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To cite this article: Tianfang Wang, Joan Kelly Hall, Yingliang He, Yuanheng (Arthur) Wang, Shuyuan Liu & Su Yin Khor (04 Mar 2025): Building affiliation in the L2 classroom: the role of side sequences, Classroom Discourse, DOI: [10.1080/19463014.2025.2464545](https://doi.org/10.1080/19463014.2025.2464545)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/19463014.2025.2464545>



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Published online: 04 Mar 2025.



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## Building affiliation in the L2 classroom: the role of side sequences

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### ABSTRACT

Previous conversation analytic (CA) studies have explored how affiliation is created in L2 classrooms. This study adds to the research by documenting the opportunities for creating affiliative moments between teachers and students afforded by side sequences, an under-explored topic in L2 classroom research. A CA analysis of five side sequences occurring in 4 h of video recordings of an IEP grammar course reveals that the teacher and students deploy a wide range of interactional resources to display affiliation while mitigating disaligning moments, managing epistemic relations, and engaging in humorous talk in side sequences. These affiliative moments create opportunities for student engagement in ways that pre-planned instructional activities may not.

### ARTICLE HISTORY

Received 14 April 2024  
Accepted 4 February 2025

### KEYWORDS

Affiliation; side sequences; L2 classrooms; conversation analysis

## 1. Introduction

Positive teacher–student relationships are linked to student engagement in learning and academic performance (National Research Council 2004, Pianta, Hamre, and Allen 2012). A primary interactional means by which positive relationships are established and maintained is through affiliation (Lindström and Sorjonen 2012; Steensig 2020; Stivers 2008; Stivers, Lorenza, and Jakob 2011). Affiliation is the affective dimension of interaction. Speakers display affiliation in their turns with nonverbal and vocal features such as laughter and changes in pitch that indicate their emotional or affective stance towards the actions their turns are performing (Antaki 2012, Couper-Kuhlen 2012, Goodwin and Harness Goodwin 1987; Holt 2020). Recipients display affiliation by matching the emotions or stances displayed in the prior speaker's turns (Lindström and Sorjonen 2012; Ochs 1996, Steensig 2020; Stivers, Lorenza, and Jakob 2011). Extended affiliative sequences promote rapport by engendering a climate of mutual trust and respect between interactants (Clark, Drew, and Pinch 2003; Park 2016).

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Conversation Analytical (CA) studies of second language (L2) classroom interactions have revealed the various ways in which affiliative relations are created and maintained in pedagogical interactions between teachers and students. Findings show that both teachers and students display affiliation using laughter and smiles (Çopur and Brandt 2024; Jacknick 2013; Jakonen and Evnitskaya 2020; Looney and He 2021; Park 2016; Petitjean and González-Martínez 2015; Sert and Jacknick 2015; Waring, Reddington, and Tadic 2016), prosodic cues (e.g. Lo 2020), reformulations and repetitions of interactants' turns (Tadic and Box 2019), and non-verbal resources such as facial expressions and body language (Nguyen 2007).

The study reported here adds to this body of research by documenting the opportunities for creating affiliative moments between teachers and students presented by a fairly common interactional sequence, the side sequence (Jefferson 1972). Side sequences temporarily put the main sequence on hold until a matter that is peripheral to the main sequence has been dealt with (Jefferson 1972, 1987). While side sequences are common occurrences in all types of interaction, they are under-explored in L2 classroom interactions, possibly because they may be perceived to be irrelevant to the main business of teaching and learning. However, as this study shows, side sequences offer unique opportunities for teachers and students to pursue affiliation. Given the connection between affiliative relationships and student engagement in learning, the findings on how they are accomplished in these moments have important implications for researchers concerned with the links between classroom interactions and L2 learning and for L2 teachers and teacher education programs. In what follows, we first review CA research on affiliation and side sequences. We then present our study in which we examine how affiliation is accomplished in side sequences that unfold at different moments in whole-group teacher–student interactions in a university-level English grammar course. After presenting our findings, we discuss the implications for research on L2 classroom interactions and pedagogy.

## 2. Literature review

### 2.1. Affiliation

Affiliation is the affective dimension of interactional cooperation, as opposed to alignment, which refers to cooperation on the structural level (Lindström and Sorjonen 2012; Steensig 2020; Stivers 2008). Aligning responses match the design preference of the turn, whereas affiliative responses endorse the prior speaker's affective stance and match the preference of the prior action (Stivers, Lorenza, and Jakob 2011). Findings from a growing body of CA research on affiliation in ordinary interactional contexts such as complaint sequences and story tellings show that speakers routinely use facial expressions such as smiles or frowns and prosodic cues such as smiley voice, vowel elongation, and stress to display their affective stance towards the events they are relating (Couper-Kuhlen 2012; Heritage 2011, Lindström and Sorjonen 2012; Sacks 1974). Recipients affiliate with speakers' stances nonverbally with facial expressions, gestures and head nods, and with vocal sounds such as inbreaths, cries, laughs and response cries such as 'o:h no:' that match the stance displayed by the speaker (Antaki 2012; Couper-Kuhlen 2012; Goodwin and Harness

Goodwin 1987; Hall and Smotrova 2013; Stivers 2008). **Excerpt 1** illustrates the use of some of these resources by speakers and recipients to achieve affiliation. It is taken from a study of storytelling in a barbershop, where MIC, a barber, is cutting MAT's hair. As he does, MIC tells a story about leaving his dog with someone who did a poor job of caring for it.

**Excerpt 1** Achievement of affiliation (Stivers 2008, 46)

```

1      MIC: >yeah I wanna jump on him cuz I'm
2          like (0.2) "Foo:l,"
3      MAT: [(I le-)
4      MIC: ["I let you to [babysit my dog ]<" (gah) an'=
5      MAT:          [( (nodding ) )]
6      MIC: =we went to barber school together right?,
7      MAT: ((nodding))
8      MIC: >So he (tells) me yeah you can leave...
```

In MIC's telling, he displays negative stance towards the person's behaviour both lexically and prosodically. He first states that he wants to jump on the person who was caring for the dog and then reports what he said to the person using the address term 'fool' with emphatic stress (lines 1–2). MAT's nodding affiliates with MIC's stance (line 5). As MIC continues the story, he explicitly pursues affiliation with the tag question 'right' which MAT matches by continuing to nod (lines 6–7).

Some of the same resources used to convey affiliation can also exhibit disaffiliation depending on the sequential positions in which they occur (Etelämäki, Heinemann, and Vatanen 2021; Lindström and Sorjonen 2012; Steensig and Larsen 2008; Stivers 2008). As shown in **Excerpt 1**, nodding during a story telling displays affiliation to the teller of the story because it claims access to the teller's stance. However, when nodding occurs at the completion of the story, it is considered disaffiliative because it is not the response that the storyteller expects (Stivers 2008). Instead, the storyteller expects affiliative actions such as response cries, parallel assessments, or second stories that match the storyteller's stance. Likewise, the absence of laughter in response to a turn inviting laughter can display disaffiliation (Clift 2016; Hall and Smotrova 2013; Jefferson 1979).

### 2.1.1. Affiliation in institutional interactions

Affiliation has been studied in many institutional settings, including sales encounters (Clark, Drew, and Pinch 2003), news interviews (Shalash 2020), and healthcare interactions (Muntigl, Knight, and Watkins 2012, 2014; Ruusu vuori 2005, 2007; Weiste et al. 2020). While interactants use some of the same resources, such as nods and smiles (e.g. Muntigl, Knight, and Watkins 2012), to display (dis)affiliation, other resources are specific to the institutional contexts. Muntigl, Naomi, and Ashley (2014) show that a therapist displays affiliation by naming a client's feelings, and Zanini and González-Martínez (2015) examine how a nurse displayed disaffiliation to a mother's child-rearing practices by mimicking the baby's voice and talking to the baby instead of directly addressing the mother.

Unlike in everyday conversations, affiliation can also be displayed differently and even sometimes withheld in institutional talk. Interactants balance their institutional responsibilities, the goal of the interactional project, and the need to provide affiliative, empathic responses in professional (Lindström and Sorjonen 2012) and academic contexts (e.g. Lo 2020). In healthcare interactions, for example, Ruusuvuori (2005, 2007) examined patients' troubles-telling in homoeopathic and general practice consultations. It was revealed that, in most cases, professionals displayed minimal affiliation or refrained from affiliating with the patients. When displayed, affiliation was used to close a trouble-telling sequence and shift back to problem-solving.

Affiliation in academic settings has also attracted much attention. Studies of L2 classroom interactions have examined the ways in which teachers and students create affiliative relationships (Jacknick 2013; Jakonen and Evnitskaya 2020, Lo 2020; Looney and He 2021; Petitjean and González-Martínez 2015; Sert and Jacknick 2015, Tadic and Box 2019; Waring, Reddington, and Tadic 2016). Findings show that teachers and students do so with the same verbal (e.g. Tadic and Box 2019), prosodic (Lo 2020), and nonverbal cues (e.g. Jakonen and Evnitskaya 2020) that are used to display affect in everyday interactions. Several studies in this line of research highlight the push-and-pull between a teacher's instructional and interpersonal roles (Nguyen 2007), revealing that teachers juggle the need to fulfill their institutional responsibilities, achieve instructional goals, and display affiliation. Teachers need to find a delicate balance between managing affiliative relationships with students and tasks such as maintaining control of the classroom and on-going tasks (Çopur and Brandt 2024), giving linguistic feedback (Lo 2020; Park 2016), and mitigating students' emotional tension (Jakonen and Evnitskaya 2020).

Findings also reveal that affiliation is pursued by both teachers and students during moments of interactional difficulties (Hall, He, and Yin Khor 2023; Jacknick 2013; Sert and Jacknick 2015), such as when a student is unable to answer a question. This is illustrated in [Excerpt 2](#), where the teacher is looking for an example from the students regarding a topic they are discussing.

**Excerpt 2** Any examples? (Hall, He, and Yin Khor 2023, 171)

17 TEA: any examples?  
 18 (0.9)  
 19 ABD: I have an example.  
 20 (0.3)  
 21 TEA: [↑okay,  
 22 |(nods)  
 23 (1.3)  
 24 SSS: [&hahaha  
 25 TEA: |(smiles)  
 26 ABD: but I shouldn't-  
 27 ABD: it'll take a little long [time °to explain°.  
 28 TEA: |ok. ok.  
 29 (0.8)  
 30 TEA: anoth- a sh- a quick example?

In this excerpt, the teacher seeks students' contributions for an example (line 17). After a brief silence, ABD responds that he has one (line 19). With an 'okay' and a head nod, the teacher indicates that ABD can continue (lines 21–22). However, ABD does not immediately

provide an example, which indicates that a dispreferred response may be imminent. The gap of silence is followed by laughter by some students and a smile by the teacher, which displays the teacher's affiliation with the student despite his disaligning response (lines 23–25). ABD then begins his turn but cuts it off and offers an account for why he will not give an example (lines 26–27). ABD's account is accepted by the teacher and, after a brief silence, she seeks a response to her earlier question, this time indicating that the response should be 'quick' (lines 28–30). Previous research on affiliation in L2 classrooms revealed the competing demands teachers manage when displaying affiliation and the interactional resources used to achieve affiliation. The current study adds to this body of literature by examining how teacher and students establish affiliative relationships in side sequences.

## 2.2. Side sequences

Side sequences occur within main sequences and serve to launch temporary deviations from them (Jefferson 1972). During these moments, the interlocutors collaboratively orient to some other business that is somehow related to the main sequence, and subsequently resume the main sequence once the business is taken care of. The following example of a side sequence comes from Mazeland and Mike (2001) study on the role of Dutch 'but' as a marker in interactions. In the example below, Jan is projecting a story about a boy from his former school.

### Excerpt 3 The-boy-from-my-former-school (Mazeland and Mike 2001, 148)

```

313 Jan: → listen, (.) >at my former school, you know
314         (0.4) there was this guy and he (uh-)
315         I didn't like him very well. (0.3) and this
316         was really hilarious [ (because uh)
317 Ans: → [ (°what was his name. °)
318         0.5
319 Jan:     what? =
320 Ans: = °and what was his name
321         (.)
322 Jan: Alexander,
323         1.3
324 Ans: which school did you go to then.
325 Jan: = to Saint Martin's. ((name of the school))
326         (.)
327 Ans: o1: h.
328         0.3
329 Ans: (Lower Quay, ) ((name of the area))
330         0.2
331 Ans: rig[ht. [ (°go ahead) ]
332 Jan: → [but thi [s u: : : :]] :h (.) this u:h (0.6)
333         this (°boy° (0.3) I didn't like him very much.
334         it really was a very strange guy,
```

As shown in Excerpt 3, the excerpt begins with Jan's recounting of a story about a guy who had attended the same school (lines 313–16). The story is halted when Ans, the recipient, asks for the name of the boy (line 317). The inquiry launches

a side sequence that runs for several turns. After receiving an answer to his first question, Ans continues the side sequence by asking another question about the school that Jan attended at the time of the story (lines 322, 324). After Ans acknowledges and expands on Jan's response, he brings the sequence back to the main project by offering a go-ahead to Jan to resume the story, which he does (lines 327–331).

A few CA studies have explored side sequences in interactions that include L2 speakers in various contexts (Brouwer 2004; Majlesi and Broth 2012; Nakahama, Tyler, and Van Lier 2001; Svennevig 2018; Theodórsdóttir 2018). Findings show that side sequences are mostly initiated by L2 speakers when difficulties with the second language, such as word meanings and pronunciations, arise. For example, in his study of interactions between a Polish speaking construction worker and his Norwegian speaking supervisors, Svennevig (2018) found the L2 employee initiated several side sequences in which he appealed to his interlocutors for help in producing technical terms in Norwegian. Similarly, in her study on conversations between Danes and L2 speakers of Danish, Brouwer (2004) found that L2 speakers used several resources, including speech perturbations, such as *-uhs*, pauses, and repetitions, to initiate side sequences in which they sought correction on their pronunciation of words in Danish. In both studies, L2 speakers temporarily shifted the focus of the conversation to vocabulary learning before returning to the main business. While several studies have outlined the organisation of side sequences and explored the pedagogical potential of side sequences in L2 learning, how L2 teachers and students display affiliation in side sequences remains uninvestigated. The study reported here addresses this gap by showing the distinctive role that side sequences play in affording opportunities for displays of affiliation between teachers and students.

### 3. Data and method

#### 3.1. Data source and participants

The data for this study include 4 h of video recordings collected from an intermediate-advanced, semester-long English grammar course offered by an intensive English program affiliated with a Mid-Atlantic public state university in the U.S. The 4 h cover two 2-h class sessions occurring at the beginning of the semester. The instructor of the course, Julie (pseudonym), is a native speaker of English with extensive ESL teaching experience. The students ( $n = 12$ ) in this class were from the Middle East, East Asia, and South America. Most of them intended to enrol in the local university's degree programs at undergraduate or graduate levels after completing the IEP course. In the classroom, students are seated in rows, facing the front.

#### 3.2. Data analysis

The first round of data analysis involved transcribing the video recordings. The Codes for the Human Analysis of Transcripts (CHAT) system, a standardised coding scheme for transcribing and analysing face-to-face human interactional data, was used. Its coding

conventions support the transcription requirements of CA, affording markings of features of conversational sequencing and the qualities of speech delivery, including paralinguistic features such as laugh particles and hesitation markers (MacWhinney 2000).

The transcripts and videos were examined twice to ensure that all sequences that appeared to be side sequences were identified. All authors collectively discussed and evaluated each identified sequence, determining whether it could be categorised as a side sequence considering the definition we adopt (Jefferson 1972) and its sequential position in the larger interactional project. In this process, we excluded insert sequences (Schegloff 2007). While both types of sequence occur within a main sequence, an insert sequence differs from a side sequence in that it is specifically placed between a first and a second pair part of the main sequence. It often seeks to clarify conditions for how the first pair part should be understood to 'enable the doing of the base second pair part' (Schegloff 2007, 99). In other words, it defers the second pair part while still holding the main topic or business relevant.

Ambiguous and questionable sequences were organised into an online survey, and each author cast votes to determine how they should be categorised. The voting results were iteratively discussed, compared and assessed until all ambiguities were resolved. The analysis yielded a collection of nine side sequences between the teacher and the students. Upon close examination of the nine sequences, we identified affiliative work being accomplished in five of them and decided to narrow our focus to affiliation in side sequences. We conducted Conversation Analysis of the five side sequences to examine how affiliation is achieved. As a sociological approach to the study of social order (Sacks 1992, 1995; Schegloff 2007), CA's contribution to L2 pedagogy has been widely acknowledged and extensively researched (e.g. Hall and Looney 2019, 2023; Kunitz, Markee, and Sert 2021; Wong and Waring 2021). It uncovers the structures of classroom interactions and reveals the interactional resources that are used to accomplish various actions in L2 teaching and learning.

## 4. Findings

In this section, we examine the affiliative work that the teacher and students do in each of the five sequences. We show that the teacher and students use various resources such as smiles, laughter and response cries to soften or mitigate disaligning moments, to manage changes in the teacher's epistemic stance relative to particular domains of knowledge, and to display humour. Although in most cases, the sequences are quite short, in all cases, they offer opportunities not only for the teacher and students to affiliate with each other but also for students to participate in interactions with the teacher and each other in ways that pre-planned instructional activities often do not.

### 4.1. Mitigating disaligning moments

In the side sequence shown in [Excerpt 4](#), JUL, the teacher, uses affiliation to soften a disaligning moment that occurs when a question she asks encounters silence from the students. We show how the teacher's use of affiliation elicits students' affiliative and aligning responses. The excerpt occurs at the beginning of a class held early in the semester.

**Excerpt 4** Does anyone remember anything (CEAPP 2014; GR4011713T1)<sup>2</sup>

1 JUL: uh:m, (0.7) so i thought we'd start >with a little review:<  
 2 an:d, tell: our::, (0.3) classmate mada what (.) >we did<  
 3 on tuesday.  
 4 (0.7)  
 5 does anybody remember (.) anything (.) >°that we did°< (.)  
 6 on tuesday.  
 7 [(5.0)  
 8 [(looks at students, smiles and sips from cup,  
 9 then sets it on podium).  
 10 ASH: [(looks at ABD, then looks up)  
 11 ABD: [(smiles)  
 12 → JUL: ☺>doesn't it feel like a long time ago?<☺  
 13 ASH: yeah=  
 14 ABD: =yes  
 15 → JUL: [&haha  
 16 [(turns toward board, gets piece of chalk and turns back)  
 17 BEL: °we: (.) talked (.) about° (.) articles?  
 18 (0.3)  
 19 JUL: we talked about articles,

The excerpt opens with the teacher standing behind the computer podium announcing the opening of a review sequence and then asking the students to tell a classmate who missed the prior day's class what they had done on that day (lines 1–6). There is no immediate response, and, after a brief silence, JUL asks if anyone remembers what they did (lines 5–6). Upon completion of her question, a long silence ensues, during which JUL picks up and takes a sip from a coffee cup that was on the podium while continuing to look towards the students and then smiling as she places the cup down (lines 8–9). As she is doing this, students are either looking at her or at the materials on their desks. Two students, ASH and ABD, appear more actively involved in that ASH first looks over at ABH and then looks up as if to indicate he is thinking about what they did. Meanwhile ABD is smiling broadly as he looks at the teacher (lines 11). Students' silence and ABD's smile here serve as a disaligning second pair part to the question.

The side sequence begins when JUL asks in smiley voice, 'doesn't it feel like a long time ago' (line 12). The question, formatted as a negative-polar interrogative, deviates from the main task – reviewing – and provides a possible account for the lack of adequate response from students. Her use of smiley voice indicates a humorous stance towards the question. ASH and ABD show alignment to the question with type-conforming responses. 'yeah' and 'yes' (Raymond 2003) and affiliation with smiles, which match the teacher's affective stance (lines 13–14). The teacher responds with affiliative laughter, turns towards the chalkboard, and picks up a piece of chalk, indicating the side sequence is ending (lines 15–16). BEL interprets it as such for, as the teacher turns back to face the students, BEL initiates a turn that provides a response to the teacher's initial question (line 5). JUL acknowledges BEL's turn by repeating it, indicating a successful return to the main sequence (line 19).

The lack of preferred response from the students stops the progression of the pedagogical sequence and creates a disaligning moment in the interaction. The side sequence here creates a space for a quick discussion of a 'less relevant' topic and prompts affiliative

responses from students. This side sequence also successfully mobilises an aligning response and allows a smooth transition back to the main sequence, as evidenced by BEL's eventual answer and the teacher's acknowledgement.

#### 4.2. Managing epistemic stance and eliciting student empathetic responses

The following two excerpts illustrate displays of affiliation by the students when the teacher's epistemic stance towards the topic under discussion is lowered, resulting in the levelling of the institutional relationship between the teacher and students. In both excerpts, students provide empathetic responses, displaying their comprehension of teacher's emotional circumstances (Hall and Smotrova 2013; Heritage 2011). In **Excerpt 5**, the side sequence involves a self-disclosure by the teacher about not knowing a vocabulary item. The class is reviewing a reading in their textbook, and the teacher asks the students whether there is any vocabulary from the reading they want to talk about. The activity focuses on explaining the meanings of unfamiliar vocabulary.

##### **Excerpt 5** I've never heard this word (CEAPP 2014; GR4011713T3)

1 JUL: [>does ↑everybody see:< the vocab word  
2 [(looking at book)  
3 in li:ne twenty u:mm- yeah twenty one?  
4 (1.3)  
5 ABD: inspired?  
6 (1.1)  
7 JUL: twenty [one.  
8 ABD: [log- logfjam  
9 ATH: [logjam.  
10 JUL: [↑lo:gja:m  
11 [(looks at book)  
12 MAD: yes  
13 → JUL: [>↑I had never heard this word<  
14 [(holds book close to chest, looks at students)  
15 [unti::l I read (.) this (.) book.  
16 [(continues to hold book and gaze at students)  
17 ABD: [↑rea:lly  
18 [(raises head, gazes at JUL, smiles)  
19 ATH: [(raises head, gazes at JUL, smiles)  
20 JUL: rea:lly. >never heard of it< lo:gjam  
21 → (shrugs shoulders while continuing to look at students)  
22 JUL: [(looks at book)  
23 [(1.0)  
24 [u:mm, but I imag- [do you know what a< lo:g is?  
25 [(continues looking at book) [(looks up at students)  
26 ABD: yeah.  
27 ATH: °yeah°.

The excerpt opens with the teacher directing the class's attention to a word in the reading as she looks at the textbook she is holding in her hand (lines 1–2). After a brief repair about the line number (lines 5–7), two students answer JUL's question in overlap (lines 8–9). JUL repeats the word with a raised pitch and an elongation of pronunciation, confirming their responses.

She then clutches the book to her chest, gazes at the students, and reveals that she had never heard this word before reading the textbook (lines 13–16). Her use of pauses and elongation as well as her prolonged gaze index the personal nature of the disclosure.

The side sequence, temporarily stopping the discussion on explaining the meanings of vocabulary, revolves around JUL's revelation of on her lack of familiarity with the vocabulary. As the language expert in this context, JUL has a higher epistemic status towards the subject matter than the students. However, her claim of unfamiliarity with the word matches the students' epistemic status as language learners and therefore displays affiliation towards students' potential disappointment of not knowing the word. Such revelation displays a moment of teacher's vulnerability, which engenders empathetic and affiliative responses from two students. ABD utters 'really' with elongation and raised pitch, a response cry indicating surprise and curiosity, as he looks at the teacher and smiles (lines 17–18). Through verbal and non-verbal cues, ABD not only acknowledges JUL's admission but does so by displaying understanding of teacher's emotion, as the experience of not knowing the vocabulary is shared. Another student, ATH, also looks up and smiles at the teacher as ABD is speaking (line 19). JUL upgrades her stance, repeating 'really' and her admission about her lack of familiarity with the word, and then shrugs her shoulders, while continuing to gaze at the students (lines 20–21). A fairly long silence, during which the teacher looks back at the textbook, serves to close the side sequence. The teacher's next turn, in which she first utters 'um' and then a but-prefaced polar question, returns the interaction to the main activity (lines 22–25).

The side sequence shown in [Excerpt 6](#) occurs towards the end of a class session. Here, affiliation is displayed by the students when the teacher admits to a mistake.

### **Excerpt 6** Was anyone able to find the syllabus (CEAPP 2014; GR4012213T7)

1 JUL: >alright<. (0.6) [we're running out of ti:me, we will talk more  
2 [(walks toward the podium)  
3 [about existence >discovery and existence< verbs  
4 [(stands at podium, looking at computer screen)  
5 [uhm but right no:w I would like to::, (0.7)  
6 [(looking down at and moving papers on podium)  
7 hand out your first writing assignment,  
8 (picks up papers while looking down)  
9 → [WAS †>ANYbody able to< fi:nd the: the syllabus (0.4) on  
angel?  
10 [(looks up at students)  
11 SSS: (looks up to JUL)  
12 MAN: no=  
13 JUL: =>anybody< check,  
14 ASH: u:hm I checked but there was (0.8)  
15 JUL: [nothing there.=  
17 [(shakes head)  
18 ASH: =>there was< nothing there  
19 JUL: ok[ay  
20 ASH: [no content.  
21 JUL: †I'm trying,  
22 ASH: [∫u[huh  
23 MAD: [(smiles)  
24 JUL: u:hm I thought I did it maybe maybe  
25 [I- >I failed to do it.<  
26 → [(looks down, taps papers on desk)  
27 >anyway< u:hm this is your first written assignment,  
28 (looks up, walks toward students with papers in hand)

The main activity is a pre-closing sequence in which the teacher is giving instructions for their first writing assignment to be completed outside of class. The excerpt opens with the teacher uttering a sequence-closing ‘alright’ (Hall, He, and Yin Khor 2023) and a post-expansion turn commenting on the activity about verbs they had just completed (lines 1–4). As she talks, she walks towards the podium in front of the room. When she arrives at the podium, she looks down and begins to move a stack of papers on the podium and opens the new sequence by announcing that she will hand out their first writing assignment (lines 5–7). She then picks up a stack of piles while still looking down (line 8). Instead of progressing with instructions about the assignment, however, she opens a side sequence by looking up at the students and asking them whether they found the syllabus on the course management system (lines 9–10). The turn temporarily deviates from the main task-at-hand. It is produced with a raised pitch and higher volume, marking a sudden change of topic. The shift in cadence prompts multiple students to look up at JUL, showing their orientation to the onset of the side sequence as well.

This is followed by several turns between the teacher and a student, ASH, who informs her that not only is the syllabus not on the system, but there is no content at all (lines 13–20). In response to this information, JUL utters ‘I’m trying’ with raised pitch, highlighting the difficulty of the task she perceives. Affiliative laughter from ASH and a smile from MAD display students’ empathy and understanding of the situation. She then offers an admission that she may not have populated the system with content after all as she looks down and taps the papers she is holding on the podium (lines 24–25). Having the syllabus on the course management system is a part of the teacher’s institutional obligation, and failing to do so threatens her institutional status as the educator. The students’ displays of affiliation mitigate the face-threatening moment. With the marker ‘anyway’ stated as she gazes up at the students, the teacher transitions back to the main sequence (lines 27–28).

The analysis of [Excerpts 5](#) and [6](#) reveals how side sequences can create affiliative moments between the teacher and students, often initiated by the teacher’s expressions of vulnerability as not knowing something that is within their territory of knowledge. In the first excerpt, JUL’s admission of unfamiliarity with a vocabulary word temporarily lowers her epistemic authority as a teacher, aligning her with the students as language learners. This moment of vulnerability evokes affiliative responses, such as ABD’s surprised utterance and smile, fostering empathy and understanding. In the second excerpt, JUL’s admission of difficulty with uploading the syllabus similarly invites affiliative reactions, as students respond with laughter and smiles, displaying empathy and mitigating the face-threatening nature of the teacher’s institutional lapse. In both cases, the teacher’s vulnerability, paired with the students’ empathetic responses, strengthens the rapport within the classroom before smoothly transitioning back to the main instructional sequences.

### **4.3. Affording humorous talk**

[Excerpts 7](#) and [8](#) illustrate how a side sequence affords opportunities for the teacher and students to affiliate with each other using humour. The side sequence illustrated in [Excerpt 7](#) occurs in the same class session as [Excerpt 4](#), about midway through the two-hour class. It takes place during a review of an exercise they had completed regarding abstract and specific verbs. In this side sequence, the students display affiliation through

smiles and audible laughter, matching and upgrading the teacher's humorous stance displayed in a question she poses to the students.

To fully understand a key turn in the excerpt, it's important to note a discussion from 40 minutes earlier. The class had been discussing a textbook statement about American and Indian executives' communication styles, leading to a student's example about how silence in response to teacher questions might indicate inattention. The student then asked the teacher how she feels when students don't respond immediately, to which she replied, 'when everybody is smiling and quiet I get worried', expressing concern about whether students understand. As students smiled and nodded, the teacher advanced the discussion.

### Excerpt 7 Really with me (CEAPP 2014; GR4011713T5)

1 JUL: so we have- (0.3) >we have< different leve:ls,  
 2 of abstractness.  
 3 (0.6)  
 4 JUL: okay?  
 5 ABD: mm.  
 6 JUL: right?  
 7 (0.2)  
 8 JUL: >agreed? are [you with me<?  
 9 [(leans slightly forward, raises hands )]  
 10 ABD: [yes.  
 11 UNK: [uh huh  
 12 (0.8)  
 13 → JUL: [<@rea:lly with me@>? or  
 14 [(smile and nod, clenches right palm)  
 15 MAD: &haha  
 16 SSS: (smile)  
 17 JUL: [i'm [listening xxx  
 18 [(gazes up and shakes head around)  
 19 BEL: [do you have any question?  
 20 (LH index point to JUL, body and head leans forward)  
 21 JUL: †&HAhahahahaha.  
 22 BEL: [no?=  
 23 SSS: [(smile)  
 24 → JUL: =okay.  
 25 JUL: [A:Nd, SO >you gave me a couple of< things up here,  
 26 JUL: [(walks back to board, taps on the board)

Moving ahead 40 minutes, a similar interactional moment occurs, captured in this excerpt in that the teacher is seeking claims of understanding from students again. The excerpt opens with JUL providing a summary of what she had just explained to the students about abstract verbs (lines 1–2). After a brief silence, she asks a polar question, designed as one word, 'okay', uttered with rising intonation, that seeks claims of understanding from the students (lines 3–4). After a minimal response is provided by only one student, JUL poses three more similarly designed questions seeking claims of understanding, 'right?', 'agreed?', and 'are you with me?' (line 8). The last one, which is upgraded to a plea as it is uttered with raised hands as she leans towards the students, elicits claims of understanding from two students (lines 10–11). Her pursuits thus far have not elicited the expected responses from the students and it is at this point that she opens the side sequence, with a partial repeat of her question with an added intensifier 'really' (line 13). The upgraded repeat is uttered with smiley voice and raised pitch, and more slowly than the prior question and as it is uttered, JUL nods her head and raises

a clenched fist. This humorously enacted question invokes the earlier discussion about how she feels when students do not respond. The students orient to the question not as a confirmation check, but as a humorous turn, and respond with laughter and smiles (lines 15–16).

The side sequence continues with JUL mumbling ‘I’m listening’ as she gazes up and shakes her head around, seemingly acting as a student who is not paying attention (lines 17–18). BEL affiliates with Julie’s turn by humorously re-enacting the scenario JUL described in the previous discussion (i.e. when the teacher asks a question and all the students are smiling and nodding but not answering). BEL asks with smiley voice ‘Do you have any question?’, and as she speaks, she leans forward and points her index finger at the teacher (lines 19–20). This draws loud laughter from JUL (line 21) and smiles from several students (line 23). The side sequence ends with the teacher’s sequence closing ‘okay’ (line 24; Couper-Kuhlen 2021) and the resumption of the discussion on verb tenses while walking back to the board and taps on the writing on the board (line 25–26).

Like [Excerpt 7](#), [Excerpt 8](#) shows how the teacher and students engage in affiliative, humorous talk in a side sequence. This is the most extended side sequence in the four hours of data. The class has been discussing the use of ‘discovery verbs’ such as show, display, and find.<sup>3</sup> The teacher now wants the students to come up with example sentences that use discovery verbs and the word ‘scientist’. After confirming his understanding of the task, one student, ABD, begins a turn, stating ‘research has shown that’. This is where the excerpt begins.

### Excerpt 8 Liposuction (CEAPP 2014; GR4012213T7)

1 ABD: research has ha- ha-  
 2 JUL: [=or research &hahahaha  
 3 [(erases word 'scientist' she had just written on board)  
 4 ABD: yeah  
 5 JUL: [resea:rch [ha:s  
 6 [(writing on board) [(looks over shoulder to ABD)  
 7 ABD: uh show[n  
 8 JUL: [show:n  
 9 (writes 'shown' on board, turns around, gazes at ABD)  
 10 ABD: that fat [can be used as an alternative to fossil fuels.  
 11 JUL: [(turns and writes 'that' on board, then stops)  
 12 ABD: [>that's actually a fact<  
 13 → JUL: [that (0.5) that fat?  
 14 [what kinds of fat.  
 15 [(looks at ABD with RH poised to write)  
 16 (0.7)  
 17 ABD: body fat  
 18 JUL: [human ↑fa:t?  
 19 [(moves head forward, stares at ABD)  
 20 ABD: mammal fat.  
 21 BEL: can be used-  
 22 (0.5)  
 23 ABD: <as u:h> as uh an alternative to fossil fuels.  
 24 (0.4)  
 25 JUL: [mammal fat,  
 26 [(continues to gaze at ABD)  
 27 MAN: [really?  
 28 (0.8)  
 29 ABD: huma:n (0.3) mammals well they use:d actually  
 30 human fat (1.2) some (.) engineer, (0.5) uh that-

31 what's ↑the: (.)>operation that's<  
32 JUL: ↑liposuction.  
33 ABD: yea:h, and he: u:sed his (.) fat: to power up  
34 hi:s u:h (0.3) yards.  
35 SSS: [&hahahahaha  
36 MAN: |oh my go:d  
37 JUL: |pff&haha  
38 [(gazing at ABD with raised RH, LH covers mouth)  
36 ABD: he is an australian engi'Hneer.  
37 JUL [(continues to gaze at ABD with covered mouth)  
38 |(2.5)  
39 JUL: °wo:::w°  
40 (lowers hand from mouth, continues to gaze at ABD)  
41 BEL: &hahahahaha  
42 (0.9)  
43 JUL: [so::, can we have like (.) energy donation [centers?  
44 [(keeps RH on board, taps left side of stomach with LH)  
45 SSS: |&hahahahaha  
46 ABD: that's what-  
47 JUL: [this is a great ide:a,  
48 [(continues holding RH poised to write, gazes at students)  
49 BEL: &hahaha  
50 (0.5)  
51 ABD: what it- it is not sufficient though.  
52 JUL: [ (stares at ABD, with RH still poised to write)  
53 |(1.4)  
54 [the government could pa:y us to donate fue:l.  
55 [(continues holding RH poised to write, gestures with LH)  
56 SSS: &hahahahaha  
57 (0.6)  
58 JUL: this is brilliant.  
*Four next turns are omitted. They comprise a repair sequence between the teacher and a student who did not consent to having his data used.*  
59 JUL: and I don't have to pay for it because I'm  
60 helping the environment.  
61 AMI: ye[ah.  
62 BEL: |&hahaha  
63 JUL: (turns to chalkboard and begins to write)  
64 BEL: is that true?  
65 JUL: [°°i don't know°° &hahahahaha  
66 |(turns back to gaze at students)  
67 ABD: [yeah it's actually true. you should look it up.  
68 (0.9)  
69 JUL: [wo:::w  
70 [(covers mouth with LH while looking at students)  
71 BEL: where can we donate [our fat.  
72 JUL: |where can we donate [&hahahahaha=  
73 SSS: |&hahaha  
74 JUL: =(turns to board and prepares to write with RH)  
75 ABD: it's just one gu:y that did it [himself, I don't really  
76 JUL: |(turns back to look at ABD)  
77 ABD: it's- it's just some gu:y that fueled his yard with (0.7)  
78 JUL: with his own f[at  
79 ABD: |fat, yeah  
80 JUL: oh [god↓okay  
81 |(turns back to board and begins to write)  
82 → SSS: [&hahaha

83 JUL: [research has shown that u:hm, uh mammal fa:t (4.7) ca:n  
 84 be u::sed (1.3) a:s (0.5) u:hm [>what did you say<  
 85 | (turns back to ABD)  
 86 an alterna[tive?  
 87 ABD: [an alternative [°to fossil fuels°  
 88 JUL: | (finishes writing)  
 89 JUL: [okay. ha:s shown. present perfect, right?  
 90 | (faces the board, underlines the verb)

Just before ABD begins his turn, the teacher had written the word ‘scientists’ on the board as a prompt for students to use in their sentences. In his turn, however, ABD uses the word ‘research’ (line 1). The teacher latches on to ABD’s turn before it is completed and confirms this word by stating it and, then, replacing the word ‘scientist’ with the word ‘research’ on the board (lines 2–6). As she completes writing ‘has’, she looks over her shoulder to ABD, which prompts him to complete his turn, which he does, stating, ‘that fat can be used as an alternative to fossil fuels’ (line 10). He adds a post expansion turn, confirming the factual nature of the information (line 12). The wording ‘actually a fact’ indicates that ABD is treating his statement as something out of the ordinary.

This prompts a question by the teacher about the information ABD has provided in his turn that serves to open a side sequence (lines 13–15). As she asks the question, she keeps her right hand at the point where she had been writing on the board as she gazes at ABD. Her non-verbal act reveals that the main activity is on hold temporarily. Upon hearing ABD’s response to her question, JUL moves her head forward while staring at ABD and offers a partial repeat, uttered with raised pitch and elongation. Her expression of surprise affiliates with ABD, who treat his contribution as surprising (lines 18–19). This engenders several turns of talk during which ABD shares additional information, and the teacher and other students display continued affiliation by, for example, offering interjections of surprise and astonishment (lines 27, 36, 39) and laughter (lines 35, 37, 41). JUL fully participates in the joke by adding non-realistic suggestions, that is having energy donation centres and having the government pay for the fuel (lines 43, 47, 54, 59–60), even when ABD already indicates that such act is not viable. JUL’s playful expansion of the joke invites even more laughter from the students (lines 49, 56, 62).

Throughout this extended side sequence, the teacher has kept her right hand poised at the board where she had been writing ABD’s sentence, and after a joking sequence, she turns back to the board, preparing to write, indicating that the side sequence is about to close (lines 59–62). However, a student question elicits several more turns that extend the sequence, during which the teacher turns back to look at the students (lines 64–73). BEL’s follow-up question (line 71) and JUL’s repetition (line 72) contribute to the development of the ongoing joke, eliciting even more laughter from the students (line 73) and creating a cheerful classroom.

At the end of another joking sequence, the teacher again turns to the board and prepares to write, indicating the impending closure of the side sequence (line 74). ABD, however, extends the side sequence with a comment on the information he had provided earlier. A brief pause during his turn elicits a completion of the turn by the teacher, which ABD confirms (lines 77–79). The teacher follows this with an affiliative assessment and a sequence closing ‘okay’ spoken as she turns back to the board and begins to write. As several students display their affiliation through laughter, the teacher returns to the main activity. She rereads what she had written on the board and then turns back to ABD to

elicit the ending to the sentence begun several turns earlier before the side sequence was opened (lines 82–85). ABD provides the sought-after information, and a discussion of verb tense ensues (lines 86–90).

Affiliative actions in these [Excerpts 7](#) and [8](#) both created humorous effects. In [Excerpt 7](#), BEL playfully recycles a previous interaction, aligning with the teacher's side sequence and creating a humorous moment. JUL's loud laughter, along with several students' smiles, highlights a lively and engaging classroom atmosphere. In [Excerpt 8](#), affiliation is fostered as JUL expresses interest in the students' funny contributions and encourages further participation. This side sequence provides students with the opportunity to share their thoughts and engage in language production, enhancing the collaborative dynamic of the classroom.

## 5. Discussion and conclusion

Our analysis of the five side sequences shows that the teacher and students achieve affiliation through a wide range of interactional resources and practices, such as smiles, laughter, gaze, response cries, and partial repetition of the prior speaker's turn. In [Excerpt 4](#), the teacher provides a possible account for the lack of adequate response, which elicits students' affiliation. [Excerpts 5](#) and [6](#) are instances where the teacher shows vulnerability as she displays a lower epistemic stance. In response, the students use response cries, laughter, and smiles to display affiliation and mitigate the face-threatening moment. In the last two side sequences, [Excerpts 7](#) and [8](#), the teacher and students achieve affiliation while engaging in humorous talk. In [Excerpt 7](#), the teacher and student verbally and non-verbally re-enact an utterance. In [Excerpt 8](#), the student's extended telling and the teacher's playful expansion of the joke evoke affiliative responses.

As we have discussed, although side sequences appear infrequently in classroom interactions, they afford opportunities for teachers and students to affiliate with each other and participate in interactions in ways that pre-planned instructional activities often do not afford. While they are often brief, they create opportunities for students to display emotions and foster relationships, not only with the teacher but with each other. Over time, these affiliative sequences can build a learning climate of mutual trust and respect, which, in turn, help to foster extended student engagement and learning (Macbeth 2014). In addition to creating space for affiliation, the examined side sequences enable the teacher to mitigate disaligning moments and mobilise responses ([Excerpt 4](#)), as well as account for instructional trouble ([Excerpt 6](#)). These actions are crucial for maintaining and restoring the progressivity of the class in order to achieve instructional goals (Amar, Nanbu, and Greer 2021; Schegloff 2007). The side sequences also encourage students' language use by eliciting student responses when the teacher displays lower epistemic stances ([Excerpts 5](#) and [6](#); see, for example, van der Meij, Sofie, and Willemsen 2022), inviting humorous talk ([Excerpts 7](#) and [8](#)), and encouraging extended student contributions which brings students' prior knowledge into classroom discussion ([Excerpt 8](#)). The elicited language use in side sequences promotes engagement and potential language development. As shown in our analysis, the actions that side sequences afford attest to their pedagogical potentials in L2 classrooms.

The findings of this study add to the discussion of L2 teachers' multitasking as they simultaneously balance affiliative relationships and institutional responsibilities

(e.g. Çopur and Brandt 2024; Lo 2020; Park 2016). Perhaps due to the teacher's instructional role and institutional rights, all five sequences in our data are initiated by the teacher. In classrooms, teachers usually allocate turns and maintain authority over instructional tasks. Students' self-select initiations of side sequences may be treated as inappropriate. However, given the pedagogical potential of side sequences that we have illustrated with our data, including the possibility of building affiliative relationships, examining student-initiated side sequences may expand our understanding of the functions of side sequences and learner-initiated actions in L2 classrooms (Waring 2011).

There are several additional areas that warrant further research. The importance of side sequences in affording opportunities for building affiliative relationships between teachers and students, notwithstanding, is limited to some degree in terms of the number of students who can be involved in them at any one time. In all the side sequences we examined in which affiliation occurred, the students who were actively involved in them, taking turns and affiliating with teacher turns through smiles and laughter, were seated towards the front of the class. Although they appeared to be attentive to the unfolding sequences in that they kept their gaze towards the front of the classroom, students towards the back of the room were far less involved. Perhaps, the greater physical distance between the teacher and these students hindered their participation, while, conversely, the proximity between the students in the front and the teacher fostered theirs. Given the importance of affiliative relationships for student engagement in learning, it would be useful to investigate the links between different seating arrangements and student participation in side sequences. Additionally, as shown in [Excerpt 7](#), the teacher and the students re-enacted an utterance from an earlier conversation to co-construct a humorous and affiliative episode of interaction. In future research, it would be worth examining longitudinal data to understand how side sequences contribute to rapport-building between the teacher and students over time.

Studies like these can be immensely useful to L2 teachers and teacher educators in understanding affiliation in classrooms and demonstrating the pedagogical potential of side sequences. As shown in our analysis, achieving affiliation in classroom interaction helps create a lively and engaging classroom atmosphere that encourages students' contribution as well as their sharing of emotions. L2 teachers can make their affective stance accessible to students by, for example, showing emotions and vulnerability (e.g. [Excerpts 5](#) and [6](#)). This makes students' affiliative responses relevant and creates opportunities for engagement. Instead of treating side sequences as pedagogically irrelevant or distracting, L2 teachers can observe their potential as spaces for affiliation-building and student participation. Reflecting on such moments can help them develop 'a reflective capacity for understanding and dealing with the contingencies of L2 teaching' (Hall & Looney, 2019, 213).

## Notes

1. The information identifies the location of the clip on CEAPP. GR4 = grammar level 4, 011713 = day, month, year, T1 = clip number).
2. Arrows are used in [Excerpts 4](#) through [8](#) to indicate the beginning and end of each side sequence.

- In this class, the teacher contrasts 'discovery verbs' with 'existence verbs' such as comprise, consist of, and constitute.

## Acknowledgement

We would like to express our gratitude to the anonymous reviewers for their invaluable feedback and constructive comments.

## Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

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