slow rotating movement,  
so to match the end of the verbal production  
with the completion of the gesture.))
- 07 (.)
- 08 T : d'acco:rdo;  
**alright**  
((she holds the posture and nods slightly towards the right corner  
in the back, towards Caterina))
- 09 (1.4)/((the teacher releases the posture and nods very slightly,  
turning her head to a central position))
- 10 → T: per cambia:re dire↑zio:ne, (0.2) io faccio una ro: [ta:?  
to change direction I do a ro- ta  
**in order to change direction I do a ro ta**  
((she underlines the "beats" of the talk with the right hand  
and moves from the area of the performance, towards her desk, and while  
addressing the whole class))
- 11 Cat. St: [rotazio:ne.  
**rotation**
- 12 T: 'zio::ne.  
**'tion**
- 13 (.)

The question in line 1 is addressed to Caterina (note that the selection is accomplished by the teacher with the gesturing of her head slightly forward and upward, as indicated in the gloss to line 1). Caterina labels the movement of Giovanni's arm in line 3, along with another student who gives a different response in line 2. Each student provides a different plausible definition, but both use lay terms. Through the repetition in line 4, the teacher seems to display that she endorses the first answer. However, since the teacher does not release the arm posture (as indicated in the description of the teacher's non-verbal behaviour in line 5), she manages to keep the sequence open. That the matter is not settled is also confirmed by the way in which the talk progresses. In line 6 the teacher

replaces the lay terms produced earlier by the students with two technical terms (the verb '*ruota*' - third person singular present indicative- / 'he rotates' and the name '*rotazione*' / 'rotation') to define the action and the circular movement of the arm upon the turning body. We can also observe that the teacher uses gestures to convey and underline the specific meaning of the action she wants students to name (glosses to line 6). Hence the DIU, which is later produced in line 10, seems to be specifically designed to insist on this specialized word. The particular importance of this information (i.e. 'my arm does a rotation') is further underlined by the successive turn designed to solicit completion exactly at the word '*rotazione*' / 'rotation'.

Like the DIU in fragment 14, here too the teacher gives salience to the turn by detaching it from prior talk in various ways. The production of the stand-alone confirmation token in line 8 as well as the teacher's body behaviour provides a framework whereby attention is drawn to the turn in line 10. The turn is thus constructed as a standing-alone sentence, with the DIU located in the main clause. The teacher, therefore, designs her turn in order to make Caterina contribute the final syllable of the technical word earlier introduced. Owing to this sequential position of the DIUs, here again the completion is designed as a repetition of a prior occurrence (line 6), whereby the prior 'un-knowledgeable student' is now treated as if s/he is now able to master the *newly acquired information* as the result of the instruction activity just enacted.

More importantly, it is to be noticed that, independently from whether Caterina already knew or ignored the meaning of the word 'rotation', by designing the request in this way (as the completion of a second occurrence of the word), the teacher manages to construct Caterina's production of the word as a repetition of the teacher's prior talk. As a result, here like in the other occurrences previously described of main-clause DIUs, the teacher manages to cast the completion provided by the student as the result of the activity just enacted. In other words, the request for completing the utterance with a repetition of a prior occurrence of the term embodies the teacher's stance that recipients are not familiar with the item, independently from whether this is actually so. The device considers recipients' verbal behaviour and their ability to provide the expected

completion as the result of the instruction activity, and consequently, as evidence that some kind of learning process has taken place, through interaction.

Besides their deployment in *main-clauses* and the *repetition format* of the item requested for completion, there is another systematic feature of DIUs that contributes to making the information elicited particularly salient: the utterance in which they occur conveys a ‘blatantly true’ meaning as their content is conceived either as *universal truth* (as in fragments 15 and 16 below), or as a plainly accessible state of affairs (as in fragment 13). The fact that rotation is necessarily correlated to change of direction (fragment 15) is an assertion whose meaning is a general truth. Similarly, the utterance in the next example (fragment 16, lines 11-14) stating that services must be increased when the population grows is also an assertion that conveys some ‘general truth’. On the other hand, the fact that the teacher’s desk has four angles (fragment 13) is a sensible datum, plainly accessible to anybody in the classroom and made even more accessible by means of Caterina’s performance; as such, it also conveys a general truth.

On this regard, line 10 of fragment 15 presents other features that emphasise this meaning: the present tense of the verb and the first person singular pronoun, used impersonally; the hand beating produced by the teacher in delivering the statement, as well as the way in which she takes a central position in front of the students, so as to face the whole class; all these features add to the sense of generality with which the teacher states the principle that ‘*a rotation is generated each time there is a change of direction*’.

To sum up, the features that characterize main-clause DIUs are the following:

- 1) the completion is constructed as a repetition of prior talk
- 2) the DIU is embedded in a main clause
- 3) the utterance conveys a ‘general truth’.

This list will help the reader in the analysis of the last fragment proposed for the discussion. Fragment 16 is from a Geography Hour. The transcription captures the interaction in a moment when the teacher is engaged in eliciting the category-noun ‘*servizi*’ /‘services’— a term that pupils

came across the year before. Prior to the fragment, students were invited to formulate the reasons why people tend to build towns rather than live apart in isolation. Through a series of questions, the teacher had guided them to realize that living in towns is advantageous because people have access to hospitals, schools, transports, and other services. The collective word has not been mentioned in prior talk, but it will be solicited through multiple prompt-to-answer DIUs (indicated in the transcription with bulleted points). The expected response is finally produced in line 6 by the student Maria and soon endorsed by the teacher in 7 and 9. Our target case occurs in the turn starting in line 11, and it is indicated with the arrow in line 13.

**(16) Services** [PM:FZ:12a.geography/harbours and towns]

01 • T: ↑tanti?  
↑many?

02 St: abitazioni  
**dwelling**s

03 T: [↑nao,  
**nope**

04 M. St: [io lo so  
**I know**

05 • T: ↑tanti?  
**many** ((bending to M.))

06 M. St: ser[VI:ZI!  
**services**

07 T: [ser::vi::zi::, /((falsetto voice))  
**services**

08 (0.2)

09 T: ci sono ta:nti servizi::, (.) eh?  
**there are many services** (IDIOMATIC EXPRESSION,  
SIMILAR TO TAG QUESTION)

10 (0.2)

11 T: >allora< <↑piu' cresce il numero delle? (0.6)  
so the more increases the number of the  
**so the more the number of people**

12 perso::ne, (0.2) piu' queste persone hanno bisogno di-?  
people the more these people are in need of  
**increases the more these people need**

13 → SER-?  
**ser**

14 Sts: 'vi[:zi.  
**'vices**

15 T: ['VI::ZI!  
**'vices**

16 (1.0)

17 T: OKAY?

Like in the two prior examples, also in this fragment the teacher designs a DIU which operates on prior occurrences of the word (lines 6, 7, 9) and is thus solicited as a *repetition*. It should be noted that the word ‘*servizi*’ occurs in line 6, produced by a student as completion to the prompt, then in line 7, as the teacher’s confirmation of the answer, and finally again in line 9, embedded in a full-grammatical sentence whereby the teacher further assesses the answer as ‘correct’. Another similarity with prior examples concerns the syntactic structure of the turn which accommodates the DIU in line 13, which is a main clause, again. Moreover the incomplete utterance has the generic quality of *statements of rules, principles, and general truths*. The sentence coordinates two main sentences through correlative conjunctions, with the DIU located in the second main sentence. Therefore, as in prior instances, the teacher designs a standing-alone sentence, albeit consisting of two coordinated main-sentences, which solely composes the turn produced at the closure of a prior activity (consider the introductory disjunctive token ‘*allora*’), and sets the information thus solicited as pedagogically relevant.

By leaving the utterance incomplete, the teacher encourages students to fill-in the empty slot in her turn to complete the same word that Maria earlier produced as a response. In this way, the completion solicited through the DIU is shaped as *occurring* in the activity that has brought the topic to the fore. Thus, students are given the opportunity to show that they can master the usage of the earlier produced word and, in a certain sense, that they have *learned* it.

The analysis of main-clause DIUs and of their sequential deployment has shown that participants orient to this activity as coincident with that of mastering some key-notions, here conveyed by technical words such as ‘angles’, ‘rotation’, and ‘services’. This phenomenon uses the mechanism of collaborative completion which speakers regularly use in ordinary conversation to manage the joint production of sentences. In this case, that mechanism is refined and specifically molded to fit the context features of whole-class interaction in order to accomplish one of the institutionally relevant goals of instruction interaction: namely, making the activity of learning

accountable as ‘locally managed, partly-administrated, interactionally controlled and sensitive to recipient design’ (Sacks, Schegloff and Jefferson, 1974) .

## (5) CONCLUSION

The analysis presented in this paper has centered on the characterization of one questioning device used in whole-class instruction sequences and demonstrating how parties reach consensus about the teaching/learning goal of the ongoing pedagogical activity as it surfaces in the organization of interaction. The phenomenon under examination is one sub-set of DIUs (Designedly Incomplete Utterances) deployed in main-clause utterances and designed to elicit completion in the shape of a repetition of words occurring in earlier talk. It has been found that this variety of the device is used to show that some kind of a learning process has taken place as the result of the instruction interaction, whereby students are able to master key-notions. In contrast to other strategies used by teachers to facilitate students’ identification of the expected completion, the repetition format used in main-clause DIUs casts the information on which the device operates as newly acquired information while casting the students as having just learned the notion at hand.

Main-clause DIUs have been compared to other varieties of DIUs that are used to accomplish different pedagogical functions and with other syntactical formatted questions, namely open interrogatives. It has been found that the device is a valid means to accomplish questioning in a more indirect way than that of interrogative-formatted questions. It offers a major ‘usability’ in promoting participation in a large group of recipients, as is the case in teacher-led and talk-and-chalk structured lessons. The indirectness is principally due to the linguistic resources which the device employs—mainly prosody—and to the device’s flexibility, which allows it to be successfully applied to any type of syntactic unit that compounds the turn, namely words, phrases, clauses, and sentences. Owing to these features, the device can be used repeatedly on any unit in the

progression of the teacher's turn, while also providing for the turn's 'reversibility' when students fail to provide the expected completion. These qualities make DIUs in general a powerful instrument because teachers can modify the trajectory of their talk as well as the pre-planned and local agenda of the ongoing instruction activity, depending on the students' responsive behaviour, as shown in the example on angles.

These findings raise relevant methodological points for discussion regarding classroom interaction and the way in which pedagogic discourse has been traditionally approached. Much progress has been made in research on classroom interaction owing to the identification of the IRE triplet (Sinclair and Coulthard 1975) and of the characterization of teachers' questioning as 'known-answer questions' (Mehan 1979). Since these breakthroughs research on the topic has continued to grow. The popularity of these analytical categories among scholars, however, seems to have detracted from the importance of fine-grained sequential analysis of teacher-students interaction in instruction sequences. Two areas have been particularly neglected: (1) the characterization, through the analysis of turn design, of the activity of questioning in classrooms as a way to accomplish a range of diverse and specifically pedagogic functions and (2) the inspection of larger sequences of talk as series of linked question-answer pairs, of their sequential deployment and of the inter-referential nature of the pairs which moves beyond the characterization of the IRE template.

Second, the question of knowledge and how it is differently accessible to different parties is certainly a crucial issue in the classroom, as this is the place where instruction is institutionally and formally imparted to young generations in our society. Regarding this topic, the three-part model with the third evaluative turn and the characterization of the teachers' initiating action as a special known-answer questioning have contributed greatly to the specific relevancies of classroom interaction. However, as the analysis has shown, the question of *which* party has access to *what* is not the only relevant element of classroom interaction. Rather, the questions of *how* they both come to an agreement about *what* can be recognized as known at that precise moment and on *what* basis are also important. Equally important is the question of *which* resources participants use to reach

this consensus at any defined stage in their interaction. This analytical approach provides a new way of understanding formal instruction interaction, insofar as it gives an interactional account of the participants' own views of learning, and precisely how it is achieved and how participants perform the activity of *instructing* and *being instructed in talk-in-interaction*. Such an approach constitutes a dramatic alternative to both the quantitative and experimental approaches to learning. Finally, far from an exhaustive account of all that DIUs can accomplish in classroom interaction, the analysis provided here is rather an account of what teachers and students themselves consider as learning in their daily activities as well as of the social organization of classroom interaction beyond the idealized three-part sequence.

#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> The model is also referred to with the acronym I-R-F (Initiation-Response-Feedback).

<sup>2</sup> The type of pedagogical activity I am concerned with here is very similar to the 'language game' described by Levinson (1992). In his analysis of classroom data, Levinson shows that *series of linked questions* can be used by teachers to accomplish two distinct pedagogical aims: (1) to make a '*request to follow a procedure*' or (2) to '*make explicit a selected part of the implicit knowledge that the teacher assumes pupils to have*' (86-92). Instructions sequences that are the focus of this study are of the second type. According to Levinson, this management of the questioning activity by teachers is similar to the way in which questions are used in courtrooms. He argues that in both contexts questions 'extract answers that would amount to a specific argument' (91). On this regard, see also Drew (1992: 472) for a characterization of the 'line of questioning management' in courtrooms.

<sup>3</sup> The word '*angolo*' /'angle', as referred to a surface, is here used as a technical word. The same part of the desk can be referred to with the more colloquial term '*spigolo*' (whose meaning partially overlaps with that of the English word 'corner').

<sup>4</sup> A few decades ago, with the rise of the 'progressive' trend in teaching, this practice, as well as other ways of questioning students, has been prey to strong criticism. Questioning students with incomplete utterances or with other close-ended questions was negatively judged because they were considered a way of constraining students' response to pre-determined answers already contained in the questions (for a short description of the controversy, see also Mercer 1995: 28-32). On this regard, it is worth highlighting also what Atkinson and Drew wrote in 1979 about similarities between the organization of talk in courts and classrooms concerning some possible constraints deriving from their multi-party settings (pp. 220-228). See in particular footnote n.8, about the way in which some organizational aspects of talk in classrooms have been considered 'unpleasant' features by some narrow and one-sided critiques.

<sup>5</sup> Quirk et al. (1985) define restrictive and non-restrictive modification in relative clauses as follows: 'The modification can be RESTRICTIVE when the reference of the head is a member of a class which can be identified only through the modification that has been supplied. [...] Alternatively, the referent of a noun phrase may be viewed as unique or as a member of a class that has been independently identified (for example in the preceding context). Any modification given to such a head is additional information which is not essential for identification, and we call it NON RESTRICTIVE' (p. 1239). The following sentences are provided as examples of the two types of modification:

(R) 'The woman who is approaching us seems to be somebody I know' (p. 1247)

(NR) 'The Bible, which has been retranslated, remains a bestseller' (p.1257).

<sup>6</sup> The specification of 'verbal' is necessary in the educational context because teachers can elicit displays of knowledge by inviting students to do something, such as to perform an activity without speaking. The Birmingham group includes the 'question' as one of three types of Initiation acts; the other two—'informing' and 'command'—make relevant non-linguistic and non-verbal responses.

<sup>7</sup> This is not to say that teachers address students uniquely to elicit displays of knowledge. The interaction that takes place in the classroom can be designed to accomplish other aims apart from instruction, such as reproaching, requesting, complaining, agreeing, disagreeing and all the other actions that participants might consider relevant in relation to the specific contingencies of a given situation.

<sup>8</sup> Italian prepositions can be linked with articles in one single word (in Italian they are called *preposizioni articolate*), and this is one such case. The simple preposition *in* (in English 'in') is here linked with the determinative article *il* (masculine and singular) to form the *preposizione articolata* (compound preposition with article) *nel*.

<sup>9</sup> In Italian some adjectives can be used also as nouns, as is the case, for instance, of adjectives of nationality. For example, the word *italiano* can be used both as an adjective and as a noun. In the latter case, the noun can be the only component of a noun phrase. The word '*neolitico*' here has the same properties: it is used as a noun and stands for the noun phrase '*il periodo neolitico*' (*the Neolithic period*).

<sup>10</sup> The ambiguity of the phenomenon as related to silence in terms of 'being allotted' by teachers in waiting for completion is addressed in the next sub-section.

<sup>11</sup> It is interesting to note that, when the teacher produces the DIU as operating on a word which is part of a parenthetical clause, students supply the end of the word with a slightly upward intonation, thus displaying that they have understood that the turn has not ended and that their performance completes a TCU into the teacher's turn. Indeed, the teacher continues in line 4.

<sup>12</sup> The notion of type-conforming and nonconforming answer has been discussed by Raymond (2003, 2006) with regards to yes/no type interrogatives. It refers to the grammatical format that these turns make relevant as standard or unmarked; i.e. for Yes/No interrogatives, the standard expected answers are 'yes' or 'no' (Raymond, 2006: 119).

<sup>13</sup> See also Jones and Thornborrow (2004: 419-420), in which a case of 'recognizably invited completions' designed to elicit the result of a calculation (a 'known' answer) is reported.

<sup>14</sup> See Heritage and Roth (1995) for an illuminating elucidation of the pragmatic force of grammatical resources in questioning in news interviews. For a survey of grammatical resources for questioning in Italian, see Fava (1995).

<sup>15</sup> According to the *Dizionario di Linguistica* (Dubois et al., 1979), nominalization is the process whereby the verb is omitted in a sentence.

<sup>16</sup> It is worth knowing that Caterina was absent during a prior lesson in which this issue was addressed for the first time. This is the reason why the girl is asked to do the demonstration herself.

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