1. INTRODUCTION: LEARNING THROUGH PRESCHOOL INTERACTIONS

1.1 EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

1.1.1 The Dutch context

In the Netherlands, compulsory school attendance starts at age 5, but most Dutch children enter primary education\(^1\) at age 4. At even younger ages, many children attend early childhood institutions, which are the first settings in which children experience social life outside the family. In the Netherlands, there are two different institutionalized early childcare facilities for children up to 4 years of age: day care (‘kinderdagverblijf’) and preschool (‘peuterspeelzaal’).\(^2\) Day care is primarily organized to enable parents to go to work and offers care for children from birth to age four, for up to five days a week. Preschools, on the other hand, are primarily organized for the benefit of children and have the educational goal of providing children with new experiences and socializing them into the routines, procedures and ways of talking in classroom. Children from around 2;6 years of age visit preschool for two to four (sometimes even five) mornings or afternoons a week.

Preschools started as playgroups organized by parents in the 1960’s and were meant to increase the child’s social and cognitive experiences. Over the years, preschools have become more professional, with a larger emphasis on educational activities and a role in tackling the problems of disadvantaged children. Since the year 2000, the Dutch government made extra money available to increase the stimulating role of preschools and to establish collaborations between preschools and primary education (van der Vegt, Studulski & Kloprogge, 2007; van Kampen, Kloprogge, Rutten & Schonewille, 2005a).

Ninety percent of the children between age 2 and 4 receive some kind of early child care (daycare and/or preschool). However, only half to two-thirds of the children ‘at risk’ (i.e. children with poorly educated parents, often from minority language groups, with Dutch as their second language) receive early childhood education before the age of 4 (Jepma, Kooiman & van der Vegt, 2007; van der Vegt, Kooiman & Jepma, 2008; Westenbrink & Versteegen, 2006). The government emphasizes that, by 2011, all at risk children need to attend preschool and obliges municipalities to try

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1 In 1986, Dutch kindergarten and elementary school merged into one institute for primary education. Since then, the word ‘kindergarten’ for the first two years of education for 4 to 6 year olds is not used anymore.

2 Preschool and day care are two separate organizations in the Netherlands, although the Ministry of Education recently urged them to attune (Ministerie van Onderwijs Cultuur en Wetenschap, 2008a). Moreover, there are proposals to integrate preschools and day care in primary education, creating educational centres for children from birth to age 12 (G27, Association of the 27 largest Dutch towns, 2007; Meijnen, 2008).
to enroll all at risk children in their community in preschool education, lest they are irreversibly disadvantaged when they enter the educational system as ‘old’ as age five (Dijksma, 2008; 2009; Ministerie van Onderwijs Cultuur en Wetenschap, 2008a; 2008b).

In order to reduce and prevent learning- and language delays of at risk children, preschools use special early childhood educational (ECE) programs. Over a decade ago, the Dutch government funded the development and implementation of the ECE programs *Piramide* and *Kaleidoscoop* as part of the policy of effective preschool education (Leseman & Cordus, 1994). Dutch municipalities use a range of ECE programs now, developed by different educational organizations. Among the current Dutch integral, (pre)school-centered programs, *Piramide* is used most frequently (used by 51% of the municipalities), followed by *Startblokken/Basisontwikkeling* (36%), *Ko Totaal* (11%), *Kaleidoscoop* (11%) and small regional programs (24%). There are also programs that focus on a specific area of cognitive development and that can be used in combination with the integral programs, like *Ik ben Bas* (31%), *Taallijn VVE* (30%) and *Boekenpret* (29%). In addition to the school-centered programs, municipalities may use family-oriented programs like *Opstapje* (25%, Jepma et al., 2007).

In this study, I focus on preschools using the programs *Piramide*, *Kaleidoscoop* and/or *Boekenpret*. *Piramide* is a highly structured program with a strong emphasis on cognitive development. The program offers daily activities, which are organized around themes (van Kuyk, 2000). The program *Kaleidoscoop* is based on the US program *High/Scope* (Barnett, 1985; Schweinhart, 2004; Schweinhart & Weikart, 1997) and emphasizes children’s motivation, own initiative and independence. Daily activities within *Kaleidoscoop* are generally not based on themes, but depend on the child’s own interest. One of the domain specific ECE programs is the literacy promoting program *Boekenpret*, related to the UK program *Bookstart* (Booktrust, 2009; van den Berg & Middel, 1996; van der Pennen, 2001). In *Boekenpret*, preschools and elementary schools, libraries and health centres cooperate in order to stimulate book reading with children.

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3 Cito, Central Institute for Test Development, Arnhem
4 APS, center for school improvement, Utrecht
5 CED-groep, teaching education and childcare, Rotterdam
6 NJI, Netherlands Youth Institute, Utrecht
7 Cedin, educational services, Drachten
8 Sardes, education welfare and youth, Utrecht
9 Expertisecentrum Nederlands, language education, Nijmegen
1.1.2 Educational language practices

Verbal communication is central to education, since it is the medium by which information is conveyed, by which social relations in the classroom are managed and by which children express themselves (Cazden, 2001; Wells, 1981). The classroom is a context for the use of a special type of language: *academic discourse*. Academic discourse consists of *educated discourse* and *educational discourse*. In practice, of course, educated discourse and educational discourse go together and cannot be separated as strictly as is suggested here. When children are involved in educated discourse, they use language to think and to communicate, and when they are involved in educational discourse, they use practices to participate in the classroom (Mercer, 1995). The type of talk used in educated discourse is associated with thinking and interacting in school, and contains stretches of extended discourse in which children establish common ground, check agreement and engage in joint, explicit and collaborative reasoning (Blum-Kulka & Snow, 2002; Mercer, 1995; Mercer & Littleton, 2007; Mercer, Wegerif & Dawes, 1999). Educated discourse does not only manifest itself on the level of interactional structures, but also in the educational *register* (Aarts, Demir, Kurvers, Laghzouai & Henrichs, 2006; Schleppegrell, 2001). Educational discourse is related to the conventions of classroom communication (Cazden, 2001). The conventions are different across classrooms and age groups, but in general they have to do with the way children and teachers interactionally construct speech events, like talking during circle time, cooperating during play and following teacher instructions. A frequently used structure in traditional classroom lessons is the IRE sequence: the teacher asks a child a question (Initiation), the child answers (Reply) and the teacher responds (Evaluation or Follow Up; Mehan, 1979).

Studies on learning through interaction often emphasize the importance of active involvement in *extended discourse*. Snow and Beals define extended discourse as “talk centered on a particular topic that extends over several utterances or conversational turns” (Snow & Beals, 2006, p.54). Different types of talk can be extended discourse, like explanatory talk or narratives. These types of talk might introduce children to new vocabulary and/or knowledge about the world. A special type of extended talk is *decontextualized talk*, about non-present topics, like someone who is not present, something that happened in the past or a hypothetical situation (Smith & Dickinson, 1994). *Joint book reading* is often studied as a context for extended discourse and decontextualized talk (Goodman, 1986; Leseman, 1998; Snow & Ninio, 1986). Another extensively studied activity is *dinner table interaction* (Blum-Kulka & Snow, 2002; Cook-Gumperz & Kyratzis, 2001; Ely, Gleason, MacGibbon & Zaretisky, 2001; Ochs & Shohet, 2006; Snow & Beals, 2006; Sterponi,
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2003; Tulviste, 2001). Through dinner time conversations, children may learn to use complex vocabulary, literacy, the conventions of their speech community and cognitive and metalinguistic skills. A third category of interactions in which extended discourse may occur are specific routine activities, like gift-opening sequences during birthday parties (Good & Beach, 2005) or parent-child interaction during cognitively challenging tasks and games. Snow and Kurland (1996), for example, studied parent-child interactions during play with magnets and found types of talk that had to do with scientific processes and procedures. The authors point out that ‘science talk’ might prepare children for school, in other areas than literacy alone, because it can familiarize children with practices like asking questions, collecting data and hypothesizing.

Specific routine activities in institutions, like preschool classrooms, are often structured by Situated Activity Systems (SAS, Goffman, 1961). Situated Activity Systems provide a global structure to activities in which participants work towards a certain goal, like borrowing a book or closing a crafts task. A SAS consists of a sequence of interactional moves (Goffman, 1961; Goffman, 1981) to which participants are oriented. Moves structure activities, since “each move must be selected from a small number of possibilities, these being largely determined by the previous move of the opposing team [the interaction partner, MD], just as each move largely determines the possibilities next open to the opponent” (Goffman, 1961, p.32). Situated Activity Systems, with accompanying moves, structure the use of specific verbal and nonverbal acts (C. Goodwin, 1997; C. Goodwin, 2000b; M. Goodwin, 2006) and thereby provide a scaffold for children to use language and participate in interactions. This way, participation in SAS’s is essential for children’s socialization into preschool classroom.

A classroom is a community of users, with specific classroom practices. Lave and Wenger (1991) use the concept legitimate peripheral participation to describe the way children and other newcomers learn the practices of a community and become part of it. The legitimate, peripheral aspect of the participation indicates that learners take part in the practices of the community, but do not have to meet expert standards yet and receive help and facilitation when needed. Lave and Wenger do not distinguish between ‘learning to participate’ and ‘learning content’, but view learning as a principally social practice: participating in practices is equivalent to learning cognitive skills (Lave, 1996; Wenger, 1998). Wenger even claims that “school learning is just learning school” (1998, p.267). This may lead to the incorrect impression that learning is about learning procedures only. However, within situated learning, there is no distinction between content and participation: content is learned
through participation and educated discourse thus always occurs within the context of educational discourse.

Rogoff and Gee orient themselves to learning in out-of-school settings. Rogoff (1990) described how children in different cultures learn to participate in communities by parents through ‘guided participation’. Gee (2004; 2007) argues that it is easier and more relevant to learn through participation in the practices of a community than through formal instruction in educational settings. The more the practices of children’s home environments resemble the practices of the classroom community, the more familiar children are with the practices that are the framework for learning content and the easier it is for them to participate in classroom. For example, children coming from environments where reading and writing is highly valued and practiced, will learn to read more easily than children who come from communities where literacy is less used and considered to be less important. Gee explains this by referring to a difference in learning opportunity: the first group of children learns literacy through an instructed and cultural process, while the second group has to learn through an instructed process only.

1.1.3 Effects of educational programs
Preschools can increase the learning opportunities for at risk children. The general aim of early childhood education is to stimulate cognitive- and social emotional development and emergent literacy and to prepare children for formal schooling by familiarizing them with academic discourse practices. The more children are involved in extended discourse, the more chances they have to learn how to use language for cognitive and social goals, and the better they are familiarized to language use and conventions in educational settings. Because not all children experience much extended discourse in their home situations, preschool could be a good context for increasing the learning opportunities of children. The use of special ECE programs should optimize this.

The Dutch government acknowledges Piramide, Kaleidoscoop and Boekenpret as effective programs, as they are listed in the database of effective interventions of the Dutch institute for youth (Ince, 2005a; 2005b; 2006). However, different evaluation studies of ECE programs often report only small to moderate effects, especially when implementation is poor or not all program requirements are met (Doolaard & Leseman, 2008; van Kuyk, 2000; Veen, Overmars & de Glopper, 1995; Veen, Roeleveld & Leseman, 2000). Doolaard and Leseman (2008) argue that

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10 In the four major Dutch municipalities (Amsterdam, Rotterdam, The Hague and Utrecht), preschools often have two fully licensed teachers available and offer care for four mornings or afternoons a week. Preschools in smaller Dutch municipalities more often have only one licensed teacher and offer care for two to three mornings or afternoons a week (Jepma et al., 2007).
early experimental schools might have been extra motivated and precise in implementation of the program, but larger effect studies include schools that may have started to use programs due to the political emphasis on the role of ECE. These schools may be less motivated and may be less strict in following implementation conditions.

Aside from problems with implementation, the reason for the lack of convincing effects in evaluation studies may also lie in the measures that are used. Effectiveness studies often use global measures, aimed at limited areas of development (Nap-Kolhoff, van Schilt-Mol, Simons, Sontag, van Steensel & Vallen, 2008). Language development, for example, is often measured with vocabulary tests (e.g. with the PPVT, Dunn & Dunn, 1997) and cognitive development is often measured with ordering- or counting tasks (e.g. tests from Cito, the Dutch Central Institute for Test Development) and social-emotional skills are reported in teacher questionnaires (e.g. SCHOBL, Bleichrodt, Resing & Zaal, 1993). Furthermore, effects are often measured on group level or school level. For example, in an effect study by the Inspectorate of Education (Inspectie van het Onderwijs, 2008), preschools were scored on different quality aspects, like ‘curriculum content’, ‘pedagogic climate’ and ‘personnel and housing’. These variables were not studied on child level in detail, but were scored on a 4-point scale on school level. Another problem with using global measures is that the results might be difficult to interpret. Studies on the effects of ECE using correlational data, sometimes report results that are counterintuitive, difficult to explain or even invalid. Schooten and Sleegers (van Schooten & Sleegers, 2009), for example, report correlations between weekly teacher-parent meetings and less vocabulary growth and between less experienced teachers and more progress in children’s work attitude.

So, there have been many evaluation studies on the effects of ECE programs, in which the focus lied on level of implementation and children’s later test scores, but none of them focussed on the specific activities and interactions of children in their preschool classrooms. The lack of significant results of ECE evaluation studies does not mean that individual children do not develop communicative skills or educational language practices, important for future formal school settings.11

Different researchers acknowledge the drawbacks of the global measures used in effect studies. For example, the Inspectorate of Education (Inspectie van het Onderwijs, 2008) reported to be unable to present effects of ECE on general child development. Effects were measured with standardised tests of the Central Institute

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11ECE programs often do not specify what the verbal interactions of children with teachers and peers should look like, although there are some initiatives to give preschool teachers more practical information on how to interact effectively with children (van Elsäcker, van der Beek, Baack, Janssen, Peters & Kooiman, 2005).
for Test Development (Cito), but the Inspectorate notes that these tests only measure a small area of cognitive- and language development and therefore are not valid for measuring the more general effect of ECE on child development. A similar conclusion was drawn in a large-scale study on the effectiveness of ECE in the UK (EPPE, Effective Provision of Pre-School Education; Sylva, Melhuish, Sammons, Siraj-Blatchford & Taggart, 2004). In this study, children’s development was measured with standardized tests, but to enhance understanding of the findings, the researchers conducted additional qualitative case studies of effective classrooms (Siraj-Blatchford, Sylva, Taggart, Melhuish, Sammons & Elliot, 2003). Two recent Dutch evaluation reports, recommend to include detailed observations of classroom activities and interactions and detailed description of implementation quality in future research to enhance understanding of the effectiveness of ECE (Doolaard & Leseman, 2008; Nap-Kolhoff et al., 2008). In sum, there is a clear need for additional studies on ECE that focus on children’s experiences in preschool and the language opportunities that different preschool contexts offer.

1.2. PRESCHOOL ACTIVITIES AND INTERACTIONS GRONINGEN (PRACTING) PROJECT

1.2.1 General design and research question

An important feature of learning through interaction is that the 'lessons' are embedded in everyday activities and arise in the course of everyday interaction. To be able to understand how children learn and develop in preschool classrooms, it is necessary to get a grip on the key interactions that children have during their days at preschool. With the current study, I aim to add to an understanding of the different interactions children have in preschool and the things they can learn through these interactions. By describing naturally occurring everyday interactions, I will show the classroom routines and practices that children are oriented to in the process of being socialized into the classroom community. My overarching research question is: How do young children learn to participate in discourse practices in preschool?

Probably the most well known longitudinal and extensive study of children’s interactions in natural context is the Bristol Study conducted by Gordon Wells and colleagues in the 1970’s (Wells, 1981; 1985; 1986). The aim of this longitudinal study was to make a representative sample and a comprehensive description of children’s language use. To achieve this goal, 128 children were followed from age 1:3 to 5:0 in their natural environments. Every three months, the children’s speech was recorded with a wireless recording device, which made multiple random recordings of 90 seconds each during the day. No researcher was present during recordings, children (wearing the microphone) could move freely in their natural environments and parents
and children were involved in their natural occupations. This way of data gathering ensured a realistic view on children’s natural activities and interactions. Analysis of the context in which language use took place was an important element of the study.\textsuperscript{12}

The Bristol Study is special because it follows a large group of children for a long period and is high in ecological validity. There are not many studies on child development in natural context as extensive as the Bristol Study. Wootton (1997) conducted an longitudinal case study of his daughter, and analyzed the development of her requests in interaction with her parents during everyday domestic activities. Catherine Snow and colleagues conducted the longitudinal Home-School Study of Language and Literacy Development (Snow, Porche, Tabors & Harris, 2009), in which, among others, mothers were asked to play and read with their children. Other researchers focused on the role of communicative action gaze in the interactions of very young children (Kidwell, 2009; Kidwell & Zimmerman, 2007; Lerner & Zimmerman, 2003). In addition, there are studies with a focus on the relation between language use and specific conditions in which interactions take place. Tulviste (2001), for example, studied mother-child interactions during mealtime and puzzle solving. Leseman and colleagues (Leseman, Rollenberg & Rispens, 2001) studied children’s cooperation and decontextualization ‘work’ and ‘play’ in Dutch preschools. Another Dutch study in the ECE setting is performed by Damhuis (1995). In her study on L2 acquisition in kindergarten, she took into account natural interactions and the importance of different types of contexts (although these were only broadly defined) and the roles peers and teachers play in children’s language use. Steensel (van Steensel, 2006) studied, among others, the effect of preschool activities on the development of emergent literacy. Haan and Singer (de Haan & Singer, 2008) studied children’s conflicts during free play in preschool. There are many other studies in which the importance of natural talk is acknowledged and the connection between specific settings and language use is made, but detailed analysis of truly natural interaction of a large group of children over time, like in the Bristol Study, is rare.

To be able to answer questions about ordinary preschool interactions and child development, I studied a group of children in their preschool classrooms. Following the example of the Bristol Study, I designed a longitudinal study, in which I follow a relatively large group of children over time in their natural environments and record their speech using wireless and non-obtrusive recording equipment. The focus of the study lies on children’s natural interactions in different preschool contexts. The difference with many other studies is that I am studying child development from a qualitative, interactive perspective with a focus on the development of discourse.

\textsuperscript{12}In order to get a full view of the context, a researcher played back the recordings to the parents at the end of each day of recording, and asked them for contextual and background information about the language samples.
practices. In line with scholars like Charles and Marjorie Goodwin, who state that “talk is intrinsically interactive, and thus shaped as much by recipients as by speakers, as well as by the activity within which the talk and its participants are embedded” (Goodwin & Goodwin, 1992, p.47), I study child development in its natural context. A conversational analytic approach may be especially fruitful in early childhood research, because its focus on the sequencing of naturally occurring interaction gives an insight in how children interpret the meaning of prior turns in the interaction (Church, 2009; M. Goodwin, 2006).

1.2.2 Method and corpus
To acknowledge the variation between children and classroom communities, I study multiple children in multiple preschool classrooms. In my search for preschool classrooms to participate in the study, I asked local authorities, managing different ECE programs, to provide me with a list of experienced preschool teachers they thought highly of. This resulted in a selection of high quality preschools in the North of the Netherlands which used one of the ECE programs Piramide, Kaleidoscoop and/or Boekenpret (described in paragraph 1.1.1). I used these lists to find four teachers who were willing to participate in the study with one of their preschool groups. All preschools are located in middle sized towns in the North of the Netherlands and are named A, B, C and D, for reasons of anonymity. I contacted the parents of the children in the selected classrooms and asked them for their cooperation. All parents gave their informed consent to the study. In every classroom, I selected 7 or 8 children who were approximately 2;6 years old at the start of the study and followed them up to approximately age 4;0, when they left preschool and entered primary education.

I recorded children’s interactions during the day at preschool every three months by letting the children wear a little jacket with audio equipment inside. Picture 1 shows children wearing ‘recording jackets’ in classroom. Children did not know that the recording device (a minidisc player) was hidden underneath the ‘fur’ at the back. This recording method made it possible to record everything an individual child said and everything that was said to him or her, without a researcher needed to be near. In addition to the individual audio recordings, I made an overview video recording for information on context and nonverbal communication. For 25 children, I collected

13 I started with three preschools, but when it became clear that the group in one of the preschools (preschool D) was unstable and it would be difficult to make a longitudinal dataset for that classroom, I contacted an additional preschool.
14 Often, there were not enough young children at the first date of recording, so I added new young children who entered preschool after the start of the study until I reached 7 or 8 focal children per classroom.
15 One day at preschool is one morning or afternoon in classroom, lasting about 3 hours.
five to twelve recordings of preschool interaction (i.e. 15 to 36 hours of recording for each child). For 5 other children, all from preschool D, I could only make up to 4 recordings (i.e. 3 to 12 hours of recording for each child), because these children switched to other play groups, were ill or did not want to cooperate. The datasets in preschools A, B and C are thus more complete and make it possible to follow children over a longer period of time. Children in these three preschools generally did not protest against wearing the recording jacket and merely accepted it as a given. The recording jacket did not seem to influence children’s interactions and except when the student assistant and I helped the children to put the jacket on, it was not a topic of conversation. The complete PRACTING corpus consists of 221 recordings, adding up to in total approximately 663 hours of natural preschool interactions. An overview of the dataset is given in appendix A.

**Picture 1. Children wearing jackets with recording equipment inside**

1.2.3 Data and analysis

I transcribed the data in cooperation with a team of trained student assistants. After I provided the student assistants with the video recording of a child, they first made a rough chronological description of the recording (a ‘log’), in which they described the activity the child engaged in (duration, place, participants and content) and gave an indication of the level of active participation by the child. Due to time constraints, we could not transcribe the entire recording. Therefore, I indicated fragments in the logs that needed to be transcribed. I selected fragments in which the child participated (relatively) actively and focused on the following *focal events* (Goodwin & Duranti, 1992): literacy events, other cognitive events (like making a puzzle), pretend play, events with social emotional content (for example children arguing) and other moments of extended discourse. The student assistants then transcribed the selected parts with the transcription software Transana (Fassnacht & Woods, 2005), using
Jeffersonian transcript conventions (Jefferson, 1984, see appendix B). For each of the studies in this dissertation, I drew different selections of data from the main PRACTING corpus. I checked the fragments in these selections and, if necessary, adapted or extended the transcription before and during data analysis. So, the transcripts used in the different studies are transcribed in multiple rounds.

To study children’s interactions in preschool, I worked in the tradition of applied conversation analysis (CA). Conversation analysis can be used to understand contexts by examining the moves people make, since they show their understanding of the event through their actions and at the same time, they are contributing to this event by their actions. I use CA to look at the interactions of children and teachers in the specific institutional context of the preschool classroom.

Institutional talk (Heritage, 2005; Richards & Seedhouse, 2005) differs from ‘ordinary’ conversation in that it is related to specific settings and tasks. Examples of institutional talk in other settings are: emergency phone calls, radio interviews or doctor’s consultations. It is the talk that people use to “manage those practical tasks, and to perform the particular activities associated with their participation in institutional contexts” (Drew & Sorjonen, 1997, p.92). The three basic elements of institutional talk are: 1) interaction partners show an orientation to specific goals, relevant to the social institution; 2) there are special constraints about which interactional contributions are appropriate; and 3) the institutional context is related to specific ways of making inferences (Drew & Heritage, 1992). The variation that participants show in their talk in institutional settings is limited by the goal and the constraints of the event (Heritage, 2005). I am applying institutional conversation analysis to understand the practices of a classroom community and how children learn to participate in these practices.

To illustrate the type of data and analyses that are central in this dissertation, I will provide here an example of Dion (2;8), who wants to join some other children in play (excerpt 1).
(1) “I want too” [Dion (2;8); Nicole (2;9), Miss Laura]

_Situation: the children are playing outside. Dion cruises the playground on a car. He drives up to the sandpit where Miss Laura and some children are playing_

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Line</th>
<th>Speaker</th>
<th>Transcript</th>
<th>Dutch original</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Dion:</td>
<td>I want too</td>
<td>ik wille ook</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td>(0,6)</td>
<td>(0,6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Miss L.:</td>
<td>there is Dion!</td>
<td>hier is Dion!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
<td>(1,1)</td>
<td>(1,1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Miss L.:</td>
<td>but I see Dion is not alone= maar ik zie dat Dion niet alleen is=</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Dion:</td>
<td>=yes!</td>
<td>=ja!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td></td>
<td>(0,6)</td>
<td>(0,6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Miss L.:</td>
<td>Dion brought somebody Dion heeft iemand meegenomen</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td></td>
<td>(0,3)</td>
<td>(0,3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Dion:</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>ja</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Miss L.:</td>
<td>who did you bring? wie heb je meegenomen?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td></td>
<td>(0,4)</td>
<td>(0,4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Dion:</td>
<td>doll!</td>
<td>pop!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td></td>
<td>(0,2)</td>
<td>(0,2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Miss L.:</td>
<td>do::ll! ((takes Dion’s doll)) po::p!</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td></td>
<td>(0,3)</td>
<td>(0,3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>Miss L.:</td>
<td>doll I’m baking a cake ((with low voice)) pop ik bak een taart</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td></td>
<td>(1,5)</td>
<td>(1,5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>Miss L.:</td>
<td>o (. ) no no doll wait a minute de cake is not ready yet! o (. ) nee nee pop ho ho de taart is nog niet klaar!</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td></td>
<td>(1,8)</td>
<td>(1,8)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>Dion:</td>
<td>(N)O not doll! EE niet pop!</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22</td>
<td></td>
<td>(0,3)</td>
<td>(0,3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23</td>
<td>Miss L.:</td>
<td>no wait doll nee ho pop</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24</td>
<td></td>
<td>(0,4)</td>
<td>(0,4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25</td>
<td></td>
<td>((Dion laughs and presses the doll to his body))</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26</td>
<td>Miss L.:</td>
<td>don’t dive into the cake niet in de taart duiken</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27</td>
<td></td>
<td>(0,3)</td>
<td>(0,3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28</td>
<td>Dion:</td>
<td>no not into [the cake] nee niet in [de taart]</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29</td>
<td>Miss L.:</td>
<td>[the cake is not [de taart is nog niet</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Notes:**

- Line 1: Dion says, "I want too." Miss Laura responds, "there is Dion!" Dion confirms, "=yes!"
- Line 5: Miss Laura notes that Dion is not alone and asks, "who did you bring?"
- Line 17: Miss Laura directs the conversation to the doll and baking a cake. Mint Laura says, "doll I’m baking a cake."
Excerpt 1 is a naturally occurring interaction of Dion during free outside play. When I want to study Dion’s language development, it is not very informative to look at his talk at the word level. Dion says: *I want too; yes!; yes; doll!; (N)O not doll!; no not into the cake; yehehes!; it’s Nicole’s!; ye:::s that is Nicole’s!* We could calculate mean length of utterance, type toke ratio, or number of content words, but these kinds of measures do not take into account the context in which Dion talked. Taking into account the conversational context shows, for example, that the *yes* in line 6 is very different from the *yehehes* in line 34. In the first case, Dion replies to an implicit question, in the form of a statement (*but I see Dion is not alone*, line 5) and in the second case, he responds to a more clear-cut statement (*that’s Nicole’s cake*, line 32). Thus, a focus on isolated words and utterances does not provide information about what happened and why this episode may be meaningful.

On the discourse level, however, the episode is more interesting. Dion’s goal is to join his peers in a sandpit activity and Miss Laura helps him to achieve this goal. Joining a group activity is a complex activity that requires children to adapt to the ongoing activity of a group of children and to understand what is happening in the play and how roles and ownership are divided. Miss Laura helps Dion to shift his self-focussed approach (*I want too*, line 1) into a more appropriate group focused approach of joining (*it’s Nicole’s!* (0,2) *ye:::s that is Nicole’s!* line 36-38). So, language learning in preschool is for a great part learning the appropriate ways of talking to accomplish (social) goals.
1.2.4 Four mundane activities: from free play to school-like tasks

Language use is always situated in specific activities, with specific practices and interactional roles. I therefore focus on activities in the classroom context. Meaningful elements of language use may be very situated and local. Sometimes they may be located in certain moves in certain activities, which may even be optional and not always realized, as I will for example illustrate in chapter 4, when I study the activity of borrowing a book. If I would have studied average language use during the day, I would have run the risk of losing these meaningful, sometimes rare, language uses. Moreover, it shows why it is problematic to simply ‘count’ language measures without taking into account their situational context. The function of a language feature is related to the interactional and situational contexts in which this feature is likely to occur.

Children do many different things in preschool and because the PRACTING corpus consists of recordings of complete classroom days, there are many different activities I could have studied in detail. To account for the range of different types of activities and interactions in preschool classrooms, I selected four different activities, which vary in the degree in which the child can take initiative and has influence. The activities I selected range from ‘play’ to ‘work’: from the relatively ‘free’ activities pretend play and spontaneous conversations about literacy to the more ‘structured’ activities borrowing a book and doing a crafts assignment. In chapter 2, I describe the development of early pretend play, using different pretend play interactions of the young girl Peggy. I show how Peggy interprets an increasing amount of play elements at the pretend level as she gets older. In chapter 3, I take a more educational discourse perspective and study the ways children encounter literacy in preschool. The focus here is on mundane literacy events: interactions about literacy that naturally rise out of the ongoing activity of the child and to which the child may take the initiative. Chapter 4 is about literacy as well, but describes an event much more structured by the teacher: the routine of borrowing a book, an activity that is part of the ECE program Boekenpret. In chapter 5, I describe a routine activity that is structured by the teacher as well and focus on the joint construction of the closings of crafts assignments. Chapters 2 to 5 are mainly qualitative descriptions of different activities and routines and educational language practices. In chapter 6, I take a quantitative approach to analyze variation in children’s speech act use during different activities and with different interaction partners and its development over time.