

# **Creating space for learning through ‘Mm hm’ in a L2 classroom: Implications for L2 classroom interactional competence**

Studies on Second Language (L2) classroom interaction have placed a great deal of emphasis on the value of teacher third-turn feedback practices. However, the roles that seemingly minor aspects of interaction like minimal response tokens (e.g., ‘Mm’, ‘Mm hm’, ‘Uh huh’, ‘Okay’, ‘Yeah’) play as a feature of these practices have not been investigated in great detail. Studies which have sought to examine what such tokens do in language teaching and learning processes have mostly adopted a discourse analytic perspective, thereby treating them more or less as a homogeneous group (namely, ‘backchannel signals’). However, through ethnomethodological research, each token has been found to be doing distinctive work. This study adopts a multimodal conversation analytic perspective to investigate the uses of ‘Mm hm’ by an English as a Foreign Language teacher in a teacher education context. Analysis demonstrates how the teacher uses the token as a ‘continuer’ to withhold a third-turn evaluation, thereby keeping the channel open for further participation and hence creating space for learning. As such, the study furthers our understanding of L2 teachers’ third-turn feedback practices and has direct implications for L2 teacher classroom interactional competence.

**Keywords:** L2 classroom interaction; minimal response token ‘Mm hm’; L2 classroom interactional competence; conversation analysis; embodiment

## **1. Introduction**

An important finding from a discourse analytic (DA) studies into classrooms is that classroom interaction can be explained by an IRF structure (Sinclair & Coulthard, 1975): The teacher Initiates a turn in the first position; the student Responds to the teacher’s turn in the second position; the teacher provides Feedback in the third position. Mehan (1979) has also claimed that classroom interaction is overwhelmingly organised in terms of a three-part sequence of interaction between a teacher and a student using the term ‘IRE sequence’: The teacher Initiates interaction in the first position; a student Responds to the teacher’s question in the second position; the teacher offers Evaluation in the third position. Although Seedhouse (2004) argues that second language (L2) classroom interaction cannot be explained only by IRE sequences, studies from a Conversation Analysis (CA) perspective show that in teacher-fronted sequences, the IRE cycle is still pervasive (e.g., Hellermann, 2003, 2005; Lee, 2007; Park, 2013; Waring, 2008).

Many studies have adopted a CA approach to highlight the value of the feedback practices of L2 teachers in the third turns of the IREs (e.g., Hellermann, 2003; Kääntä, 2010; Park, 2013; Sert & Walsh, 2013; Waring, 2008). Such studies have demonstrated how the third-turn move is crucial in constructing or obstructing learning in the L2 classroom. For example, Lee (2007) shows how the third turn carries out the contingent task of responding to and acting on the prior turns of the students while moving the interaction forward. Park (2013) also

demonstrates how repeats in the third turn may provide an effective tool for facilitating talk. Similarly, by focusing on the third slot of the IRE exchange, where the teachers make repetitive feedback moves following student responses, Hellermann (2003) shows how the differential prosody of each repetition by the teachers accomplishes some additional interactive work. In addition, Sert and Walsh (2013) illustrate how teachers use deictic gestures, embodied vocabulary explanations, translation, and code-switching after the students' Claims of Insufficient Knowledge (CIK) to further facilitate involvement, thereby constructing learning in the L2 classroom. Waring (2008), on the other hand, demonstrates how the use of explicit positive assessment (e.g., "very good") by teachers can suppress the opportunities within certain contexts for voicing understanding problems or exploring alternative correct answers (see also Wong & Waring, 2009).

It is obvious that these studies have contributed to our understanding of the features of L2 teachers' feedback practices in the third turn position of the IREs. They have revealed the importance of the teacher third-turn move in constructing or obstructing learning and underscored the concept of Classroom Interactional Competence (CIC), which is defined as "teachers' and learners' ability to use interaction as a tool for mediating and assisting learning" (Walsh, 2011, p.158). However, the roles that seemingly minor aspects of interaction like minimal response tokens (e.g., 'Mm', 'Mm hm', 'Yeah') play as a feature of teacher third-turn feedback practice have not been investigated in great detail. Studies which have sought to examine what the use of such tokens by L2 teachers do in language teaching and learning processes have mostly adopted a DA perspective, thereby treating all such tokens as homogeneous, namely 'backchannel signals' (e.g., Castro, 2009; Yoshida, 2008). According to Heritage (1984), collecting minimal response tokens under such a term is problematic, as the notion of 'backchannelling' includes a range of listener activities, such as asking for clarification, confirmation, and other types of repair. Since his work, subsequent CA studies have supported Heritage's observations (e.g., Beach, 1993; Gardner, 1997; Goodwin, 1986; Heritage, 1984; Jefferson, 1984; Schegloff, 1982).

In this study, we investigate the distinctive work achieved by 'Mm hm' in a L2 classroom, where pedagogy (i.e., the goal-oriented nature of interaction) plays an important role in shaping interaction (Seedhouse, 2004). More specifically, adopting a multimodal CA perspective, we investigate the uses of 'Mm hm' by an English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teacher as a third-turn feedback practice. The analysis of 12 hours of video-recordings taken from a teacher education context demonstrates that the teacher uses the token as a 'continuer'

(e.g., Gardner, 2001; Jefferson, 1984; Guthrie, 1997; Sacks, 1992a, 1992b; Schegloff, 1982) to withhold a third-turn evaluation (e.g., Zemel & Koschmann, 2011), thereby keeping the channel open for further participation and hence creating space for learning. As such, the study furthers our understanding of L2 teachers' third-turn feedback practices and has direct implications for L2 teacher CIC (Walsh, 2011).

## **2. Early work on minimal response tokens in L2 classroom interaction and the minimal response token 'Mm hm'**

Studies which have sought to investigate the uses of minimal response tokens in L2 classroom interaction have mostly come from a DA perspective. However, not much attention has been paid to the uses of these tokens in L2 teacher talk (Castro, 2009; Dink & Wang, 2015). As such, the scarcity of research on the uses of these tokens by L2 teachers leaves only limited knowledge on the roles they play in shaping L2 classroom interaction.

Castro (2009) investigates the prevailing functions of 'Mhm' and 'Yeah' employed by a non-native teacher of English in an EFL class using a DA approach. Castro reports that 'Mhm' is used by the teacher as a 'backchannel signal' to provide permanent feedback to the students, thus signalling that "the message has been understood and confirming that communication is on course" (p. 73). As for 'Yeah', it has been reported that the token is used by the teacher as a 'response/reaction marker' which has an interpersonal function of conveying agreement (p. 70-71).

Yoshida (2008) also adopts a DA perspective to investigate an EFL teacher's deployment of the token, 'Uh huh'. Yoshida reports that by using this 'backchannel signal', the teacher indicates that the message has been received and implicitly suggests that "the student should continue to keep her turn" (p. 6).

To our knowledge, only one study has attempted to employ CA methods to explore the uses of a minimal response token by an L2 teacher. Shi (2015) applies the term 'embodied backchannel' (p. 1) when investigating the uses of 'Okay' by an EFL teacher. Firstly, by using a Corpus Linguistics (CL) approach, Shi shows the occurrences of 'Okay' within its surrounding textual environment, thereby revealing certain contexts such as opening or closing a topic, showing instruction to students, and offering conversational support. Following this initial step, CA is adopted in order to examine how 'Okay' is framed, and Shi identifies five functions of 'Okay': Topic opening/shifting, encouragement,

acceptance/agreement, hesitation, and turn allocation. In order to investigate the interplay of the backchannel and gestures, Shi builds a multimodal sub-corpus to code gestures produced with the backchannel. Shi reports that, in her corpus: topic opening/shifting is likely to co-occur with the raising of eyebrows and frowning; encouragement tends to co-occur with the raising of eyebrows and smiles; acceptance/agreement is more likely to co-occur with a nod and smile; hesitation is always accompanied by frowning; the teacher performs hand gestures and smiles to allocate turns. Shi argues that her research demonstrates the interdependence of ‘Okay’ and gestural conduct in creating meaning.

As far as we are aware, teachers’ deployment of ‘Mm hm’ in L2 classroom interaction has not yet been a focus of research attention. However, in broader interaction research, ‘Mm hm’ has been given special attention over many years. Researchers have tried to understand its specific uses in particular institutional settings like therapy (e.g., Czyzewski, 1995; Fitzgerald & Leudar, 2010; Muntigl & Zabala, 2008) and its use along with the deployment of other tokens (e.g., Drummond & Hopper, 1993a, 1993b; Gardner, 2001; Guthrie, 1997; Jefferson, 1984). One central finding is that the token serves as a ‘continuer’ in interaction, which rests on the observation that the token is typically placed at a point in talk when a current speaker’s turn is not yet complete (e.g., Gardner, 2001; Jefferson, 1984; Guthrie, 1997; Sacks, 1992a, 1992b; Schegloff, 1982). As such, it is used to signal to the current speaker that they continue. On the other hand, it has been argued that the token can also direct a speaker to say more (e.g., Czyzewski, 1995; Fitzgerald & Leudar, 2010; Muntigl & Zabala, 2008). For example, Muntigl and Zabala (2008) show how therapists might deploy ‘Mm hm’ after a lengthy pause as an ‘expansion elicitor’ (see also Czyzewski, 1995; Fitzgerald & Leudar, 2010; Gardner, 2001). Related to this, Gardner (2001) argues that it is crucial to be precise about whether the token occurs in overlap with the prior talk or at the boundaries of Turn Construction Units (TCUs) and whether it occurs before or after pauses in interaction. Gardner also notes that the way in which ‘Mm hm’ is interpreted is also determined by whether it is deployed as a ‘stand alone’ or as part of a larger unit.

The prosodic shape of ‘Mm hm’ also plays an important role in understanding how the token is deployed or interpreted. It has been reported that the token is typically articulated with a slightly rising terminal pitch contour to pass up an opportunity to do a fuller turn (Gardner, 2001). On the other hand, in examining patient-therapist interaction, Czyzewski (1995) shows that when produced with a fairly flat intonation contour, ‘Mm hm’ can encourage the patient to open up.

Based on the findings of these studies, it is apparent that ‘Mm hm’ acquires specific meanings as a ‘contingent’ achievement, where its sequential placement, timing, and prosodic shape ‘converge’ to inform how it is treated in interaction. However, the current study argues that it is not only the sequential placement of the token, including its timing and prosodic shape that help to disambiguate its use. In addition, the embodied resources (e.g., gaze, head nods, gestures, body posture) with which its production co-occurs also play an important role in understanding how it is treated in interaction. Therefore, by also paying attention to such embodied resources, our analyses examine the distinctive uses of ‘Mm hm’ as an ‘embodied’ achievement in L2 classroom interaction.

### **3. Data and method**

Data were generated in an academic course on ‘Contextual Grammar’, taught in a teacher education context at a state university in Turkey. Three hours of video data were generated from a class which took place in the spring term of 2013/14, and a further nine hours of video data were generated over a three-week period in the spring term of 2015/16. The same teacher is present throughout the data set, but student cohorts vary.

The context of this study is a L2 classroom, where the organisation of the interaction is structured around IRE sequences. In addition, in the third turn move, the teacher typically assesses either the accuracy of the language patterns or the appropriacy of the propositional information in relation to the ongoing activity. As such, the study draws conclusions from only one type of L2 classroom micro-context, which is ‘form-and-accuracy’ (Seedhouse, 2004). However, based on the collection of sequences, the pedagogical focus is rarely on the accuracy of linguistic forms, but rather on the factual accuracy of the students’ statements in relation to the ongoing activity.

The participants are first-year students of English language education and one female teacher. The students (approximately 35 in each classroom) are undertaking four years of study before going on to teach English in primary or high schools. The teacher, who was born and raised in Turkey, has been a lecturer in the department for five years. She has a PhD in English Language Teaching (ELT) and she has been teaching English at tertiary level for more than seven years. In the transcript, the participants have been anonymised: T is used to refer to the teacher, and S1, S2, etc. to refer to individual students.

Data transcriptions are based upon Jeffersonian conventions (see Appendix A), with additional features to indicate key embodied conduct developed in order to display some visual information key to our analyses. For example, | is used to mark the onset and ending of a nonverbal action (e.g., head nods, gaze), and # is used for the screenshots to show the exact location of the images in the transcripts. In addition, ↓ or **↑** (underline, bold) is used to mark the type of a head nod performed by the teacher (with more arrows representing more expansive nods). *Praat*, a free, readily available open source software, was used to determine the pitch contour of ‘Mm hm’ in the all cases analysed for the study.

In employing multimodal CA in our data analysis, we treat language not as an abstract set of potentialities, but as situated action, organised in the temporal and sequential unfolding of its uses, mobilised with other multimodal resources, such as glances, gestures, bodily postures, and body movements (Goodwin, 1981; Mondada, 2008).

Analyses draw on a close examination of the token’s sequential placement, prosodic shape, and timing, as well as any embodied resources employed by the teacher. The token deployed by the teacher is a bilabial nasal (i.e., ‘Mm hm’) articulated with an aspiration in the second syllable (i.e., the ‘h’). As such, the token is recognisably the same as that described in previous research (e.g., Gardner, 2001; Guthrie, 1997; Jefferson, 1984). However, as the study focuses on only one teacher, it is possible that its use may be idiosyncratic, or linked to her own idiolect (i.e., as a L1 Turkish speaker).

#### **4. Analysis**

Analysis of the data shows that the teacher uses ‘Mm hm’ in the third turn position of the IREs as a ‘continuer’. That is, to pass up an opportunity to do a fuller turn, thereby giving the floor back to the prior speaker to continue. The following categories have been identified regarding the use of the token as a ‘continuer’: a) to acknowledge the students’ intention to continue, b) to display an evaluative stance with the students’ answers (i.e., assess the students’ answers), and c) to prompt the students to expand on their answers (i.e., open up).

In Extract 1 below, the deployment of ‘Mm hm’ as a ‘continuer’ is treated differently by a student, according to its sequential location in the talk. More specifically, by deploying the token at the within-turn juncture (e.g., Fitzgerald & Leudar, 2010), or within the turn (e.g., Goodwin, 1986), the teacher acknowledges the student’s intention to continue. With that production, the teacher passes up an opportunity to do a fuller turn, because a multi-unit turn is already in progress (Schegloff, 1982). On the other hand, by deploying the token at a

possible TRP, where the second turn of the student is complete, the teacher prompts the student to expand on her answer (i.e., open up).

Before the extract, the teacher and students agree on the details of ‘gerunds’ by reading a text and exploring the grammar item in the text. After assigning some tasks to the students about the usage of the grammar item (i.e., a task to decide the –ing words in the sentences are gerunds or not), the teacher writes two sentences on the board and asks the students if the sentences are different (i.e., whether the –ing words in the sentences are gerunds or not).

**Extract 1\_17.15 (30:02-31:12) (I have another question for you)**

- 17 T: |yes.  
|T pointing at S2
- 18 S2: er: in the first sentence, e:m >walking on the beach is  
19 one of my favourite activities< er: walking on the beach  
20 |is subject,  
|S2 gaze towards T
- 21 → T: |Mm hm,  
|((↓)) T nodding
- 22 S2: [|of the sentence. but the- the second sentence e:m  
|S2 gaze towards T
- 23 it em: it dif- e:m indicates the |time difference.  
|S2 leaning back, gaze  
shift down towards the book
- 24 → T: |Mm hm,  
|((↓)) T nodding, gaze towards S2
- 25 S2: |er: when we were walking |on the beach, she told the  
|S2 gaze shift towards T |((↑↑ ↓↓)) T nodding
- 26 [whole story.

27 S3: [|like an adverb.  
|T gaze shift towards S3

28 T: |Mm: hm:. |so: we should be careful about them.  
|((↑↑ ↓↓))T nodding |T gaze shift towards the board and then towards class

Before the extract, the teacher asks the students about the difference between the sentences written on the board. She gives the turn to a bidding student (S2) in line 17. From line 18 to 20, S2 provides the second pair part of the adjacency pair, and in line 21, the token is deployed by the teacher with a falling-rising intonation contour (i.e., |Mm [hm,]) accompanied by a rapid down head nod (i.e., ↓), acknowledging that a multi-unit turn is in progress, and giving the student the go-ahead to continue. The evidence for this is as follows: The token is produced at a point where the student's turn is incomplete (e.g., S2's talk in line 22 is the syntactic continuation of the turn in lines 18-20, the turn is articulated with a slightly rising intonation contour, and the turn in line 22 is produced in overlap with the second syllable of the teacher's token, which shows that S2 holds the floor for speakership). In lines 22 and 23, S2 continues to produce the rest of her response, and completes the turn (e.g., it is articulated with a falling intonation contour, S2 leans back on her chair and shifts her gaze from the teacher down towards her book). In line 24, the teacher deploys the token with a falling-rising intonation contour (i.e., |Mm hm,) and performs a rapid down head nod (i.e., ↓) in conjunction with gazing towards the student. Interestingly, S2 retakes the floor in line 25 through a filler (i.e., er:) and expands on her answer by providing an elaboration. In line 27, S3 displays her affiliation with S2's response in overlap, thereby acting as a co-producer of the turn.

It should also be noted here that the teacher manifests an 'embodied preferred next action' by performing a full expansive up-and-down head nod (i.e., ↑↑ ↓↓) in line 25 at the same time as S2 produces her expansion. In other words, the teacher displays the positive nature of her evaluation before the third turn is produced. In line 28, the teacher deploys the token in turn-initial position with a falling intonation contour. Notice that it is also a long glissando (i.e., there is a prolongation of the token). In addition, she performs a full expansive up-and-down head nod (i.e., ↑↑ ↓↓). As such, the teacher uses the token as an acknowledgment token this time to acknowledge both students' responses as acceptable in the sense of 'correct'.

The reason for characterising the use of ‘Mm hm’ as an acknowledgment token in line 28 is predicated on the sequential environment in which it is realised, as well as its prosodic shape (i.e., it is a long glissando with a falling intonation contour). This shows that the token is deployed immediately following the student’s second turn response (i.e., at a possible TRP). In other words, the student’s second turn is pragmatically, syntactically and intonationally complete (Ford & Thompson, 1996). In addition, since the teacher does not deploy the token as a ‘stand alone’, but provides more talk, she takes over speakership and does not display passive reciprocity in the sense that she passes up an opportunity to take a fuller turn (Gardner, 2001; Jefferson, 1984).

As seen in the extract, the deployment of ‘Mm hm’ as a ‘continuer’ by the teacher at two different points in the talk is treated differently by the student. More specifically, the teacher deploys the token in line 21 at the within-turn juncture to pass up the opportunity to take a fuller turn, thereby honouring a projection of continuation displayed by the learner. In other words, by using the token when a multi-unit turn is in progress, the teacher acknowledges the student’s intention to go on, thus giving the floor back to the prior speaker to continue. The projection is also indicated by the prosodic shape of the token (i.e., falling-rising) and the nod the teacher performs (i.e., one rapid down nod). On the other hand, by deploying the token at a possible TRP in line 24, the teacher projects that more talk is required of the student. That is to say, by using the token at such a point, the teacher prompts the student to expand on her answer (i.e., open up). This projection is also indicated by the deployment of the token with a rising intonation contour (i.e., it indicates that the floor is the student’s), alongside the teacher’s gaze towards the student and the type of the nod she produces (i.e., one rapid down nod), which displays ‘go ahead and say more’ (in contrast to the evaluative nod, which is one full rapid or slow, more or less expansive, up-and-down or down-and-up nod) (see Extracts 2 and 3).

Previous research has shown that recipients’ deployment of ‘Mm hm’ and ‘Uh huh’ at within-turn junctures bridges the units in the flow of speech and tend to be produced at the boundaries of TCUs (Goodwin, 1986; Sacks, 1992a, 1992b; Schegloff, 1982). More precisely, recipients track the course of talk by placing the tokens not after one unit is finished, but rather just before it reaches completion (see Goodwin, 1986). However, in the extract analysed above, ‘Mm hm’ does not occur just before one unit reaches completion, but *after* it reaches completion, and the student begins to produce the next unit before the token is completed (see line 22). In other words, the token does not latch or overlap with the previous

unit, but rather it latches with the next. In addition, the teacher does not interject just anywhere within the turn, but after the student articulates the previous unit. Further, she does this with a slightly rising intonation contour, which displays that the student intends to continue, and the token does rise, thereby taking the prosodic shape of its environment and hence confirming this incompleteness (Fitzgerald & Leudar, 2010). As such, it does not indicate the teacher's opinion of the answer, but functions as a signal for the student to continue to produce the next unit/s of her turn (Fitzgerald & Leudar, 2010). The projection is also indicated by the nod the teacher performs (i.e., one rapid down nod), which might be displaying 'go ahead' (in contrast to the evaluative nod, which is one full rapid or slow, more or less expansive, up-and-down or down-and-up nod) (see Extracts 2 and 3). Therefore, the token appears to have both a 'prospective' aspect, in that it gives the floor back to the prior speaker to continue to produce the next unit/s of the turn, as well as having a 'retrospective' aspect, in that it indicates to the student the incompleteness of the turn, but it remains 'neutral' towards the talk (Muller, 1996).

However, the analysis also shows that the teacher can deploy 'Mm hm' to display her assessment of the students' answers. Extract 2 below serves to demonstrate how the teacher displays her positive assessment of a student's answer by producing 'Mm hm' at a different point within the student's turn, shifting its prosodic shape, and performing some forms of nonverbal cues, thereby projecting an 'embodied preferred next-action'. The extract will also show how the different timing of the token (i.e., after a short pause), deployed at a different point in the talk, with a rising intonation contour, and alongside the teacher's head nod and gaze hold towards the student, prompts the student to expand on her answer.

Before the extract, the teacher and students explore the grammar item (i.e., 'modals') in a reading text, and the teacher explains the usage of the grammar item from the 'grammar notes' section of the book by reading the notes and elaborating on them. In the extract, the teacher asks a question to the students about a note in the section.

**Extract 2\_5.1 (01:22-02:04) (What is contracting?)**

14 T: | [ Mm: hm:. | but we have one more thing.  
| ((↓↓ ↑↑)) T nodding | T gaze shift towards S3, T pointing at S3  
15 S3: negative form of must [ is used ] for=

16 → T:

[ | ↑ Mm hm. ]

| (( ↓ )) T nodding, T pointing at S3

# 1.1 ----> 1.2 ----> 1.3

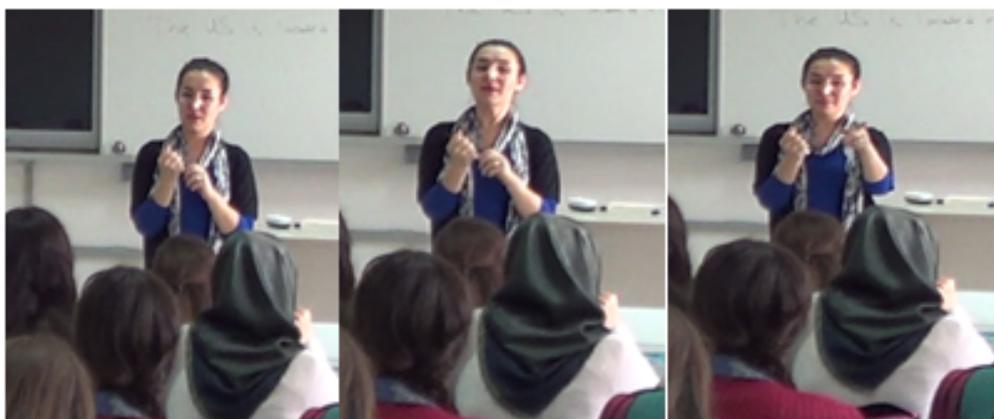


Figure 1

17 S3: | =prohibition.

| S3 gaze shift down towards the book

18 | (0.4)

| T gaze towards S3

19 → T: | Mm hm,

| (( ↓ )) T nodding

20 S3: | er: for that reason we don't use [mustn't.

| S3 gaze shift towards T and then down towards the book

21 T: [ | ↑ ye:ah. we

| T gaze shift towards class

22 don't use it here.=

23 S4: | =°meaning is changing.°

| T gaze shift towards S4

24 T: | yeah. the meaning is changing.

| T gaze towards S4 and then shift towards class

The extract begins with the teacher's repair initiation in line 14, where she also allocates the turn to S3. In line 15, S3 provides her response, and the teacher deploys the token in line 16 with a rising-falling intonation contour (i.e., | ↑ Mm [ hm. ) in conjunction with performing a

full rapid up-and-down head nod (i.e.,  $\uparrow \downarrow$ ) and pointing at S3, which displays an evaluative stance. The evidence for this is as follows: Firstly, it can be seen that the teacher deploys the token with a marked prosody (i.e., a rising-falling intonation contour) in line 16 in overlap with the student's turn in line 15, and also performs a full rapid up-and-down head nod, and points at S3 (see Figure 1), which work together to display a positive assessment of the answer. Secondly, it can be argued here that the teacher uses the token to assess the student's answer without treating it as an emerging element of a larger structure (Goodwin, 1986). More precisely, it is not a student intended multi-unit turn that is being acknowledged by the token, but it is an assessment of 'what is being said, while it is being said'. Therefore, the teacher uses the token to assess 'what is being said' without treating it as a preliminary to something else. S3 provides the rest of the response in line 17, and the turn is complete (e.g., it is articulated with a falling intonation contour). Following a 0.4 second silence in line 18, the student retakes the floor, after the teacher deploys the token with a falling-rising intonation contour (i.e.,  $|\underline{Mm} \underline{hm},$ ) accompanied by a rapid down head nod ( $\downarrow$ ). Following the student's turn, the teacher acknowledges the answer as acceptable by using an acknowledgment token ( $[\uparrow ye:ah.,$  line 21) as a preface to her repetition of the student's answer.

One could argue here that the production of 'Mm hm' at such a point (line 19), together with the nod, serves as a 'late' acknowledgment, rather than as projecting a continuation. However, the reason for calling it a continuer is predicated on its sequential environment, where it is preceded by a pause. If the teacher was producing an acknowledgment, it would typically occur as close to the end of the student's TCU as possible, rather than after a pause (Muntigl & Zabala, 2008). By withholding speaking at such a point, and producing 'Mm hm' after a short pause, the teacher elicits the student's expansion on the topic. In addition, it can be argued here that the projection of the continuation has already been displayed by the teacher, through her gaze hold towards the student during the pause in line 18. In other words, the teacher has used her gaze as a resource for pursuing/mobilising a further response, and when the response is still not forthcoming, she upgrades to a verbal pursuit (Rossano, 2006, as cited in Stivers & Rossano, 2010). This is even further indicated by the deployment of the token with a rising intonation contour, and embodied through the nod the teacher performs (i.e., one rapid down nod).

Lastly, in the following extract, we will demonstrate how the teacher draws upon a specific form of hand gesture when producing the token, in order to prompt a student to expand on her



# 2.1 ----> 2.2 ----> 2.3

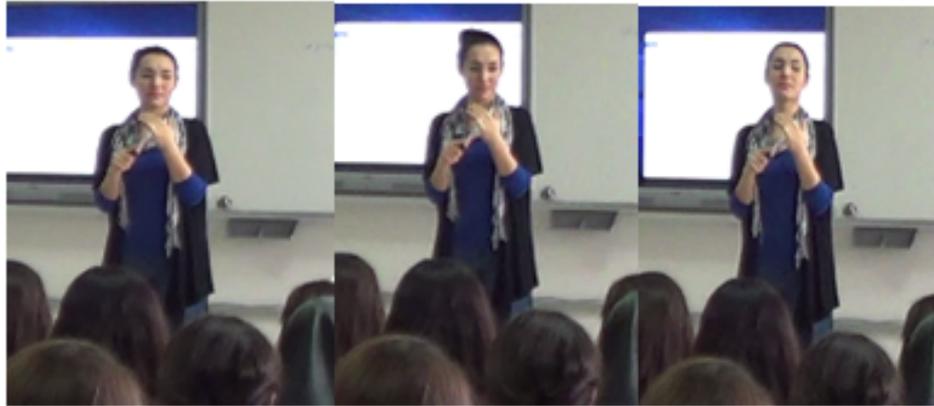


Figure 2

9 S1: =er for example e:r |/dinin/ manne- e:r eating manners,  
|T tapping on her finger with the pen

10 → T: |Mm: [hm:],  
|((↑↑ ↓↓))T nodding, T finger counting with the pen

#3.1 ----> 3.2----> 3.3

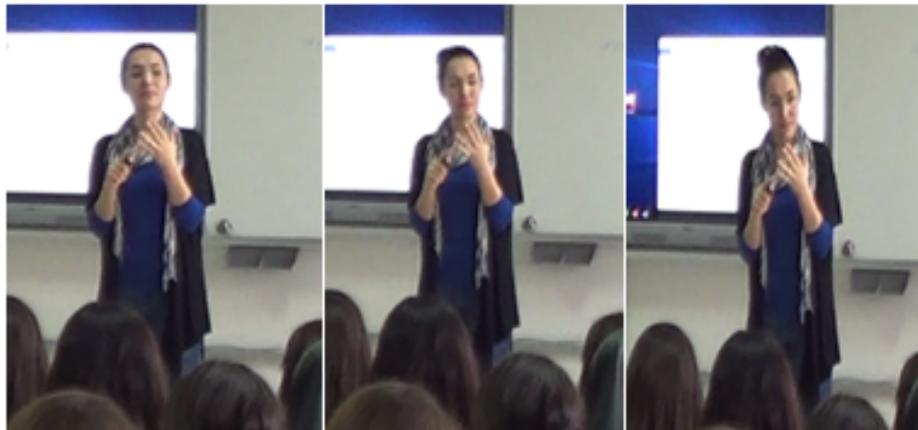


Figure 3

11 S1: [and giving gifts to each other,

12 → T: |Mm: hm:,  
|((↑↑ ↓↓))T nodding, T finger counting with the pen

#4.1 ----> 4.2 ----> 4.3

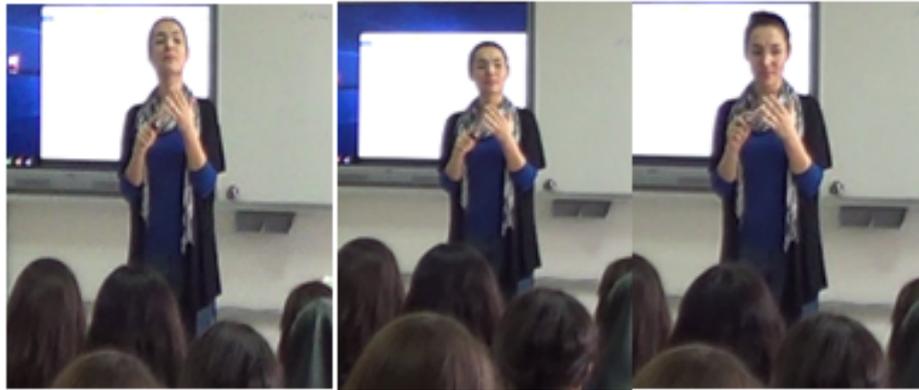


Figure 4

- 13 S1: a:nd |e:r \$like that\$.=
- |S1 gaze shift down at her book and then towards T
- 14 T: |=↑yeah. there were some differences between these two
- |T gaze shift towards class
- 15 cultures. .h what happened? |who went\_ to where:?
- |T hand gestures

The extract begins with the teacher's second initiation of the extended IRE sequence (line 1). During the 0.9-second silence in line 5, the teacher shifts her gaze towards S1 and selects the student as the next speaker via a head nod. S1 provides her response in lines 6, 7. It should be noted here that the teacher manifests an 'embodied preferred next action' by performing a full expansive down-and-up head nod (i.e., ↓↓ ↑↑), pointing at S1, and tapping on her finger with a pen, all alongside the student's production of her response (line 6). Firstly, it can be argued here that a multi-TCU turn is projected by S1, as the turn begins with a 'pre-pre' (Schegloff, 2007) or 'story preface' (Sacks, 1974) (i.e., >there are some differences between<). In addition, the turn is articulated in line 7 with a slightly rising intonation contour and the student holds the floor for speakership through a filler (i.e., =er) in line 9. Notice that it is also produced as a latched turn, suggesting that the turn in line 7 is incomplete. Therefore, by deploying the token with a falling-rising intonation contour at line 8, the teacher gives the go-ahead for a multi-unit turn from the student (i.e., as the current speaker) (Schegloff, 1982). It can also be argued here that by using the token as a long glissando (i.e., |Mm: hm:, =) and performing a full expansive down-and-up head nod (i.e., ↓↓ ↑↑), the teacher displays a strong alignment with the student's projected course of action. In line 9, the student continues, and 'Mm hm' is again produced before the turn is complete

(e.g., the turn is articulated with a slightly rising intonation contour and the student holds the floor for speakership in line 11 with a connector, ([and]), produced in overlap with the second syllable of the token). As such, the token is deployed by the teacher with a falling-rising intonation contour in line 10, again to acknowledge the student's intention to go on. As it is a long glissando (i.e., |Mm: [hm:, ) and accompanied by a full expansive up-and-down head nod (i.e., ↑↑ ↓↓), the teacher again displays a strong alignment. In line 11, the student continues further with her response, and the turn is again articulated with a slightly rising intonation contour. As such, the token is deployed by the teacher with a falling-rising intonation contour for a third time in line 12, yet again acknowledging the student's intention to go on. And again, for the third time, it is produced as a long glissando (i.e., |Mm: hm:, ) and accompanied by a full expansive up-and-down head nod (i.e., ↑↑ ↓↓), thus displaying further alignment with the response.

This extract demonstrates that the production of 'Mm hm' in this sequential location is treated as a signal by the student to continue with the ongoing multi-unit turn. That is, it is used to acknowledge the incompleteness of the turn whose units are marked with a slightly rising intonation contour. In addition, it can be argued that the teacher displays a strong alignment with (or positive assessment of) the student's answer, as the token is a long glissando and accompanied by a full expansive type of nod. Therefore, we argue that the teacher is projecting 'embodied preferred next-actions' at these within-turn junctures.

However, it can also be seen that the token deployed at such points is accompanied by a specific form of hand gesture (i.e., finger counting with a pen) (see Figures 2, 3, and 4) alongside the nods, which might have been drawn upon by the teacher to acknowledge the so-far-given responses as the preferred ones, but at the same time project that more talk is required of the student, thereby prompting the student to continue. This is how it is treated by the student, as she adds a unit to her turn (line 13) to verbally display that she has nothing further to add. As such, it seems that the deployment of the token, and embodied resources the teacher draws upon including the prosodic shape of the token, prompt the student to say more, thereby being treated by the student as a projection of continuation. It is also possible that by reissuing the question in line 14 (i.e., notice that it is the same question asked by the teacher in line 1), the teacher treats the turns as having failed to answer the question satisfactorily (i.e., fully) (Stivers & Rossano, 2010). Therefore, through the deployment of the token together with the embodied resources described in the extract above, the teacher is prompting the

student to continue to say more, thereby ‘encouraging’ the student to continue speaking in a way appropriate to the pedagogical agenda.

## **5. Concluding discussion**

In order to further understand the feedback practices of L2 teachers in IRE sequences, we have focused on a teacher’s uses of ‘Mm hm’ from a multimodal perspective. The analyses have demonstrated that its production is an ‘embodied’ achievement, where its sequential placement including timing, prosodic shape, and the embodied resources that go with it ‘converge’ to inform how it is treated by the learners.

Fitzgerald and Leudar (2010) have demonstrated that when a therapist deploys ‘Mm hm’ in the flow of the client’s speech (i.e., at a within-turn juncture), it is used to acknowledge the client’s intention to go on. On the other hand, when deployed at the end of a TCU (i.e., at a possible TRP where the client has come to a potential completion point and seems to be stopping), the token prompts, encourages, or directs the client to keep talking (see also Czyzewski, 1995; Muntigl & Zabala, 2008).

As for the prosodic shape of ‘Mm hm’, Gardner (2001) reports that the token is typically articulated with a slightly rising terminal pitch contour, when it is being used to pass up an opportunity to take a fuller turn. As such, it does not intrude on the content of prior or subsequent talk, but “invites speaker continuation by signalling receipt of prior information and nothing more” (Frankel, 1984, p. 158). Similarly, Fitzgerald and Leudar (2010) have found that the token has mostly a mid-volume tone, which indicates neutrality except to convey to the client that the therapist is present and listening. However, they have also shown that the deployment of the token with a loud-volume tone by the therapist indicates a heightened involvement in the talk.

The findings of the current study contribute to this discussion by showing that when deployed with a falling-rising intonation contour at within-turn junctures (i.e., where a student turn is not complete), ‘Mm hm’ is used by the teacher to acknowledge the students’ intention to go on. That is, it does not indicate an assessment of the students’ answers (see line 21 in Extract 1). On the other hand, when deployed with a falling-rising intonation contour at ‘possible’ (see line 24 in Extract 1) and ‘late’ (i.e., after a pause; see line 19 in Extract 3) TRPs, the token is used by the teacher to project that more talk is required of the students, thereby prompting them to expand on their answers (i.e., open up). In addition, the deployment of the token with a marked prosody (i.e., a rising-falling intonation contour) by the teacher indicates

a heightened involvement in the talk, thereby displaying an evaluative stance (see line 16 in Extract 2).

However, the findings of the study also highlight that it is not only the sequential placement, timing, and prosodic shape of the token that help to disambiguate the use of ‘Mm hm’, but the embodied resources drawn upon by the teacher also play a crucial role in contributing to how it is treated. For example, in Extract 2, we showed that the deployment of ‘Mm hm’ as a ‘stand alone’ with a rising intonation contour at a ‘late’ TRP (i.e., after a short pause) projects that more talk is required of the student. However, it is not only the timing of the token and its prosodic shape that prompt the student to expand on her answer, but the combination of this alongside the teacher’s gaze hold and the nod she performs (i.e., one rapid down nod). Furthermore, in Extract 3, a different embodied resource (i.e., finger counting with a pen) accompanies the token to inform how it is interpreted by the student.

In addition, line 16 in Extract 2 demonstrates that the token can be understood as an assessment when deployed with a rising-falling intonation contour, and alongside the student’s production of a second turn answer. However, again the projection is also embodied through the teacher’s performance of a full rapid up-and-down head nod and pointing at the student. As such, the teacher displays the positive nature of her evaluation in advance, thereby projecting an ‘embodied preferred next-action’.

Kääntä (2010) has shown that teachers can project the dispreferred nature of their next-actions through embodied resources, thus coining the term, ‘embodied dispreferred next-actions’. This finding of the study suggests that teachers can also display the positive nature of their evaluation before producing their third turns by solely drawing on embodied resources (see line 25 in Extract 1), or deploying ‘Mm hm’, alongside multiple semiotic resources (e.g., a shift in prosody and nods, hand gestures), while the student is producing her response (see line 16 in Extract 2), thereby projecting ‘embodied preferred next-actions’.

It has also been suggested that performing distinct types of head nods together with, or in the absence of, verbal tokens is intersubjective in that it conveys different meanings in interaction (see Whitehead, 2011). The findings of the current study also contribute to this discussion by showing how the production of the teacher’s nods helps to disambiguate the use of ‘Mm hm’ at a particular point in the talk (e.g., displaying assessment, displaying continuing reciprocity, or projecting a continuation from the students). For example, when the token is deployed to acknowledge the incompleteness of a turn (see line 21 in Extract 1) or as an ‘expansion

elicitor' (see line 19 in Extract 4), the teacher performs a rapid down nod, which appears to be displaying 'go ahead and say more'. However, when the token is deployed with a marked prosody to display an assessment, the teacher draws upon a full rapid up-and-down nod (see line 16 in Extract 2), which might be displaying a positive evaluation of 'what is being said at the same time as it is being said'. Therefore, the findings of this study suggest that as in ordinary conversation, teachers can also display distinctive reciprocity through differential 'head nods' in L2 classrooms.

The current study has also shown that 'Mm hm' can also serve as a 'continuer', much like in interaction in mundane conversation (e.g., Gardner, 2001; Jefferson, 1984; Guthrie, 1997; Sacks, 1992a, 1992b; Schegloff, 1982). In this setting, however, it appears to also display withholding of a third-turn evaluation (e.g., Zemel & Koschmann, 2011), thereby keeping the channel open for further participation and hence creating space for learning in L2 classroom interaction.

As discussed earlier, several studies have placed a great deal of emphasis on the value of feedback practices in third turn position of IREs (e.g., Lee, 2007; Hellermann, 2003; Park, 2013; Sert & Walsh, 2013; Waring, 2008). One central finding is that the third-turn move is crucial in constructing or obstructing learning in the L2 classroom. For example, Waring (2008) shows that, within certain contexts, the use of explicit positive assessment in the third turn can suppress the opportunities for voicing understanding problems or exploring alternative correct answers (see also Wong & Waring, 2009). This suggests that teachers' use of assessments like 'fine', 'good', 'that's right', or 'very good' in the third turn closes down the interaction, thereby not keeping the channel open for further involvement and hence further learning opportunities.

The current study contributes to this discussion by showing that the teacher's deployment of 'Mm hm' as a 'stand alone' in the third turn of IREs gives the floor back to the students to continue. As demonstrated, the teacher does so by either honouring a projection of continuation intended by the learners (i.e., acknowledging the students' intention to go on), or projecting that more talk is required of them (i.e., prompting the students to expand on their answers). Either way, the token is used by the teacher as an effective way to withhold a third-turn evaluation, thereby keeping the channel open for further participation and hence further L2 learning opportunities (i.e., in contrast to using assessments like 'right', 'good', 'fine' in the third turn, which serves to end the sequence and close down the interaction). Therefore,

the study suggests that the use of ‘Mm hm’ as a ‘continuer’ in the third turn of the IRE is a feature of L2 teacher CIC (Walsh, 2011).

In closing, it should be made more explicit that the findings here highlight an important issue in relation to the concept of CIC. Walsh’s initial concept of CIC included a set of broader teacher skills such as maximising interactional space, shaping learner contributions (e.g., by seeking clarification, scaffolding, modelling, repairing learner input), effective use of eliciting, instructional idiolect (i.e., a teacher’s speech habits), and interactional awareness. Following this, a growing body of research has revealed that CIC also includes some more teacher skills like managing students’ displays and claims of insufficient knowledge (Sert & Walsh, 2013), successful management of student code-switching (Sert, 2015), managing learner initiatives (Waring et al., 2016), foregrounding achievement and addressing correction (Fagan, 2015), and shaping learner contributions by translation and the use of board (Can Daşkın, 2015). This study continues to this body of work by demonstrating that, and how, even seemingly very minor aspects of teachers’ classroom practice, such as deployment of minimal response tokens, can create space for learning by maximising interactional space and eliciting students’ answers effectively, and thus is evidence of CIC.

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## Appendices

### Appendix A

#### Jeffersonian Transcription Conventions

*Sequential and timing elements of the interaction:*

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| [ | Beginning point of simultaneous speaking (of two or more people)   |
| ] | End point of simultaneous speaking   |
| = | Talk by two speakers which is contiguous<br>(i.e., not overlapping, but with no hearable pause in between) |

OR

- |       |   |
|-------|---|
|       | continuation of the same turn by the same speaker even though the turn is separated in the transcript |
| (0.2) | The time (in tenths of a second) between utterances   |

(.) A micro-pause (one tenth of a second or less)

*Paralinguistic elements of interaction:*

wo:rd	Sound extension of a word (more colons = longer stretches)
word.	Fall in tone (not necessarily the end of a sentence)
word,	Continuing intonation (not necessarily between clauses)
wor-	An abrupt stop in articulation
word?	Rising inflection (not necessarily a question)
<u>word</u>	(underline) Emphasised word, part of word or sound
WOrd	Capital letters indicate that the speaker spoke the capitalized portion of the utterance at a higher volume than the speaker's normal volume
word↑	Rising intonation
word↓	Falling intonation
°word°	Talk that is quieter than surrounding talk
hh	Audible out-breaths
.hh	Audible in-breaths
w(hh)ord	Laughter within a word
>word<	Talk that is spoken faster than surrounding talk
<word>	Talk that is spoken slower than surrounding talk
\$word\$	Talk uttered in a 'smile voice'

*Other transcription conventions:*

(word)	Approximations of what is heard
((comment))	Analyst's notes
S?	Unidentified student
SS	More than one student altogether
	Marks the onset of a nonverbal action (e.g. shift of gaze, pointing)
/word/	Mispronounced word
<u>↓</u> or <b>↑</b>	(underline, bold) Marks the type of a head nod (more arrows = more expansive nods)