# 'Can anyone help her?': Managing Student Embarrassment in the Adult ESL Classroom[*]

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**ABSTRACT**: This paper investigates how an English as a second language (ESL) teacher manages student embarrassment in the adult ESL classroom. Data consist of approximately 4 hours of video-recorded classroom interactions at a low-intermediate adult ESL class in the United States. Participants include a female teacher and eight adult English learners of various L1 backgrounds. Using conversation analysis, this paper describes several ways in which the teacher orients to potential displays of student embarrassment during classroom interactions: (1) excusing the failure and inviting peer support, (2) excusing the failure and providing a factual account, and (3) attributing the failure to creativity. The findings of this study contribute to the growing literature on contingency in teacher talk (e.g. Waring, 2016; Waring, Reddington, & Tadic, 2016) by identifying a set of teaching practices teachers can use to remediate student embarrassment. The study also contributes to the limited literature on embarrassment in interaction (e.g. Heath, 1988; Sandlund, 2004) by examining the sequential environments of embarrassment in the adult ESL classroom, the characteristics of and orientations to embarrassment, and how such sequences are made relevant by the participants in classroom talk-in-interaction.
**Keywords:** conversation analysis, classroom discourse, emotion, embarrassment

## 1. INTRODUCTION

When some adult second language learners find themselves in the middle of an embarrassing episode during a lesson such as failing to provide an expected response in front of the class, how would a teacher respond to the student's embarrassment? Waring (2016) emphasizes the importance of contingency in teacher talk, which refers to a teacher's responsiveness toward contingent events that arise outside of their planning or prediction. Examples of such may include assisting performance (Tharp & Gallimore, 1988), employing improvisational strategies (Mehan, 1979), giving admonition (Lemke, 1990), and responding delicately to student-initiated departures (Waring, Reddington, & Tadic, 2016), to name only a few. In a similar vein, a teacher who is mindful about their students' feelings would attempt to remediate an embarrassing situation for their students. The focus of this paper is on the management of student embarrassment in the adult English as a second language (ESL) classroom.

Embarrassment is an unpleasant feeling of awkwardness, which occurs when a person has lost control over a situation in front of an audience (Goffman, 1956, 1959, 1967; Miller, 1996). Although prior research has shed much light on embarrassment through experiments, interviews, self-reports, and questionnaires, such approaches to emotions have several potential drawbacks: experiments do not always generate accurate representations of participants' behaviors in naturalistic environments (Borgatta & Bohrnstedt, 1974); participants may not always accurately reflect their emotions in self-reports (Haviland-Jones, Wilson, & Freyberg, 2016; Nisbett & Wilson, 1977); and researchers using interview data oft overlook interviews as a form of collaborative, interactional practice (Potter & Hepburn, 2005).

Over the past few decades, an increasing number of discourse scholars have begun to perceive emotion as a socially constructed phenomenon, one that can be observed by the

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researcher (e.g. Goodwin & Goodwin, 2001; Heath, 1988; Prior & Kasper, 2016; Ruusuvuori, 2013; Sandlund, 2004). As Peräkylä and Sorjonen (2012) write, "[T]he expression of emotion is constructed and managed as a collaborative process by the participants in interaction" (p. 4). This line of research is of particular interest to this study, wherein conversation analysis (CA) has enabled analysts to inspect emotions discursively in talk-in-interaction, including, but not limited to, 'anger' (e.g. Couper-Kuhlen, 2012; Goodwin, 2007; Kangasharju, 2009; Selting, 2010), 'surprise' (e.g. Wilkinson & Kitzinger, 2006), 'pleasure' (e.g. Wiggins, 2002; Furukawa, 2016), 'fear' (Burch & Kasper, 2016), 'distress' (Wootton, 2012), 'disgust' (Goodwin, Cekaite, & Goodwin, 2012), and 'empathy' (e.g. Heritage & Lindström, 2012; Ruusuvuori, 2007).

Following this line of research, the current paper seeks to examine embarrassment from a CA perspective. Data consist of two video recordings from a low-intermediate adult ESL classroom in the United States. Using CA, this paper describes the sequential environments of potential embarrassment displays during classroom interactions, and how these displays are oriented to by the participants.

## 1.1. Embarrassment

Embarrassment has been rigorously discussed by researchers across various disciplines. In psychology, Lewis (2016) distinguishes between 'embarrassment as evaluation', which relates to one's loss of self-esteem or that of others over task failures, and 'embarrassment as exposure', which can be triggered by an individual *thinking* that they are being monitored by others (see also Haidt & Keltner, 1999; Sacks, 1972). Several social psychologists identify embarrassment as a social-evaluative emotion that seems to only occur in public (Miller, 2007; Tangney, Miller, Flicker, & Barlow, 1996). In his influential work, sociologist Erving Goffman (1956) introduces embarrassment as an orderly behavior which manifests "not in the individual but in the social system wherein he has his several selves" (p. 269). Goffman's theory, though lacking empirical proof, has been a source of inspiration for later studies on embarrassment (Heath, 1988).

Previous research into embarrassment has pinpointed some discernible features of embarrassment. Goffman (1956) argues that signs of embarrassment may include blinking, sweating, stammering, fumbling, lowering or raising one's pitch while speaking, vocal cracking, and hesitation in speech. Lewis (2016) identifies three common behaviors that reflect embarrassment: a silly smile, gaze aversion (see also Heath, 1988; Sandlund, 2004), and the touching of one's body parts such as hair, face, or clothes. Other displays of embarrassment may include blushing (e.g. Drummond, Camacho, Formentin, Hefferman, Williams, & Zekas, 2003; Leary & Meadows, 1991; Miller, 1996, 2007), smiling by smooshing one's lips (Miller, 2007), covering the smile with a hand, tilting one's head, shifting one's body postures, and gesturing (Edelmann & Hampson, 1979).

Closely linked to embarrassment is the notion of 'face', i.e., the ideal image a person claims for themselves (Goffman, 1967). Goffman (1967) conjectures that feelings are attached to face, which explains why appraisal and compliment induce good feelings (i.e., 'gaining face') whereas criticism and embarrassment lead to bad feelings (i.e., 'losing face'). For example, when embarrassment strikes, individuals tend to protect their face with a downward gaze, awkward smile, or nervous laugh (Goffman, 1956). In CA research, Lerner (1996) remarks 'face' as a preferred structure in talk-in-interactions. Based on recordings of mundane interactions among English speakers, he shows that participants have a preference for self-repair, agreement, and offers over dispreferred actions such as other-repair, disagreement, and requests. On exploring compliment design and responses by German speakers, moreover,

Golato (2005) demonstrates that participants often preface dispreferred actions with compliments as a way to mitigate face-threats to their recipients.

Admittedly, a more comprehensible discussion on the interrelationships between embarrassment and face is needed but it lies beyond the scope of this paper due to space constraints. Still, these studies are mentioned for demonstrating that, just as facets of face have been observed from an emic perspective (e.g. Arundale, 2010, 2013a, 2013b; Haugh, 2010; Kasper, 2004, 2006, 2009), embarrassment can be studied by analyzing its sequential organization, and how it is oriented to by participants in situ (cf. Heath, 1988; Sandlund, 2004).

## 1.2. Embarrassment in Interaction

From a CA perspective, emotions are "social displays and situated practices, interactionally generated and negotiated by co-participants" (Berger & Lauzon, 2016, p. 88); thus, they are best observed in naturally-occurring interaction as opposed to in isolation (Goodwin et al., 2012). Examining emotions from this perspective entails collecting naturally-occurring interactions via recording devices, analyzing the affluent resources—both vocal (e.g. lexical choices, paralinguistic features) and nonvocal (e.g. facial expressions, shifts in posture or gaze)—employed by participants as they engaged in the interactional practice, and examining how their talk is designed and sequentially organized. These minute details serve to inform the analyst about participants' 'emotional stance' encoded in a local sequential environment within the interaction (Peräkylä & Sorjonen, 2012).

Despite the growing body of CA research on emotions (see above), embarrassment has received relatively scant attention from conversation analysts. There are a few exceptions, however. On exploring Goffman's (1956) theory of embarrassment, Heath (1988) examines the interactional order of embarrassment in medical consultations between doctors and patients, during which the patients are asked to expose their chest for examination. In accord with Goffman's (1956) observations, Heath identifies similar embarrassment displays of the patients. But unlike Goffman, who characterizes embarrassment as a sudden loss of control in one's self-presentation, Heath's study provides empirical evidence to demonstrate that embarrassment is "sequentially organized" and "systematically co-ordinated by the participants" in interaction (Heath, 1988, p. 154). In one example, a patient's embarrassment occurs near the end of a silence ensuing her coughing and aspiration. Heath suggests that the patient's fluster is not a random outburst but designed in relation to the doctor's preceding action (e.g. gazing at the chest).

Sandlund (2004) examines embarrassment, among other types of emotions, in classroom interactions between professors and graduate students at a university in the United States. Inspired by Heath's (1988) work, Sandlund illustrates not only the displays of embarrassment but also the interactional environments where it emerges within the interaction, as well as ways in which participants avoid or resist embarrassment. Her analyses show that embarrassment is systematically elicited and managed by participants throughout the course of their interaction. For example, an unexpected prior talk produced by a co-participant (e.g. teasing), which is dispreferred in terms of turn design, elicits embarrassment displays from the targeted participant in the next sequential environment. The embarrassed participant would then manage their embarrassment through gaze aversion or a justification against the turn that led to the tease.

Both Heath's (1988) and Sandlund's (2004) studies have made significant contributions to the field of CA by delving into the displays and sequential organization of embarrassment in talk-in-interactions. Still, little is known about embarrassment and its responses in across

different social contexts, such as the adult ESL classroom. The present study extends the limited CA literature on embarrassment, focusing specifically on the management of student embarrassment in the adult ESL classroom.

## 2. METHOD

This paper adopts a CA framework to analyzing a total of approximately 4 hours of video-recorded classroom interactions at an adult ESL classroom in the United States. Data were transcribed using Jefferson's (2004) system of transcription notations for CA (see Appendix for transcription key adapted from Wong & Waring, 2010), followed by a detailed examination of the sequential environments of potential student embarrassment as well as its displays and responses (cf. Sandlund, 2004)

### 2.1. Conversation Analysis

Originated from ethnomethodology, CA is well-recognized as a powerful analytical tool for examining language use in real-time social interactions. Researchers who adopt this framework are interested in the copious nuances embedded within social interactions that can reveal much about the interactional orders governing our daily communication. An empirically grounded approach, CA enables researchers to explore spoken discourse from an emic as opposed to an etic perspective (Tsui, 2011; Wong & Waring, 2010).

Kasper and Wagner (2014) differentiate 'basic CA' from 'applied CA': while the former refers to the analysis of interactional practices (e.g., turn-taking, repairing trouble in talk, and preference structure), which enable the interlocutors to work toward intersubjectivity in an orderly fashion, the latter aims to examine social phenomena commonly studied in another field of research. The authors further discuss three major strands of 'applied CA': (1) foundational, which can be best epitomized by discursive psychology wherein the aim is to observe participants' emotion, attitude, and affect; (2) social problem-oriented, in which the researchers are interested in interlocutors' construction of power relations, identities, and beliefs in conversations; and (3) institutional, which centers on ways in which institutional talks (e.g. classroom talk), are accomplished, sustained, and how they evolve in relation to participants' use of interactional practices. For the reasons enumerated above, CA is a well-fitted framework for the current study as it allows the researcher to observe the sequential organization of embarrassment and participants' orientations toward it during classroom interactions.

### 2.2. Participants

Participants in this study come from an intact low-intermediate English class at a community language program in the United States. In addition to offering foreign language courses to adult language learners, the community language program serves as a lab school for master's students majoring in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) at a graduate school. The class is comprised of a twenty-one-year-old female teacher, who was pursuing her master's degree in TESOL at the time of data collection, and eight adult English learners of various cultural backgrounds: the Dominican Republic (Estelle and George), Japan (Kana and Hiro), France (Marleen), Morocco (Josh), South Korea (Mia), and China (Dee). All names reported in this study are pseudonyms.

### 2.3. Data Collection

The class began in the Fall Semester of 2016 and met three times per week. Each lesson was about two hours long. The two 2-hour video recordings took place on the third and fourth

week of class, respectively. Prior to data collection, all participants have signed a consent form and agreed to be filmed for research purposes.

## 2.4. Data Analysis

In reviewing the data, I have followed the analytic procedures as described by Heath, (1988) and Sandlund (2004). Like Sandlund (2004), I have relied on previous work on the displays of embarrassment and treated such displays as social practices within the interaction rather than in isolation. Critically, participants' embodied actions, whether accompanied by talk or not, can prompt responses from other co-participants (Heath, 2016). Similar to Heath (1998), I have paid notice to the silence gap preceding participants' fluster. With these in mind, a total of eight embarrassment sequences were unearthed from the data. Based on this collection, I looked into the structure surface of each embarrassment episode to examine the sequential environment of embarrassment, as well as how it is situated, received, and oriented to by participants in situ (cf. Sandlund, 2004).

Below shows an example in which Estelle displays signs of embarrassment (lines 5-6) after she has performed a role-play with her classmates in front of the class. The embarrassment episode emerges after the teacher's evaluative remark (line 3), which is followed by a pause of silence. Prior to this extract, the teacher assigned students in groups to conduct a role-play using the English passive voice. Although Estelle and her group members (Josh and Dee) completed the role-play, they had forgotten to include the passive voice in their dialogue.

Extract 1. It's okay. It's okay.

```
01                      {(((Josh, Estelle and Dee smiling at T after their
02                      role-play, Estelle clutching her arm))-(1.0)}*Fig. 1-1
03      T:              ↓that's it?
04           →         (0.5)
05      Estelle: →     [{(((looks first at T then at Josh & Dee, Estelle releases
06           →         arm))-o↑h my ga::::::h,}*Fig. 1-2
07                      [((Josh and Dee gaze at Estelle))]
08      Josh:          [   hH hh      ]
09      T:      →      [>↑it's oka::y?<]=>↑it's oka::y?<
10      Josh:          hH
11      T:             okay?
12                     (0.2)
13      T:             ((to class))-did you (.) hea::r? what they are
14                     talking a↑bout,
```



Fig. 1-1: 1.0 pause, Estelle clutching her arm    Fig. 1-2: Estelle releasing her arm

After the role-play, the students gaze at the teacher with fixed smiles, anticipating for the teacher's evaluation (lines 1-2). Estelle is clutching, showing a high degree of tenseness as she waits for the assessment. Following the 1.0 second pause, the teacher breaks the silence by asking: '↓that's it?' (line 3), implying that the students' performance has somewhat fallen short of her expectation. The long gap of silence along with the teacher's evaluative remark can be seen as a dispreferred action as she misaligns with the students' performance. Estelle's fluster becomes apparent after the 0.5 gap of silence (line 4), after which she averts her gaze away from the teacher to her group members and then back to the teacher (lines 5-6). Meanwhile, she releases her clutching posture while saying: 'o↑h my ga::::::h,'.

In response to Estelle's prior actions, the teacher makes an affiliative move by repeatedly stating: '↑it's okay?' (line 9), which occurs toward the end of a troubling exchange before she hops back into the main business at hand (Ruusuvuori, 2007). Having terminated the troubling sequence, the teacher then resumes the original pedagogical agenda (lines 13-14). This extract shows how the teacher orients to Estelle's embarrassment by excusing her group's failure to conduct a role-play. However, since 'excusing' has already been identified as a common remedial strategy to reduce embarrassment (e.g. Antaki, 1994; Cupach & Metts, 1990, 1994; Domenici & Littlejohn, 2006; Miller, 1996; Tiedens & Leach, 2004), extracts as such were removed from the analysis. The remaining five extracts in this study focus on how the teacher utilizes different tactics coupled with various kinds of embodied actions in managing student embarrassment.

## 3. FINDINGS

### 3.1. Excusing the failure and inviting peer support

In the two extracts below, the teacher orients to some students' potential displays of embarrassment by first excusing the failure and then utilizing one of Mehan's (1979) improvisational strategies—*opening the floor*—to invite peer support. The students' embarrassment episodes are occasioned in a particular sequential environment following some interactional troubles produced in the prior turn. As will be shown, the teacher may react differently depending on how the student orients to their own failure. Extract 2 presents an example in which the teacher responds to an embarrassing encounter for a quiet student, Kana, who volunteers to be the next speaker after Mia has failed to provide an answer. Prior to this extract, the teacher asked the students to recall the rules for the English passive voice, which was the focus of the previous lesson. Mia provided the correct response but showed trouble in giving an example of a sentence in the passive voice upon the teacher's request. The extract begins with the teacher soliciting an elaborated response from Mia, who claims insufficient knowledge (CIK) (Sert, 2013, 2015; Sert & Walsh, 2013; see also Sert & Jacknick, 2015) with a giggle.

Extract 2. It's okay. Can anyone help her?

```
01    T:        {(( to Mia ))-would you like to- (0.2) >°give us
02              an° exam↑ple?<}
03    Mia:      °u:::::m,°
04              {(( T smiling at Mia ))-(4.0)}
05    Mia:      {(( giggles ))-hh tsheh [ (( sniffs )) .hh}
06    T:                                [{(( to class ))-can anyone
07    Mia:      heh heh hh   ]
08    T:        h↑elp Mia?}]*Fig. 2-1
09    Kana:     (( raises hand ))
```

| 10 | | (0.5) |
|---|---|---|
| 11 | T: | {((*appoints Kana*))-<go a↑head.} |
| 12 | Kana: | u::m, student? °um° (0.2) were wro::ng? |
| 13 | T: | <mhmm? |
| 14 | | (0.2) |
| 15 | Kana: | <u>Eng</u>lish. |
| 16 | | (0.8) |
| 17 | T: | <I'm sorry?=student, |
| 18 | Kana: | a student (0.2) u::m °student? agree?° ah |
| 19 | | ENGlish? um (0.6) Engli:sh, (0.5) are:: |
| 20 | | leA::rned? u::h |
| 21 | → | (0.5) |
| 22 | Kana: → | {((*hands covering her face*))-sorry}*Fig. 2-2 |
| 23 | T: → | <oh no no=it's ok[ay?=it's] oka::y.*Fig. 2-3 |
| 24 | Kana: | [ ↑a::h ] |
| 25 | → | {((*sits back*))-↑a::::h hh} |
| 26 | T: → | {((*inducing gesture*))-can anyone help ↑her?}*Fig. 2-4 |
| 27 | | (0.5) |
| 28 | Josh: | u:::h okay, if I understand what it like (0.2) |
| 29 | | the palm tree::, (0.5) kicked down? by- (0.5) |
| 30 | | by (0.2) ><u>FRI</u>end.< |



Fig. 2-1: T inviting peer support for Mia          Fig. 2-2: Kana covering her face



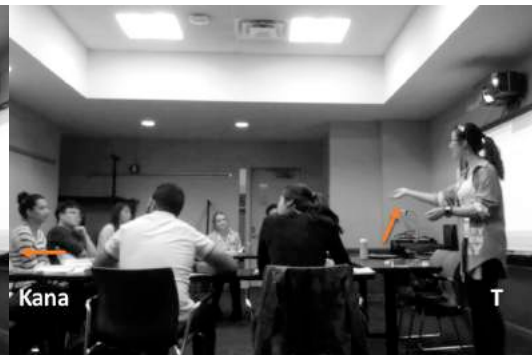Fig. 2-3: T excusing Kana's failure          Fig. 2-4: T inviting peer support for Kana

Upon receiving Mia's CIK, the teacher invites peer support without excusing her failure (lines 6-8). In line 8, Kana quickly volunteers to take Mia's turn. However, as evidenced by the short pause, fillers like *um* and *uh*, and elongations (lines 12), Kana is apparently having trouble herself. These turbulences are altogether treated by the teacher as incomplete as she tries to elicit

a complete answer: 'I'm sorry?=students,' (line 17). Despite Kana's attempts to reformulate her turn, her response once again turns out to be unsuccessful (lines 18-20). Here, Kana's embarrassment is occasioned after the 0.5 pause (line 21). In line 22, she buries her face in her hands and offers an apology. She even cries out 'a::::h' as she sits back to her chair, pulling herself in and out of the ongoing discussion (lines 24-25).

Although the teacher uses a similar technique to invite peer support for both Mia and Kana, the manner in which she orients to their prior actions are very different: first, the teacher does not excuse the failure for Mia; second, when inviting peer support for Mia, the teacher stands in a relaxed posture, placing her hands in front of her body and leaning more weigh on one leg (Fig. 2-1). In contrast, the teacher not only excuses Kana from her failure, but this excuse is prefaced by 'oh' (line 23), a change-of-state token (Hertiage, 1998), and the multiple of 'no' along with halting gestures (Fig. 2-3), suggesting that she has treated Kana's prior actions as unexpected and unnecessarily persisted (Stivers, 2004). Moreover, the teacher approaches closer to the table and uses inducing gestures when inviting peer support for Kana (line 26) (Fig. 2-4), which, together with her prior turn, indicate a stronger attempt to close Kana's troubling sequence. As seen in line 28, the invitation is soon taken up by another student, Josh, who takes over the current speakership and offers an alternative response.

In this extract, Kana's embarrassment occurs after producing some kind of interactional trouble. In return, the teacher orients to Kana's prior actions by excusing the failure and inviting peer support. Moreover, her embodied actions render a sense of urgency to quickly terminate Kana's current speakership. She does so by encouraging participation from other students rather than repairing the trouble source herself, or worse, probing into Kana's incompetency (i.e. a dispreferred action). Extract 3 below is another instance in which the teacher implements the same strategy to avoid potential embarrassment for George. Unlike Extract 2, the teacher orients to George's failure differently. Prior to this extract, the class was asked to read out their answers in the workbooks. For one of the questions, George chooses 'clay' as his answer while everyone else choose 'stone', which is the correct response. The extract begins with the teacher checking George's comprehension.

Extract 3. No? Can anybody help him?

| 01 | T: | {((*looks to George*))-what did you put.} |
|---|---|---|
| 02 | George: | clay. |
| 03 | T: | c↑lay. ((*looks at workbook*)) |
| 04 | | (0.4) |
| 05 | T: | what's the ↑difference between stone and clay. |
| 06 | | (0.4) |
| ((lines omitted)) | | |
| 19 | T: | what's the ↑difference between cla::y and stone? |
| 20 | | {((*George gazing at T and class gazing at George*))-(0.8)} |
| 21 | T: | <do you know it? *Fig. 3-1 |
| 22 | → | (0.5) |
| 23 | George: → | {((*nodding and leaning forward*))-I have idea.}*Fig. 3-2 |
| 24 | T: | {((*nods*))-yeah.} |
| 25 | | (0.2) |
| 26 | T: | °okay?°=↑try to explain it. |
| 27 | George: → | ((*shaking head and smiling at T*))*Fig. 3-3 |
| 28 | T: → | {((*smiling*))-no?} <can anybody he[lp him?        ]*Fig. 3-4 |
| 29 | Estelle: | [((*raises hand*))] |

```
30                        (0.2)
31       T:              ((appoints Estelle))-<go ah↑ead.
32                        (0.2)
33       Estelle:        clay's so::ft.
34       T:              yeah?
35       Estelle:        a:::nd-
36       George:         and stone?
37       Estelle:        <and stone is °ha:rd.°
```


Fig. 3-1: T's ESC to George


Fig. 3-2: George claiming sufficient knowledge


Fig. 3-3: George smiling and lightly shaking his head


Fig. 3-4: T inviting peer support for George

In the lines omitted, the teacher encourages George to explain the difference between 'stone' and 'clay' despite his CIK ('na:h'). The teacher then invites George to at least give it a try so that he can practice speaking English, and George agrees to her statement by stating 'yes'. Upon receiving George's agreement token, the teacher initiates a new sequence to elicit an explanation from him (line 19). Rather than responding to the teacher's initiation, however, George gazes at the teacher while the class has their eyes fixed on him (line 20). Following a 0.8 gap of silence, the teacher breaks the silence and initiates an epistemic status check (ESC) (Sert, 2013) to George: 'do you know it?' (line 21) (Fig. 3-1).

George's attempts to avoid a potentially embarrassing situation can be seen after the 0.5 pause (line 22), during which he finally responds to the teacher by claiming sufficient knowledge: 'I have idea' (line 23). Meanwhile, he noticeably raises his body position, orienting toward the teacher (Fig. 3-2). In line 24, the teacher's nod and acknowledgement token suggest that she has treated George's reply as a sign that he is capable of answering the question; subsequently, she proceeds with a follow-up question: '↑try to explain it' (line 24), once again inviting George to contribute a response.

Despite having claimed sufficient knowledge (line 23), George rejects the teacher's request by lightly shaking his head and smiling at her (line 27), indicating his unwillingness to participate (Sert, 2015). In responding to George's prior action, the teacher smiles at him and

says 'no?' with a rising intonation (line 28), thereby excusing George from continuing the current exchange. This acknowledgment token instantaneously signals other students that a new turn is about to be initiated. Then, the teacher reopens the floor to invite peer support by saying 'can anybody help him?' (line 28). Notice the lack of prosodic variations and embodied actions the teacher uses to manage George's orientation to his interactional trouble compared to Extract 2, during which the teacher used a raised pitch on '↑her' along with inducing gestures in response to Kana's prior turns. Like Extract 2, however, the teacher's invitation here is soon taken up by another student, Estelle, as evidenced by her recognition overlap (Jefferson, 1983) which subsequently terminates George's troubling sequence.

As seen above, the teacher shows contingency in her talk by recognizing the dynamics unique to each embarrassing episode, and how the situation is oriented to by the relevant participants as the sequence unfolds. Whether explicitly or implicitly, in both cases, the teacher shows affiliation by first excusing the student from their failure, thereby closing the troubling exchange. Then, in lieu of simply stating 'anyone else?', which ignores the student's attempted contributions, the teacher invites peer support by asking 'can anyone help him/her?', hence recognizing the failed attempts as partial contribution, meanwhile encouraging participation from other students.

### 3.2. Excusing the failure and providing a factual account

The following extracts show how the teacher makes use of another strategy—excusing the failure and providing a factual account—in her orientation to some students' failures. This once again entails the teacher first pardoning the flustered student from their failure; however, rather than opening the floor to invite peer support, the teacher proceeds with a factual account to validate the excuse. An example is shown in Extract 4, during which Josh, Dee, and Estelle are given a second chance to perform their role-play using the passive voice in their dialogue. In their revised dialogue, Josh invites Estelle and Dee to watch a movie. Extract 4 begins with Josh greeting the ladies, but the role-play unexpectedly runs into some trouble with verifying names.

Extract 4. It's okay. You're new.

```
01                      {((Josh, Dee and Estelle stand up one after another))-
02                      (7.0)}
03      Josh:           Hi Estelle,}
04                      (0.2)
05      Josh:           ah >sorry< ((palm towards Dee)) I forgot the name.
06                      <sorry.=[HEhh]
07      Estelle:              [ Dee. ] Dee.
08                      {((points to self))- [↑me=Estelle?]}
09      Josh:           {((points to Dee))- [   tha:t's Dee. ]}
10                      {((points to Estelle))-Estelle. Estelle.=yeah?}
11      Estelle:        {((nods))-<°mhmm.°}
12      Josh:           ((to Dee)) and Dee.
13      Dee:            °Dee.°
14      Josh:           ↑DEE. (.) [{((looks down at paper))-°okay.°}]*Fig. 4-1
15      Dee:                      [{((looks down at paper))-°yeah.°}]
16              →       (0.3)
17      Class:          [  {((breaks into laughter))}-(1.2)   ]
18      Josh/Dee: →     [           ((smiling at T))          ]
19      Estelle:  →         [((looks down with hand on her neck)) ]*Fig. 4-2
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```
20      T:          →        [  {(((looks to Josh))-↑it's okay?      ] you're n↑ew. HH}
21      Josh:                cause I (0.4) °new.° <I- I text messaging and I
22                           was going through my phone. <okay? HH
23      T:                   <sure.
```



Fig. 4-1: Josh and Dee looking down at paper      Fig. 4-2: Providing a factual account

In line 3, Josh begins the role-play by greeting Estelle but not Dee because apparently, he has forgotten her name. This is understandable since Josh is a new student who is attending this class only for the second time. Apologetic for his mistakes (lines 5-6), Josh receives help from Estelle who provides Dee's name on her behalf (line 7). Meanwhile, Estelle also takes the opportunity to reintroduce herself to Josh (line 8). But even after learning their names and receiving a confirmation from Estelle (lines 10-11), Josh launches a new request to Dee (line 12), who has been holding onto her role as a bystander thus far. In line 13, Dee finally joins in the conversation by softly uttering her name: °Dee.°. In return, Josh reiterates her name loudly with a high pitch: '↑DEE.'. Then, the two suddenly fall silent, break eye contact with each other to focus on a paper in front of them, simultaneously terminating the sequence with a minimal response (lines 14 & 15) (Fig. 4-1).

Following the 0.3 gap of silence in line 16, the class breaks into laughter for 1.2 seconds (line 17), suggesting that other students have perceived this false start as a laughable moment. Although the group also smiles, their smiles are far subtler compared to the class's loud laughter. Meanwhile, Josh and Dee both look to the teacher with a fixed smile (line 18), and Estelle looks down at a paper on her desk as she begins to move her hand over her neck (line 19) (Fig. 4-2), as if she has disengaged herself from the current course of actions.

In responding to the students' prior actions (e.g. Josh's and Dee's downward gaze and the class's laughter), the teacher immediately says with a raised pitched, '↑it's okay?' (line 20), to excuse the group from their failure to conduct the revised role-play. Then, she proceeds with a factual account on behalf of Josh by making his status as a new student public: 'you're n↑ew.' while orienting her palm towards Josh. By excusing the failure and providing a factual account, the teacher remediates a potentially embarrassing moment for the whole group, thus treating Josh's failure to remember a name as normal. As seen in line 21, Josh accepts the teacher's account and even goes further to provide an account of his own (lines 21-22), which is quickly accepted by the teacher (line 23).

In this extract, the teacher orients to the failure of a group of students, whose role-play performance unexpectedly triggers class laughter. By excusing the failure and providing a factual account, the teacher avoids potential student embarrassment while reminding other students that Josh is a new student. This technique is somewhat similar to what Cupach and Metts (1990) identify as 'expressing empathy', during which the observer can help the

embarrassed individual save face by normalizing the situation (e.g. "I know, it happens to me, too."). In this extract, however, the teacher does not express personal empathy to Josh; rather, she normalizes the situation with a fact that is known to all audiences.

The next extract shows another example in which the teacher employs this technique in responding to Marleen's orientation to her failure. Prior to this extract, the teacher asked the students about the usage of the English prepositions: 'in' and 'on', to denote time reference. She also asked them to provide a metalinguistic explanation to justify their answer. Estelle contributed a response but it was deemed incorrect. In Extract 5, Marleen raises her hand, showing eagerness to contribute a response. Nonetheless, her response turns out to be an incomplete one. The extract begins with Marleen's attempt to make a contribution.

Extract 5. Yeah. You're trying to say that, too.

| 01 | Estelle: | [°oh yeah. that's-°] |
| 02 | Marleen: → | [      °becaus-°     ]{((*raises hand*))-<u>uh</u>} |
| 03 | | [{((*four students gazing at Marleen*))-(0.2)}] |
| 04 | T: | [              ((*appoints Marleen*))              ] |
| 05 | Marleen: | {((*points pencil forward in semi-circular motion*))- |
| 06 | | (syl syl) >probably becau::se,< o:n S::eptember, |
| 07 | | =i::t's u::m}*Fig. 5-1 |
| 08 | | (0.4) |
| 09 | Marleen: | u::hm >°I don't know the language?°<=but (0.2) |
| 10 | | {((*moves pencil forward*))-it's <u>thi</u>::s (.) Septembe::r (.) |
| 11 | | twe:lve?} |
| 12 | T: | >mhmm?< |
| 13 | Josh: | {((*looks at Marleen and to T*))-[that s↑pecific] da::y.} |
| 14 | Marleen: | [so it's o:::n   ] |
| 15 | T: | {((*pointing to Josh*))-[specific date ]} |
| 16 | Marleen: | [     yeah.     ] |
| 17 | Estelle: | {((*nodding*))-yeah [°specific day.°]} |
| 18 | T: | [ ve::ry  goo::d.] ((*lightly clapping*)) |
| 19 | → | (0.2) |
| 20 | Marleen: → | {((*partially covering her face*))-so::rry,}*Fig. 5-2 |
| 21 | | {((*Estelle and Josh gazing at Marleen*))-(0.2)} |
| 22 | T: → | {((*nodding*))-yeah.} <you're trying to say that too::.*Fig. 5-3 |
| 23 | Marleen: | >yeah.<= |
| 24 | Josh: | ={((*pointing to Marleen and nodding*))-yeah.}=<it's |
| 25 | | similar example. |



Fig. 5-1: Marleen contributing a response        Fig. 5-2: Marleen apologizing

Fig. 5-3: T providing a factual account

As seen in line 2, Marleen shows eagerness to make a contribution by softly uttering '°becaus-°', which overlaps with Estelle's cut-off utterance (line 1). Seemingly aware of having violated one of the ground-rules for classroom talk (Edwards & Mercer, 1987)—only one student should speak at a time—Marleen consciously withholds her response and instead makes herself known to the teacher by raising her hand along with a stress on 'uh' (line 2), showing her interests in making a contribution. During the brief pause in line 3, several students turn their gaze at Marleen as she is appointed as the next speaker (line 4).

In giving her response, Marleen orients her pencil forward and repeatedly moves it in a semi-circular motion (lines 5-7). Yet despite her keenness to make a contribution at first, Marleen seems to be going through some trouble conveying her intended meaning (e.g. the elongations, fillers, and mitigation). After a 0.4 pause (line 8), Marleen begins to reveal a sense of uncertainty toward her response as she quickly and quietly utters: '>°I don't know the language?°<' (line 9). Nevertheless, her use of the conjunction 'but' through latching helps her successfully maintain the speakership. In lines 10-11, Marleen gives an example of how 'on' and 'in' are used to denote time reference. However, this response is marked by two micro-pauses, elongations, and a rising intonation at the end of her utterance, suggesting that Marleen is still having difficulties in formulating her response. In return, the teacher treats this response as incomplete as she invites Marleen to continue: '>mhmm?<' (line 12).

In line 13, Josh seizes the chance to take over the speakership by first looking at Marleen and then gazing at the teacher. Meanwhile, he utters: 'that s↑pecific da::y.', which occurs in an overlap with Marleen's final remark (line 14). Josh has joined the ongoing discussion without raising his hand, but since his answer fulfills the teacher's initial inquiry (i.e. to provide a metalinguistic explanation), it is accepted by the teacher as she points to him and shows acknowledgement through a partial recast: 'specific date' (line 15). Simultaneously, Marleen replies 'yeah' to show agreement with Josh's contribution (line 16). After the teacher congratulates Josh for giving the right answer (line 18) and a brief moment of silence (line 19), Marleen apologizes for her failure and moves her hand backward to partly cover her face (line 20), withdrawing her original affirmation.

Rather than ignoring Marleen's apology and moving onto pursuing the original agenda, which would be considered as a dispreferred action as it further intensifies the face-threat to Marleen, the teacher addresses Marleen's apology through an assortment of embodied actions: nodding, giving an acknowledgement token: 'yeah.', and adding a factual account: '<you're trying to say that too::.' (line 22) while pointing her fingers toward Marleen. In so doing, the teacher pardons Marleen from her failure to fulfill the teacher's expectation; importantly, the factual account here serves to inform all audiences that Marleen's contribution, albeit incomplete, is also accountable. The effectiveness of this strategy can be seen in line 23, in

which Marleen promptly confirms this account by saying '>yeah<', and so does Josh, who shows affiliation by nodding and pointing at Marleen as he provides another factual account: 'yeah.=it's similar example.' (lines 24-25).

As described above, the teacher orients to the students' prior actions by excusing the failure and providing a factual account. Particularly, she shows affiliation to the students by first excusing their failure and then proceeds with a factual account to normalize the situation.

## 3.3. Attributing failure to creativity

The final extract included in this paper illustrates an embarrassing moment for George, whose genuine request for clarification on the word 'linen' unexpectedly triggers a series of laughter. As will be shown, the teacher does so by attributing failure to creativity. This technique involves using a compliment to transform a moment of embarrassment into achievement. Prior to this extract, Estelle read a passage about the invention of the light bulb while the other students were asked to pay close attention to what they heard. The extract begins with the teacher's attempt to elicit more responses from the students after they have identified only a few items from the passage.

Extract 5. I love your brain.

| 01 | T: | what else? |
| 02 | | (0.8) |
| 03 | T: | did you catch (0.2) °glass?° |
| 04 | | (1.0) |
| 05 | Estelle: | cotton. |
| 06 | | (0.8) |
| 07 | T: | [cotton.] |
| 08 | Josh: | [cotton,] |
| 09 | T: | [ y e:s. ] |
| 10 | Mia: | [cotton?] |
| 11 | Marleen: | [cotton.] |
| 12 | Josh: | [ linen, ] |
| 13 | | (0.2) |
| 14 | T: | cotton and linen. |
| 15 | | (0.2) |
| 16 | George: → | {(( *looks at T* ))-[lemon?]} |
| 17 | Mia: | {(( *nods* ))- [ u::n. ]} linen. |
| 18 | T: | {(( *looks to George* ))-LInen.} |
| 19 | Marleen: | .hh HH heh heh heh heh |
| 20 | Class: | {(( *breaks into laughter* ))-(5.0)} |
| 21 | T: | $oh my °god.°$ |
| 22 | Marleen: | [hheh heh heheh] |
| 23 | Mia: | [hhh heh heheh ] |
| 24 | George: | [{(( *hand gesturing writing* ))-WRIte.=°please.°} *Fig. 6-1 |
| 25 | T: → | [{(( *pointing to her head then to George's* ))-I love} |
| 26 | → | your brain.=hh heheh heh heh *Fig. 6-2 |
| 27 | Class: | (( *laughter continues* )) |
| 28 | Estelle: | yeah. |
| 29 | T: | (( *writes 'cotton', 'linen' on the board* )) |

Fig. 6-1: George requesting T to write on whiteboar    Fig. 6-2: T attributing George's failure to creativity

In line 3, the teacher provides a quiet cue, °glass?°, to the students; however, this is disregarded considering the fact that they have already named it in a prior sequence not shown in the extract. Followed by a long gap of silence (line 4), Estelle contributes a new item, 'cotton' (line 5), since she is the only one who has read the passage. This contribution turns out to be helpful for the other students as they repeat the word one after another (lines 8, 10 & 11). In line 12, Josh recalls another item from the passage: 'linen', which, along with Estelle's contribution, is confirmed by the teacher as she repeats 'cotton and linen.' (line 14).

After a 0.2 gap (line 15), George looks to the teacher and initiates a clarification request for the word 'linen' (line 16). However, instead of saying the word 'linen', he says 'lemon?' with a rising intonation, suggesting that he does not recognize the word under discussion. In line 18, the teacher responds to George by articulating the word 'LInen', highlighting the phonological difference between these two words. Soon after that, Marleen initiates the first laugh, and then the whole class falls into a long series of laughter (lines 19 & 2). The laugher suggests that the class has perceived George's clarification request as a laughable moment given the fact that lemons are not typically associated with the making of light bulbs. Regardless of the class's laughter, however, George remains clueless as he signals the teacher to write 'linen' on the board (line 24).

Although the teacher has also perceived George's clarification request as somewhat out of scope (line 21), she orients to this laughable moment for George by offering him a compliment: 'I love your brain.' (lines 25-26). Meanwhile, she makes an affiliative move by pointing to her own head and then to George's as she delivers the compliment, thus highlighting a connection between her brain and George's. Here, the teacher praises George's ability to contribute a response that is different from the rest of his peers. After all, George is the only student who shows trouble in recognizing the word 'linen'. Rather than delving into George's linguistic incompetency for not knowing the word 'linen', the teacher manages a potentially embarrassing moment to George by attributing his failure to creativity, thus turning a laughable moment into one that is worthy of compliments. In line 28, Estelle says 'yeah', showing agreement with the teacher's comment to George. Almost instantaneously, the teacher's compliment repositions George from being laughed at for his failure to being praised for his creativity.

In this extract, the teacher cleverly dodges a potentially embarrassing moment to George by complimenting on his inventiveness to contribute an unexpected response: 'lemon'. Although this incident has undeniably triggered a funny moment in the classroom, the teacher's affiliative move following the sequential environment of a potentially embarrassing moment for George prevents him from losing face in front of his peers. Importantly, the teacher's comment successfully invokes an affiliative stance from another student, Estelle, who takes part in remediating the aftermaths of George's interactional trouble (line 28).

# 4. DISCUSSION and CONCLUSION

Adult ESL students come to the classroom with a diverse set of traits and assets. When learning a new language, however, some may still feel embarrassed after making an error or contributing an incorrect answer in front of the class. This paper has adopted a CA framework to investigate ways in which a teacher manages student embarrassment in the adult ESL classroom. The analysis shows that the teacher has exercised a rich repertoire of maneuvers at her disposal to handle student embarrassment: (1) excusing the failure and inviting peer support; (2) excusing the failure and providing a factual account; and (3) attributing failure to creativity.

In excusing the failure and inviting peer support, the teacher first makes an affiliative move by excusing the embarrassed student from their failure. Next, the teacher utilizes one of Mehan's (1979) improvisation strategies, *opening the floor*, to invite peer support. In so doing, the teacher terminates the troubling sequence of a student who is put on-stage while promoting speaking opportunities for other students. The first part of the second strategy—excusing the failure and providing a factual account—also entails an affiliative move. Rather than inviting peer support, the teacher proceeds with a factual account to justify the excuse, thereby normalizing the embarrassing situation. Finally, in attributing failure to creativity, the teacher avoids a potentially embarrassing moment to the student by tapping into his creativity rather than, say, delving into his linguistic incompetency.

The study has also identified several interesting characteristics of student embarrassment in the adult ESL classroom: (1) the embarrassing episodes described in this study have occurred due to interactional difficulties in prior turns, such as producing an incomplete or unexpected response in front of the class; (2) generally, the students' displays of embarrassment are located in a particular sequential environment: after the brief moment of awkward silence following the interactional trouble; (3) class laughter may or may not occur following the embarrassing episode; and most important of all, (4) the teacher's orientation to embarrassment, which takes place after the manifestations of embarrassment or the class's laughter, involves an ample assortment of multisemiotic and interactional resources (e.g. hand gestures, body orientation, prosody, and vocalization), not just the linguistic materials alone. These findings lend support to previous CA studies on embarrassment (Heath, 1988; Sandlund, 2004) by showing that embarrassment is an interactional phenomenon co-accomplished by participants in talk-in-interaction.

The current study contributes to the limited literature on embarrassment in institutional talk by focusing on student embarrassment as well as its displays and responses in the adult ESL classroom. On a larger scale, this study also adds to the budding literature on emotion in interaction by detailing the kinds of interactional resources participants employ as they orient to embarrassing encounters during classroom interactions. By observing how the teacher delicately responds to student embarrassment, moreover, the analyses of this study contribute to the burgeoning body of literature on contingency in teacher talk. As seen in this paper, students may orient to their interactional troubles differently. In all instances, the teacher shows contingency in teacher talk by noticing the dynamics unique to each embarrassing episode and selecting an appropriate method to reduce embarrassment. It is hoped that the set of remedial strategies discussed in this paper can generate practical implications for ESL teachers, and that the implementation of such practices can serve to create a pleasant learning environment where failures and errors are allowed.

While this study has documented several ways of how the ESL teacher contingently manages student embarrassment, it is worth noting that the data were extracted from two video

recordings of a single intact class, both of which took place near the beginning of the course. As facework practices may evolve depending on the degree of power difference among participants, social distance dynamics, and the level of threat intensity (Brown & Levinson, 1987), future studies on embarrassment in the adult ESL classroom can uncover more insights by examining how different ESL teachers and students orient to embarrassment across a wide variety of contexts, and how the sequential environment of embarrassment sequences manifests over time. Undoubtedly, longitudinal studies as such may offer a more complete picture about the nature of embarrassment among adult language learners and its developmental trajectory in the long run.

## 5. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

## 6. APPENDIX

(Transcription key adapted from Wong & Waring, 2010.)

| | |
|---|---|
| . | falling intonation. |
| ? | rising intonation. |
| , | continuing intonation. |
| - | abrupt cut-off. |
| :: | prolonging of sound. |
| <u>word</u> | stress. |
| WORD | loud speech. |
| °word° | quiet speech. |
| ↑word | raised pitch. |
| ↓word | lowered pitch. |
| >word< | quicker speech. |
| <word> | slower speech. |
| < | jump start or rushed start. |
| hh | aspiration or laughter |
| .hh | inhalation. |
| [ ] | beginning and ending of simultaneous or overlapping speech. |
| = | latch or contiguous utterance. |
| (1.5) | length of a silence in 10ths of a second. |
| (.) | micro-pause, 0.2 second or less. |
| ( ) | non-transcribable segment of talk. |
| ((*gazing*)) | non-speech activity or transcriptionist comment. |
| {(((*words*))-words} | beginning and ending of co-occurrence of nonverbal behavior and verbal elements. |
| $word$ | smiley voice. |
| #word# | squeaky voice. |
| *asterik | figure |

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