4 RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND DATA COLLECTION

This chapter begins with a section that outlines the research questions for the study. These research questions respond to the research aims outlined in the introductory chapter, as well as the dynamical perspective on learner interaction developed in the previous chapter. The formulation of research questions also includes a preliminary indication of the nature of the learner interaction data which needs to be collected in order to respond to the questions.

The remainder of the chapter consists of four sections, which outline the collection of the learner interaction data in a Norwegian primary school setting. This includes a section on the pilot work that preceded the main period of data collection. Since the pilot work was the first contact with the research setting, this section includes a discussion of how access was gained, as well descriptions of the school, the class, the teachers, and common classroom activities in the English language lessons. The discussion of the pilot work is followed by a section that outlines the procedure followed in selecting participants, provides a profile of these participants, and discusses ethical considerations. The next section outlines the design of the data collection, and contains a discussion of the different sources of data. Finally, since the research involved collecting data on a series of similar classroom activities, each of which was separated by a period of time, a final section discusses the contingencies that were associated with each of these successive data collection periods. The chapter concludes with a brief summary.

4.1 Research Questions

The starting point for the formulation of research questions is the research aims outlined in the introductory chapter. The overall research aim was:

- The research aims to visualise the dynamics of learner interaction.

The following two more specific aims were introduced to make the overall research aim more concrete, and reflecting the interest in learner interaction that takes place in language classrooms.

1. The research aims to visualise the dynamics of learner interaction across the duration of a language classroom activity.
2. The research aims to visualise changes in the dynamics of learner interaction across a series of similar language classroom activities.

The dynamical perspective developed in chapter three viewed learner interaction as constituted by multiple activity strands and threads, and argued that relationships between different activity strands and threads reflected the dynamics of the learner interaction. In other words, the visualisation of the dynamics of learner interaction will involve the identification of relationships between different activity strands and threads. After Hayles, in the visualisations, these relationships may take the form of “recursive symmetries that almost, but not quite, replicate themselves over time” (1990, p. 51). That is, the relationships may usefully be identified as *patterns* in the visualisation of the learner interaction data.

There may also be cases where there are time-ordered distributions of features in single activity strands or threads across the timescale of a language classroom activity. Moreover, combinations of such time-ordered distributions in multiple activity strands and threads, across the timescale of the classroom activity, may be interpreted as qualitatively different learner interaction. Alternatively, relationships between activity strands and threads may also change across the timescale of a language classroom activity. This would result in the identification of *phases* in the visualisation of the learner interaction data. This focus on patterns and phases motivates the formulation of a first research question.

1. What patterns and phases of activity are detected through the visualisation of learner interaction?

In this question, and in the remainder of the thesis, a pattern is defined as a relationship between two or more activity strands or threads in the visualisation of the learner interaction data. Furthermore, phases are defined as periods of time with qualitatively different learner interaction. Finally, as patterns and phases reflect the dynamics of learner interaction across the duration of a language classroom activity, this first research question responds to the first specific research aim presented in the introductory chapter, and repeated in the above.

These definitions of patterns and phases of activity are different from other uses of these terms in the literature on interaction. In the classroom interaction literature a frequently cited example of a pattern is the Initiation-Response-Feedback (IRF) pattern in teacher-student discourse (Sinclair & Coulthard, 1975, 1992; cf. also Mehan, 1982). Moreover, in recent research on learner interaction in a language classroom setting, Storch (2002) has used the term ‘patterns of interaction’. However, Sinclair and Coulthard base their identification of the IRF pattern on a systemic-functional linguistic framework, and Storch’s use of the term ‘patterns of interaction’ describes role relationships between participants, such as whether one learner is more dominant or passive than the other in the interaction. Uses of the term ‘phases’ to describe interaction include Mehan’s (1982) research on classroom interaction, and Bales and Strodtbeck’s (1967) work on problem-solving interaction. Again, neither of these uses

ties their definition of phases to the concept of activity, as does the present research.

The critique of established perspectives in chapter two suggested the value of in-depth analysis of episodes of learner talk, and that such in-depth analysis could go some way toward validating the outcome of visualisation. Following the dynamical perspective developed in chapter three, and in particular Cameron's (2001) framework for researching classroom talk, one possible way to assess the value of the outcomes of visualisation is to do an in-depth analysis of the demands and support that are related to these outcomes. That is, since the outcomes of visualisation will be in the form of patterns and phases, the following research question can be formulated.

2. How do the patterns and phases of activity relate to demands and support in learner interaction?

The purpose of this second research question, then, is to provide a richer account of what the patterns and phases, as the outcomes of visualisation, actually tell about learner interaction.

The focus of the second specific research aim, outlined in the introductory chapter, is on changes in the dynamics of learner interaction across a series of similar classroom activities. Building on the first research question outlined above, the following third research question can be formulated.

3. What changes in activity are detected through visualisation of successive instances of learner interaction?

Responding to this third research question will require visualising the dynamics of learner interaction in a series of similar classroom activities.

Finally, in order to assess the overall contribution of visualisation as a method for researching interaction between language learners, a fourth and final research question can be formulated.

4. What are the potential contributions of visualisation as a method for research on learner interaction?

This final research question will involve pulling together the separate contributions made by responding to the first three research questions.

From the combination of the research aims for the study, the research questions outlined above, and the implications for the research outlined in the final sections of chapters two and three, a set of requirements for data collection can be outlined.

- Learner interaction data should be collected from a classroom activity in relatively unperturbed classroom setting;
- The classroom activity should be repeated in a similar form over a period of time;
- The selection of participants should follow a transparent procedure;
- The learner talk in the classroom activity is the primary data for the research;

In addition, contextual data on the participants' experiences and expectations, and on the setting more generally, should be collected in order to formulate the task-as-plan demands and support associated with the classroom activity that used. However, the collection of such contextual data should be mindful of the requirement that data should be collected from a relatively unperturbed classroom setting.

4.2 Pilot Work and Description of Research Setting

The pilot work took place in October and November 1999. The objectives of the pilot work were:

- To negotiate access to a school, classroom and participants.
- To become familiar with the research setting, including the school, teachers, classrooms and potential participants.
- To identify a classroom activity which involved learner interaction, and which would, or could, be repeated in similar form over a period of time.
- To explore unobtrusive ways to collect contextual data.

The following four sub-sections discuss each of these objectives in turn.

4.2.1 Access to the Research Setting

Access to the research setting was negotiated in the middle of October 1999. The choice of this setting was, in part, a result of practical considerations. First of all, being a bilingual Norwegian and English speaker, an English as a foreign language setting in Norway was a 'natural' choice for me. Furthermore, because of my own previous experience with young language learners, primary schools were targeted. The selection of schools was further limited to those that were within accessible distance to my accommodation while in Norway. This narrowed the set of possible schools down to about seven or eight.

The principal of the school that finally did provide access was very supportive. However, he did express concerns about the impact of the research on the pupils' education, and about ethical considerations surrounding classroom research more generally (cf. sub-section 4.3.3).

Hence, in the first place access was granted for the pilot work to take place. However, subject to there being no unforeseen complications, and subject to ethical guidelines being followed, he was positive for the later main data collection to take place in the school.

The principal suggested the particular class in which the pilot work took place, and in which the main data collection later would take place. He suggested the class (at the time a year 6 class) because it was relatively small, was generally considered to have a good working and social atmosphere, and it was in the hands of an experienced homeroom teacher. Additionally, he felt that the teacher who taught the English lessons in this class (different from the homeroom teacher) would be open to participating in the research.

As the principal had anticipated, both the homeroom and the English teachers reacted positively to my presence and my research aims. I discussed the issue of access with both of these teachers, and they agreed that access for the main study would be contingent on how comfortable the teacher (in this case the English teacher) would be having me in the classroom, how the pupils reacted to the presence of a researcher, and to what extend the research would impact on the pupils' education. By the time the pilot work drew to a close in the beginning of November 1999, all parties agreed that the main data collection could take place in the Year 6 class.

4.2.2 Description of the School, Class and the Teachers

The school in which the data collection took place was a medium sized primary school, situated in a small urban area in southeastern Norway. The school had pupils attending years one through seven. At the time of the research there were about 300 pupils in the school. The majority of these pupils, as well as their teachers, lived within a few miles of the school. All the teachers and pupils, with only a very few exceptions, were of Norwegian origin.

The average class size in the school was between 22 and 25 pupils. The school was modern, with spacious classrooms, a library, a small computer room for student use, home economics facilities, a small indoor gymnasium and swimming pool, and a large school ground where the pupils could play between lessons. The teachers all had their own individual desks and computers in shared office spaces. There was also a seminar room, and a large teachers' room where the staff would meet between lessons, and sometimes also at the beginning and end of the school day.

The class that served as the research setting was at the beginning of the data collection a year 6 class. The approximate age of the pupils was 11 years, and there were 8 girls and 9 boys. At the end of the research the class had moved to year 7, the pupils' approximate age was 12 years, and there was the still the same number of boys and girls. There was also another class in the same year. At the beginning of year 6 these two classes had been split

from what had been a larger year 5 class the year before. This had happened because the larger year 5 class had exceeded the stipulated maximum class size. As a result these classes were relatively small as compared to the school average.

At the start of the data collection the pupils were in their third year of English study (i.e., they first had English in year 4). Their English lessons consisted of two consecutive periods of 45 minutes, at the end of the school day, each Thursday. At the end of the data collection, when the pupils were in year 7, there were three separate 45-minute English lessons. These were scheduled in the last periods of the day on Monday, Wednesday and Friday

Every Norwegian primary class is assigned a homeroom teacher. This homeroom teacher will teach most subjects in the first few primary years, and then progressively fewer of the subjects as the children grow older. Hence, in year 7 (the last year of primary school) the homeroom teacher will be responsible for only about half of the pupils total class time. Nevertheless, since the homeroom teacher has followed the pupils throughout the primary years, she remains very familiar with all the pupils in the class. This was also the case for the homeroom teacher for the class in question. Hence, although she did not teach the English lessons, she knew all the pupils, and their parents, well, and was therefore a valuable resource for both contextual data and for facilitating the data collection more generally.

As the class moved from year 6 to year 7 the English teacher changed. Both the year 6 and 7 English teachers were qualified teachers of English in the Norwegian primary school system. The year 6 teacher had about 3 years of experience in the school. However, this was the first year she taught this particular class. She was both open and flexible in her approach to the English lessons, and always keen on getting feedback from the pupils in the class. Finally, she had lived and worked in English speaking environments, and her spoken English was fluent and colloquial.

The year 7 English teacher had about 25 years of experience in the Norwegian school system. He was also the PE teacher for the participating class that same year. This, combined with his long experience in the school, made him quite familiar with the pupils. He frequently taught English, and was at the time of the data collection also teaching English in year 3 and year 6 classes. Finally, on the back of his many years of experience, his spoken English was confident and articulate, but somewhat less colloquial than that of the year 6 English teacher.

4.2.3 Classroom Activities in the English Lessons

The Year 6 English lessons were held in the pupils' regular classroom. This classroom was similar in size, layout and general appearance to most classrooms in the school. However, with only 17 pupils in the class (as compared to an average of about 22-25 in the school) the classroom was very spacious.

In the English lessons the pupils were seated in groups of four (with four desks pushed together). In addition, there were extra chairs and tables in the room that the pupils could use when needed. All in all, the physical setting was not only conducive for interaction between learners, but also for such interaction to be observed. It offered me as a researcher several locations, such as a couch at the back of the room, or simply a chair placed somewhat away and to the side, from which to observe the teacher and pupils at work without being so close as to appear overly intrusive.

In order to assess what type of activities involved learner interaction a total of 6 English lessons were observed over a three-week period. This was supplemented by comments made by the year 6 English teacher as to how typical the observed lessons were. Activities that included some level of interaction between learners included:

- Pupils reading to/for each other from the textbook (usually followed by answering comprehension questions posed by the teacher about what they have just read).
- Pupils writing sentences in pairs or groups (e.g., to practise new vocabulary).
- Pupils writing little stories or expository texts in pairs or groups.
- Pupils doing workbook exercises in pairs or groups (e.g., matching tasks, responding to questions, and making up questions).

In all of these activities the English teacher would encourage the pupils to 'cooperate'. Nevertheless, the type of cooperation, and hence learner interaction, that resulted from these activities was reminiscent of findings made in British primary contexts, where pupils have been found to 'sit together', but not necessarily to 'work together' (cf. Bennett & Cass, 1988).

The activity that in the end became the focus of the data collection was not so much common in the sense that it was done frequently. Rather, my awareness of the activity was raised rather by chance. It happened during the second week of the pilot work when the English teacher told me that she would be doing a role-play task. This turned out to involve pairs of pupils writing dialogues together around a general theme, or frame, provided by the teacher, and the later performance of these role-play dialogues to the whole class. In the role-play task the teacher did, the theme was that of a shop, and the pupils were asked to write a dialogue between a shopkeeper and a customer. The pilot work, therefore, included observing this role-play task, as well as tape-recording the learner interaction between one pair of pupils as they were writing their dialogue together.

It later became clear that the English teacher did this role-play task every two or three months. Given that the role-play task involved a great deal more learner interaction than any

of the other activities I had observed, I asked her if she could 'save' the role-play task for the times I was around to observe the English lessons.

4.2.4 Pilot Work on Sources of Contextual Data

The pilot work objective of finding unobtrusive ways of collecting contextual data was complicated by the requirement that the data on learner interaction should be collected from a relatively unperturbed classroom setting.

The pilot work showed that informal 'interaction' with the English teacher before and after class, as well as from more sustained 'conversations' with her in other free periods of the day, yielded some contextual data. In the same way, the homeroom teacher was also a good source for contextual data (cf. sub-section 4.2.2).

Collecting contextual data on the pupil's perspectives proved more difficult, however. Similar brief conversations with pupils before and after class yielded some data. Nevertheless, it was felt that some additional and more structured source of contextual data on the pupil's perspective was needed. Actual interviews were never considered, as these might affect the pupils' activity in the classroom more than the requirements for data collection would allow. Instead, the possibility of pulling pairs of pupils out of their regular class to do an additional activity related to the role-play task was considered. Two activity types were piloted. The first activity was a writing task similar to the writing involved in the role-play task. The intention was to ask the pupils, after they had finished this additional writing task, to compare it with their experience of the role-play task. However, the pupils did not seem to take this as a very convincing purpose for being pulled out of their regular class, and it yielded very little contextual data. The second activity that was attempted was possible because pupil pairs wrote their dialogues, for the role-play task, in two separate notebooks. Furthermore, there were often slight differences between what any two pupils, working together, had written. Hence, the pupils were pulled out of their regular class a few days after the role-play task and asked to rewrite their two slightly different versions of the role-play dialogue in the researcher's notebook (so that he would have a copy of the role-play which they both agreed on). In addition, the pupils were encouraged to improve on the role-play dialogue if they felt there were problems with what they had already written in class. Not only did the students seem to be more convinced that they were doing something purposeful, they also spent some time discussing among themselves what to write (e.g., what to keep and what to change). Finally, this activity was relatively quick, and there was time left to engage in incidental talk about topics related to the role-play tasks. The pupils seemed to find the purpose of this activity convincing, and the slightly more formal setting, as compared to the brief

conversations before and after class, yielded more substantial comments on the role-play tasks.

Finally, there was a concern that taking pupils out of their normal lessons would constitute an undue disruption to the pupils' education. However, this possibility was raised with the principal and the teachers at an early time, and since the data collection was spread out over a long period of time, the loss of class time was minimal. Moreover, it was agreed that if done judiciously, in relation to what was going on in the lessons in question, it would be acceptable.

4.3 Participants and Ethical Considerations

This section outlines the procedure followed in selecting participants for the research, gives a profile of the participants that were selected, and discusses ethical considerations in this selection and the research more generally.

4.3.1 Selection of Participants

Given that the research aimed to apply a novel visual method of analysis, the development of which was expected to require considerable time, only a small number of participants were selected. Nevertheless, in order to benefit the development of the visual method the selection of participants followed Wood and Kroger's suggestion to include "participants who, although similar in some sense, are different enough that they might give different versions" (2000, p. 79). It was decided that six pupils, or three participant pairs, would generate a sufficiently diverse data set to respond to the research aims and questions, while at the same time making the overall research project manageable. Hence, of the 17 pupils in the class, six participants needed to be selected.

The selection of participants followed a combination of required and desirable selection criteria. Required selection criteria included: the signing of an informed consent form; a good attendance record; likelihood of remaining in the class for the duration of the data collection period. Desirable selection criteria included: an equal number of boys and girls should be selected; the selected pairs should be able to work together without tension; the selected pairs should differ in terms of levels of English language proficiency.

No discussion or decisions about the selection of participants took place before all the pupils (and their parents) had decided whether they wanted to participate in the research through the signing of informed consent forms (cf. sub-section 4.3.3). 13 out of the 17 pupils in the class, and their parents, gave their informed consent to be participants. The remaining two required selection criteria were designed to avoid disruption to the data collection. Hence,

pupils who were known to be absent frequently, as well as cases where there was uncertainty whether the pupil would be staying in this class, or school, for the remainder of the research, were excluded as possible participants. Although it is recognised that this put individual pupils at a disadvantage for reasons beyond their control, these criteria were deemed necessary given the study's dependence on following a very small number of participants over time. After applying the required criteria, 10 out of the 17 pupils in the class remained as potential participants.

The first desirable criterion, which was selecting the same number of boys as girls, was formulated not so much for reasons of representativity. Rather, it is the researcher's experience that with learners of this age such a criterion is good 'policy', and prevents potential complaints about unfairness from pupils. The problem, however, was that selecting the same number of boys and girls would have resulted in one mixed gender pair. Classroom observation of peer-relationships, as well as consultation with the homeroom and English teachers, made it clear that same-gender pairs would respond better to the second desirable selection criterion. That is, given the age of the learners (early adolescence) same-gender pairs stood a better change of working together, without tension, over the duration of the data collection period. In the researcher's experience, this second desirable criterion is also reflected in what many teachers do when organizing pair or group work activities in the classroom. This criterion was applied in consultation with both the homeroom and English teachers. No pupils were eliminated on this criterion. Rather, specific pairings were noted as being potentially more 'harmonious'.

The third desirable criteria was motivated by research findings that suggest that the balance between individual pupils' levels of language proficiency may be a factor in what type of interaction can be observed (e.g., De Guerrero & Villamil, 1994; Varonis & Gass, 1985). That is, this criterion relates to what Yin calls *theoretical replication logic*, which is defined as selecting cases that produce "contrasting results ... for predictable reasons" (1994, p. 46). Again, this follows Wood and Kroger's (2000) suggestion quoted above.

The final selection of participants was done in consultation with the pupils' homeroom teacher, and resulted in the selection of six participants, organised into three pairs. The following participants were selected:

Case 1: Veronica and Karen
Case 2: Morten and Tim
Case 3: Marcus and Dennis

The names which are used for the participants, and which are used throughout this thesis, are pseudonyms which preserve some of the ‘sense’ of the pupils’ real names, and which are recognisable as names in both Norwegian and English.

Finally, the selection of the above three pairs of participants is not necessarily representative of the range of pairs which were formed during the role-play tasks in this research setting, nor of the range of pairs that might present themselves in any teacher’s day to day organization of pair work activities in other settings. Hence, there is an element of what Robson (1993, p. 141) calls convenience sampling. The exact differences between the three pairs will become apparent from the discussion of the participants profiles in the next sub-section.

4.3.2 Profiles of the Participants

At the beginning of the data collection, in March 2000, all the pupils were about 11 years old, and at the end of data collection, in January 2001, the pupils were about 12 years old.

The first two participants, Veronica and Karen, were not close friends at the start of the data collection. Nevertheless, the homeroom teacher felt that they should be able to work well together. About three months into the data collection the two girls spent some time together, as friends, in the school setting, both inside and outside of the classroom. This remained the case for the rest of the data collection period. Neither of the girls seemed to identify themselves, or were identified by their teachers, as part of any larger group of close friends in the class or the school. Veronica attended year 1 in this school, left for three years to another school not far away, and returned again to this school at the start of Year 5. Karen moved to the area, and started attending this school, in the beginning of Year 4. According to both homeroom and the year 6 English teachers, Karen was academically ‘stronger’, in both English and other subject areas, than Veronica. The girls also had different experiences with languages. Veronica did not know any other languages than Norwegian and some English, and had only limited experience travelling outside of Norway. By contrast, Karen grew up speaking two languages at home (Norwegian and Polish). English, therefore, was a third language for her. Moreover, Karen had more experience travelling outside of Norway and claimed to speak and understand some German. Consequently, in terms of both language proficiency and general academic level, the two girls constituted a heterogeneous pair.

According to the homeroom teacher, the second two participants, Morten and Tim, were reasonably good friends at the beginning of the research. However, they told the researcher they did not spend much time together outside the school. This remained unchanged throughout the data collection period. Tim had been in the school since year 4, and Morten since year 1. The homeroom teacher considered Morten to be academically somewhat

'stronger' than Tim, in both English and other subject areas. However, in comparison to the rest of the class they were both considered strong, in both English and most other subjects. Neither of these pupils spoke any other languages than Norwegian and English. However, Tim had frequent contact with the Swedish language (which is intelligible to most people living in this area of Norway) through family connections. Morten had travelled widely, throughout Europe and the Middle East, on various holiday trips. Tim had also travelled some, but not as much as Morten. Despite the slight differences in academic and language backgrounds, these two participants were considered a homogeneous pair.

The third pair of participants, Marcus and Dennis, were again considered to be reasonably good friends in the school setting, but just as Morten and Tim, they would not spend much time together outside this setting. This remained unchanged throughout the data collection. Marcus first started attending the school in year 1, and Dennis in year 5. Of these two pupils, Marcus' level of English proficiency was considered stronger than that of Dennis. This difference was greater than between Morten and Tim, but less than between Veronica and Karen. In other subject areas the pupils' academic levels were more similar.

4.3.3 Ethical Considerations

The research was conducted in accordance with the guidelines provided by the British Educational Research Association (BERA, 2000), as well as the corresponding Norwegian guidelines provided by Den Nasjonale Forskningsetiske Komité for Samfunnsvitenskap og Humaniora [The National Committee on Ethics in Social Science and Humanities Research] (NESH, 1999).

Before the data collection for the main study started, a meeting was held with all the parents (in conjunction with a regular parents meeting scheduled by the homeroom teacher). In addition to an introduction to the purposes of the research, the pupils' parents received two informed consent forms. One was for the parent to read and sign, the other for the student to read and sign (cf. Appendix A). The parents were encouraged to talk about the research with their children, and to come to a mutual decision. It was emphasized that the research would be entirely independent of the school, and that an individual pupil's status in the school would not be affected by their decision. Furthermore, it was stressed that any decision not to participate would be held in confidence by the researcher.

Both the year 6 English teacher (at the start of the research), and the year 7 English teacher (who took over the English lessons the following year), were given an informed consent form to sign (cf. Appendix A). Both teachers were forthcoming in giving their consent.

At three points during the extended data collection period the parents received a brief written update on the progress made so far, as well as information about when the next data collection was expected to take place. In each of these updates the current address and e-mail of the researcher was included, and they were encouraged to contact him if they had any questions or reservations.

4.4 Overview of Sources and Collection of Data

The data collection was centred on a series of four successive role-play tasks. This role-play task was identified during the pilot work as the classroom activity that involved the most learner interaction in the English lessons (cf. sub-section 4.2.3). Furthermore, since the role-play task was introduced to this class by the year 6 English teacher, and not the researcher, this focus ensured that the learner interaction data would have a reasonable level of ecological validity. That is, using the role-play task as the 'vehicle' for collecting data on learner interaction not only left the teacher in control of the classroom, but also addressed the principal's concern that the research should have a minimal impact on the pupils' learning (cf. sub-section 4.2.1).

The role-play task was done four times over a period of one year. The first two took place when the pupils were in year 6, and were taught by the original English teacher. Again in order to ensure the ecological validity of the data, it was decided not to ask this teacher to repeat the task more often than she would otherwise do. Hence, the last two role-play tasks, in the series of four, took place when the pupils were in year 7, and were taught by the later year 7 English teacher (cf. sub-section 4.2.2). This change of English teachers was not expected to take place at the beginning of the data collection. The four successive role-play tasks took place in March 2000, May 2000, October 2000 and January 2001. Throughout this series of four role-play tasks, the three pairs of pupils, selected as participants in the research (cf. sub-section 4.3.2), remained the same.

In conjunction with the role-play tasks there were three sources of data: 1) background observational data that was collected through attending at least two English lessons before the role-play task took place; 2) the role-play task itself, which generated observational and tape-recorded data; 3) a follow-up activity, anywhere from 2 days to a week after the role-play task, which generated tape-recorded contextual data on the pupils' experiences of the role-play task. In addition, informal conversations with both teachers and pupils, and collection of various documents, provided additional contextual data. Table 4.1 gives an overview of how the data collection was centred on the role-play task, with an indication of the different sources of data.

Table 4.1: Sources of data centred on the role-play task

<table>
<tr><th>Time</th><th>Activity</th><th colspan="2">Data</th></tr>
<tr><td>Week 1</td><td>Two regular English lessons</td><td>Observation</td><td rowspan="5">Informal conversations with pupils and teachers

Teaching and curriculum documents</td></tr>
<tr><td rowspan="3">Week 2
(Role-play task)</td><td>Teacher’s instructions</td><td>Observation
Tape-recording</td></tr>
<tr><td>Dialogue-writing activity</td><td>Observation
Tape-recording</td></tr>
<tr><td>Performance of dialogues</td><td>Observation
Tape-recording</td></tr>
<tr><td>Week 2/3</td><td>Follow-up activity</td><td>Informal interview
Tape-recording</td></tr>
</table>

Of the different sources of data indicated in table 4.1, the tape-recording and observation of the dialogue-writing activity (highlighted in the table) was where the learner interaction took place. This, therefore, constituted the primary data for the study. The collection of the four different sources of data indicated in table 4.1 is discussed in more detail in the following sub-sections. The contingencies associated with collecting data on four successive role-play tasks, over a period of one year, are discussed in section 4.5.

4.4.1 Classroom Observation Preceding the Role-play Task

At least two English lessons (each of 45 minutes duration) were observed before data was collected on the role-play task itself. This research activity had a dual purpose. The main purpose was that it served to *habituate* the pupils to the researcher’s presence (cf. Robson, 1993, p. 208). Since the intervals between each successive role-play task, and therefore also data collection, was around three months, this need for a period of habituation remained necessary for each subsequent period of data collection. The second purpose was to collect observational data on the participants, as well as the remaining pupils in the class, in a context other than the role-play activity itself. This data could be used to assess whether the participants’, as well as the remaining pupils’, activity in the role-play tasks was consistent with how they would act in the English lessons more generally.

4.4.2 Learner Interaction Data from the Role-play Task

The observational and tape-recorded data of the role-play task would typically record the pupils returning from their break, getting settled, the teacher giving instructions for the role-play task, the commotion involved in getting into pairs, the actual writing of the role-play

dialogue in pairs, pupils rehearsing their role-play dialogues, and the performance of the dialogues to the whole class by all pairs. Table 4.2 shows the typical event structure of the role-play task.

Table 4.2: Typical event structure of the role-play task

Activities
Pupils return from their break and settle down
Teacher hands out the task sheet and gives instructions
Pupils form pairs and find places to work
Pairs compose their role-play dialogues (dialogue-writing activity)
Pairs rehearse their role-play tasks
Pairs perform role-plays to the whole class

Note that the dialogue-writing activity part of the role-play task in table 4.2 is highlighted in darker grey. Again, this is because this was the time when the learners were actually interacting with each other. The settling into pairs, immediately before the writing phase, is also highlighted (lighter grey) because this period of time also included learner interaction. Finally, the period when the pupils rehearsed their role-play dialogues also involved learner interaction. However, the time provided for this part of the role-play task varied. Moreover, when time was available, what the pupils 'actually' used this time for differed greatly. Hence, the collection of the primary data on learner interaction was taken to begin at the point in time when the teacher *finished* her instructions, until the point in time when the pupils declared themselves (usually verbally and caught by the tape-recorder) to be finished *writing* their role-play dialogue.

The entire lesson period of the role-play tasks was tape-recorded, including all the activities indicated by table 4.2. In addition, from the time the pupils began forming pairs, until the time the pupils finished writing their role-play dialogues (i.e., the highlighted activities in table 4.2), the three participant pairs received individual tape-recorders which they placed on the table between themselves while they were working together. This tape-recorded learner interaction data, together with the observational notes that were made during the dialogue-writing activity, resulted in the transcripts which were used in the development and application of the visual method of analysis (cf. chapter 5).

Table 4.3 is an overview of the approximate length, in minutes, of each of the four successive dialogue-writing activities of the three participant pairs. The table shows that the typical length of the dialogue-writing activities was about 20 minutes. With three pairs

writing four role-play dialogues, the total duration of the tape-recorded primary data for the study was 255 minutes.

Table 4.3: Overview of the primary data on learner interaction

Case\Date	March 2000	May 2000	October 2000	January 2001	Total
Veronica & Karen	25 min	20 min	17 min	19 min	81 min
Morten & Tim	20 min	18 min	17 min	20 min	75 min
Marcus & Dennis	24 min	24 min	23 min	28 min	99 min
Total	69 min	62 min	57 min	67 min	255 min

The role-play tasks also yielded data in the form of written role-play dialogues. Despite working as pairs, each pupil would individually write down the role-play dialogue they were composing together. Whereas the other pupils would use their English notebooks for this, the participant pairs used sheets of blank paper supplied by the researcher. At the end of the lesson period of the role-play task the participants would give the sheets, with the role-play dialogues they had written and performed, to the researcher. These were then photocopied by the researcher, and returned to the pupils as part of the follow-up activity (cf. sub-section 4.4.3). This written data was later used to support the application of the visual method of analysis (cf. chapter 5).

The present discussion may have given the impression that all the activities going into the role-play task, including instructions, writing in pairs, and pupils' performances, were completed in one 45-minute lesson. However, this was in fact never the case. The exact event structure for each of the four successive role-play tasks, as well a fuller description of any other contingencies surrounding these, is provided in section 4.5 of this chapter.

4.4.3 Follow-up Activity

Anywhere from a couple of days to a week after the role-play tasks took place, each of the three pairs of participants was taken out of a regular English lesson to do a follow-up activity. The follow-up activity included the following elements:

- The pupils got back the sheets with the role-play dialogue they had written.
- The pupils listened to the tape-recording of their own performance of their role-play dialogue to the whole class.

- The pupils were asked to write a single agreed upon version of their role-play dialogue (building on the individual, but sometimes slightly different, dialogues on the sheets that just had been returned to them).

When the sheets containing the participants' individual role-play dialogue were returned, they were stapled into their English notebooks. This was to address the fact that the remaining pupils in the class had their role-play dialogues written down in these notebooks.

The second activity, listening to the tape-recording of their role-play performances, was quite popular, and had two purposes. First of all, there was a wish to share some parts of the research process with the pupils. Secondly, it was easy to get the pupils to talk a bit about the role-play task after they had listened to the tape, without leaving the impression that they were being interviewed. In fact, any conversation following from listening to the tape-recording of the role-play performances, or at any other time during the follow-up task, was deliberately framed as 'conversation', and sharing of experiences, and not as interviews. Common questions that the researcher would ask included:

> How do you think it [the role-play task] went?
> Do you think it was different from the time you did it before?
> Are you happy with what you wrote?

These questions would sometimes be followed up by additional prompts, such as: 'Why?', or 'What do you mean?' However, this was avoided where it could compromise the informal nature of the conversation.

In the final main phase of the follow-up activity the participants were asked to write an agreed upon single version of their role-play dialogue, based on what they had written on their individual sheets of paper during the dialogue-writing activity in the classroom. The purpose that was given to the pupils was, "There are some differences in the dialogues you have written, and I need a *single* version which you both agree on". The pupils were also told that if they had sufficient time they could improve on, or make minor changes to, the dialogues.

In total, the follow-up activity, with one pair of participants, would last anywhere from 25 to 40 minutes. The time allowed was to some extent dependent on whether only one pair was pulled out of a particular English lesson, or whether two pairs had to be pulled out of the same lesson. In the latter case, the follow-up activity for the second pair would usually take up the 10-minute break pupils had between lessons. None of the participants complained when they missed part of their break time.

The entire follow-up activity was tape-recorded (including listening to the pupils' role-play performances). In addition, the researcher would write observational notes while the pupils were working on the single agreed upon version of the role-play dialogue.

The data generated from the follow-up activity was used to build the profiles of the participants (cf. sub-section 4.3.2), and to a limited extent in formulating a picture of the research setting (cf. sub-section 4.2.2). It also contributed to the formulation of the task-as-plan demands and support for the dialogue-writing activity (cf. discussion of the demands and support associated with each successive role-play task in section 4.5). However, the data was not used in any direct way in the development and application of visualisation as a method. Only at a few points in the application and discussion of the visual method, in chapters six through nine, was the data generated by the follow up activity used (and these cases are clearly indicated where relevant). Hence, the follow-up activity, and the data it generated, is illustrative of the uncertainty as to what contextual data was needed, given the exploratory nature of the research. Notwithstanding, the follow-up activity, and the data it generated, was part of the overall process of the research, including the development and application of visualisation as a method.

4.4.4 Additional Sources of Data

Additional sources of data included: 1) informal conversations with the pupils before and after lessons, inside and outside the classroom; 2) informal and more structured conversations with the English teachers and the homeroom teacher; 3) various curriculum and teaching documents.

In addition to the informal conversations with the focus participants during the follow-up activity, the researcher would sometimes talk to pupils before and after lessons. None of these conversations were guided by any explicit purpose, and there was no attempt to speak only to those pupils who were participants in the research. These various conversations helped the researcher to get to know all the pupils in the class, and the class to get to know the researcher. As such, it helped create a positive atmosphere between the researcher and the pupils.

The conversations with the teachers took two forms. There were frequently brief and informal conversations with both the English teachers and the homeroom teacher, either in the teachers' room, the teachers' offices, or walking to and from lessons. These informal conversations were usually not guided by any explicit research purpose (other than the occasional last minute confirmation about some aspect of classroom or research activity). The second form conversations took was more formal, and often arranged ahead of time. These conversations would take place either in the teachers' room, during the teacher's free periods,

or in the teacher's office, during or after school time. These conversations lasted anywhere from 30 minutes to more than one hour. Topics ranged from discussing arrangements for the research, individual pupils' backgrounds and any other topic having to do with the research setting. As far as possible, any conversations about teaching methods or approaches was avoided.

Documents collected for the research include:

- English subject textbooks used by the participants;
- Norwegian national curriculum documents related to the English subject;
- Various handouts and materials used in the English lessons.

The class used the *Scoop 6* and *Scoop 7* textbook series (Lothe Flemmen & Sørheim, 1997, 1998, 1999a, 1999b). The students were issued both the textbook and workbook from this series each year. All the role-play tasks were copied from, adapted from, or based on exercises in these textbooks. In the first two role-play tasks, which took place when the pupils where in year 6, this was done by the English teacher. In the two final role-play tasks, when the pupils where in year 7, this was done in close collaboration between the English teacher and the researcher (cf. section 4.5). The remaining documents where not used directly, and instead contributed to an understanding of the overall context in which the data collection took place.

4.5 Contingencies in the Data Collection

This section is organised into four separate sub-sections, providing descriptions of the contingencies associated with the four successive role-play tasks that took place in March 2000, May 2000, October 2000 and January 2001. The description of each successive role-play task includes:

- An outline of the event structure of the task.
- A description of the topic of the task.
- The demands and support associated with the task.
- An illustration of the teacher's instructions for the task.

The discussion in this section does not include any mention of observational data generated in the week before the role-play task took place (cf. sub-section 4.4.1), the follow-up activity (cf. sub-section 4.4.3), or the collection of additional sources of data (cf. sub-section 4.4.4). This is because the collection of these sources of data was not affected by as many contingencies. The one exception to this is the follow-up activity that took place after the final role-play task

in January 2001. This particular follow-up activity is, therefore, discussed in the relevant sub-section (cf. sub-section 4.5.4).

4.5.1 Data Collection: March 2000

Table 4.4 illustrates the event structure of the role-play task that took place in March 2000. The role-play task was done as part of a double period of English at the end of the teaching day (periods 5 and 6). After having covered other topics for most of the first English period, the teacher used the last few minutes of this period to give her instructions for the role-play task. Pupil pairs were also organised in this first of two English periods. When the pupils returned from break for the second English period they found places to work and started writing their role-play dialogues fairly promptly. The last 10 - 15 minutes of the second English period was used for the performances of the role-play dialogues.

Table 4.4: Event structure of the role-play task in March 2000

Period	Time	Activity
End of 5th period (45 min)	7 min	Teacher gives instructions for the role-play task Teacher hands out the task sheet Pupils form pairs
Break	10 min	All pupils go outside
6th period (45 min)	4 min	Pupils return from their break
	2 min	Pupils find places to work
	25 min	Dialogue-writing activity (Some pairs have a few minutes to rehearse before performances begin)
	10 min	Pupils perform role-play dialogues
	4 min	Pupils get ready to leave for the day

The role-play task involved writing a dialogue between a student, who had done something wrong, and a teacher who was reprimanding the student. The student had to provide excuses for what s/he had done. The task sheet (cf. appendix B) for the role-play task included some examples for how the dialogue could begin. The role-play task was adapted from the pupils' workbook, and was linked to a textbook unit which theme was 'Back to School'. They had been doing this unit over the last two weeks of English lessons. The actual carrying out of the

role-play task met with few surprises, with pupils working in pairs equally spaced out across desks in the classroom, and with all pairs getting time to perform their role-plays to the class at the end of the second English period. Some pairs were eager to perform; others were more reluctant. However, all the pupils listened with interest to other pairs' role-plays, everyone received a round of applause and praise from the teacher, and the atmosphere was generally friendly and supportive.

The task-as-plan task demands and support for learning for the dialogue-writing activity of the role-play task are summarised in table 4.5.

Table 4.5: Task-as-plan demands and support in March 2000

	Demands	Support
Cognitive	• Writing a dialogue on a given topic • Imagining a scenario • Creating roles	• They have done the role-play task two times before
Language	• Finding lexis and grammar to express what they want to write • Understanding task instructions	• Glossary in back of their textbook • Topic of task is related to theme of textbook unit they are/have been doing
Interactional	• Working in pairs • Writing the *same* dialogue on individual sheets of paper	• Experience of working in pairs • Cooperation is emphasised in the curriculum
Metalinguistic	• Understanding teacher's instructions in English • Understanding instructions on task sheet in English	• Teacher often uses English in giving instructions
Involvement	• Sitting down in pairs to write for 20 - 25 minutes • Knowing that they are going to perform the role-play dialogue in front of the whole class	• Pupils are somewhat accustomed to writing at length • Humour is integral part of task; task is perceived as a pleasant change from normal routine

For this dialogue-writing activity the combined language and metalinguistic demand for understanding the task instructions was particularly high. Both the task sheet and the teacher's instructions were entirely in English. The teacher started her instructions with a fairly long monologue explaining the task in English. This part of the teacher's instructions appears in lines 1 through 21 in extract 4.1.

Extract 4.1: Teacher's instructions for the role-play task in March 2000

Line	Speaker	Text	Comments
1	Teacher:	and as I mentioned earlier,	
2		we're gonna have a role-play, /	
3		and I have a piece of paper right here that has the	
		instructions for you guys, /	
4		(..) and I was actually thinking that you --	
5		you'll be two --	
6		ehm two together,_	Some pupils do not
7		and you gonna --	seem to pay attention
8		one will be a teacher, /	
9		the other one will be the pupil, \	
10		and (..) it's gonna be about --	Some pupils in the
11		may- maybe the pupil did something wrong and	back talking among
		teacher get angry upset,_	themselves
12		and then maybe the pupil wants to find an excuse,/	
13		(..) like it says here the teacher says,_	
14		why have you not done your homework?/	
15		and the pupils says,_	
16		I I didn't do my homework because I overslept._	
17		do you understand what I mean?	
18	Pupils:	yes	3 or 4 pupils respond
19	Teacher:	and it can be a million different reasons why the	
		teacher is upset,_	Some pupils talking
20		right,/	among themselves
21		so it is really up to you guys to figure out what it's	
		all gonna be about.\	
22		<L1 did you understand what I said just now L1> ?/	Limited pupil
			response
23		(2) can you put your hand up if you if you feel that	
		you understood everything./	No hands come up
24		(3) who knows what to do when the next lesson	
		starts,\	
25		XX put your hand up.\	No hands come up
26		(3) you don't know what to do?/	A few hands come up

The long teacher-fronted segment was followed by comprehension checks by the teacher in lines 22 through 26. Only a few of the pupils indicate any understanding in line 26, when a

few hands come up. After this the teacher unsuccessfully tried to nominate a pupil to explain the task, and provided some additional clarification, all in English (not shown in extract 4.1). The main support for dealing with this metalinguistic demand was that by March 2000 the pupils had done role-play tasks twice before (in September and November 1999). The teacher also routinely used English to give instructions, and it is likely that the pupils were used to this. Even so, a number of pupils seemed not to understand the full details of the task instructions at the beginning of the dialogue writing activity.

4.5.2 Data Collection: May 2000

The role-play task in May 2000 followed the event structure indicated in table 4.6. Just as in March 2000, the role-play task was done as part of a double period of English at the end of the teaching day. However, this time the role-play task was started as early as 20 minutes into the first of the two periods. The teacher started earlier this time because she wanted the pupils to have more time for the performances at the end of the second period. The teacher also encouraged the pupils to work through the break (between periods 5 and 6), with the incentive that they might be allowed to leave a bit early. On average the pupils did not spend more time on writing their role-play dialogues as compared to the March 2000 role-play task. However, some pupils spent comparatively more time rehearsing their dialogues. The role-play task finished about 20 minutes into the second English period, which was earlier than the teacher had anticipated.

Table 4.6: Event structure of the role-play task in May 2000

Period	Time	Activity
End of 5th period (45 min)	5 min	Teacher hands out the task sheet Pupils are nominated to read the task sheet Teacher explains the role-play task
	2 min	Pupils form pairs and find places to work
	20 min	Dialogue-writing activity (Some pairs have time to rehearse their dialogue)
Break	10 min	Some dyads are still writing their dialogue; others stay behind to practice their role-plays; remainder go outside
6th period (45 min)	5 min	Pupils assemble in classroom Some pupils are still writing or rehearsing
	15 min	Pupils perform role-play dialogues

The topic of the role-play task again involved creating a dialogue between two fictional characters. This time it was a dialogue between Maid Marion and Robin Hood, something that was linked to a textbook unit, of which the theme was 'Robin Hood', and which the class had just started doing the week before. This time the task sheet provided a single suggested beginning to the dialogue the pupils were asked to write (cf. appendix B). The task was adapted from an activity in the pupils' workbook.

The task-as-plan demands and support for the dialogue-writing activity in May 2000 were very similar to those for March 2000 (cf. table 4.5 in the previous sub-section). The only changes were that now the pupils had done the task three times, and this, perhaps combined with the researcher's presence during the role-play tasks, made the format of the task more recognisable. In addition, although the task sheet was entirely in English (cf. appendix B), the teacher's instructions were more 'interactive', and included some translation into Norwegian toward the end. Extract 4.2 shows the more interactive structure of the teacher's instructions. In line 50 the teacher nominates a pupil to read part of the task sheet; confirming in line 51 that it is okay to read from the workbook instead, where the same text can be found. She asks everyone to pay attention in line 54, and then the pupil proceeds to read the somewhat lengthy passage. Robin Hood is a well-known story in Norway, and the pupils' background knowledge would have helped them understand the English text the pupil was reading.

Extract 4.2: Teacher's instructions for the role-play task in May 2000

Line	Speaker	Text	Comments
47	Teacher:	before vi start,\	
48		can somebody read this,_	
49		(..) to the rest of the class,_	
50		(1) Erik?/	
51		<X L1 you have the book L1 X>,_	
52	Erik:	ehm ehm --	
53		(...)	
54	Teacher:	pay attention the rest of you guys,_	
55		1	
56	Erik:	Marion and Robin,\	reading task sheet
57		Maid Marion and Robin were going to g- get married,\	
		{Pupil continues reading from the task sheet...}	
68	Teacher:	thank you,\	
69		(..) you understand ehm a little bit?/	
70		of this?/	
71	Pupils:	yes._	Two boys respond

72		(...)	
73	Teacher:	so actually what we are going to do now,/	
74		we have the beginning of the dialogue between Robin and Marion,/	
75		maybe somebody would like to read this one as well,/	
76		(.) so we can hear what it is all about,/	
77		ehm Tim can you be Robin,/	
78		and Marcus,/	
79		du er Marion,/	
80	Pupils:	@@@@	Laughter
81	Teacher:	and then we can hear the beginning,\	'Beginning' stressed
82		because you are gonna (.) continue this thing.\	
83		okay.\	
		{Tim and Marcus role-play the suggested beginning of the dialogue}	All pupils seem to enjoy this and listen attentively

In lines 75 through 79, when Erik is finished reading the text, the teacher nominates two other pupils, Tim and Marcus, to read out the suggested beginning of the dialogue between Marion and Robin. Tim and Marcus treated this as an opportunity to role-play (rather than merely reading), and all the pupils enjoyed the brief performance. This was followed by some comprehension checks by the teacher, clarification requests by the pupils, and then eventually a quick translation of the task instructions in Norwegian (not shown in extract 4.2). As compared to the role-play task in March 2000, the pupils seemed a lot clearer about what the task involved by the end of the teacher's instructions.

4.5.3 Data Collection: October 2000

Two important changes in the third role-play task included that the pupils were now in a new school year (year 7), and they now had a new English teacher.

The change of English teachers was not anticipated by either the school or the researcher, and was due to the previous teacher taking on other employment. At the beginning of the school year the homeroom teacher contacted the researcher to tell him about the change. Subsequent to this, the researcher contacted the new English teacher. This initial contact soon evolved into a good working relationship, and once fully informed about the research, the new teacher was positive about being part of the research.

One potential problem resulting from this change in teacher was that the role-play task was not something the new teacher would normally do in his English lessons. It was agreed, therefore, that the researcher should have some input in designing the role-play task. The new

teacher was also provided an outline of how the role-play task was carried out by the previous teacher (cf. Appendix C). Beyond this, the researcher encouraged the new teacher to give the role-play task his own interpretation, with assurances that there was no expectation that the task would be just as it had been the year before.

The resulting role-play task followed the event structure indicated by table 4.7. Since the class had no scheduled double period of English that could be used, the teacher arranged a change in the pupils' schedule, in effect creating a double period of English for the role-play task. The teacher said that although this was not very common, this was acceptable as there was always some contingency in the scheduling of classes.

Table 4.7: Event structure of the role-play task in October 2000

Period	Time	Activity
5th period (45 min)	5 min	Pupils return from break
	3 min	Teacher explains why they will have English in period 6 Teacher hands out the task sheet Teacher tells the pupils to proceed (with few instructions)
	2 min	Pupils form pairs and find places to work
	20 min	Dialogue-writing activity
	15 min	Some pairs are still writing Some pairs rehearse their role-play dialogue Some pairs are finished altogether and do other things
Break	10 min	Most pupils stay inside A few pairs stay to prepare their performance
6th period (45 min)	4 min	Pupils return from their break Teacher determines order of the performances
	7 min	Pupils perform role-plays

The topic of the role-play task was again to write a dialogue between two fictional characters. This time it was a dialogue between a famous person, who had been observed in an embarrassing situation during a St. Patrick's celebration in Limerick, Ireland, and an inquisitive reporter. This topic was linked to the theme of a textbook unit, which was called 'Ireland', and which the pupils had started the week before the role-play task took place. The task sheet for the role-play task included two suggested examples for how the dialogue could begin (cf. appendix B).

The task-as-plan demands and support for the dialogue-writing activity changed somewhat from the previous role-play tasks. These demands and support are shown in table 4.8.

Table 4.8: Task-as-plan demands and support in October 2000

	Demands	Support
Cognitive	• Writing a dialogue on a given topic • Imagining a scenario • Creating roles • Creating an entertaining role-play	• They have done the role-play task four times before
Language	• Finding lexis and grammar to express what they want to write	• Glossary in back of their textbook • Topic of task is related to theme of textbook unit they are/have been doing
Interactional	• Working in pairs • Writing the *same* dialogue on individual sheets of paper	• Experience of working in pairs • Cooperation is emphasised in the curriculum
Metalinguistic	• Understanding instructions on task sheet in English	• Teacher appeals to pupils' knowledge of how previous role-play tasks were carried out
Involvement	• Sitting down in pairs to write for 20 - 25 minutes • Knowing that they are going to perform the role-play dialogue in front of the whole class afterwards	• Pupils are somewhat accustomed to writing at length • Humour is integral part of task; task is perceived as a pleasant change from normal routine

Since the teacher himself had not done this type of task before, his introduction to the role-play task included an explicit appeal to the pupils' knowledge of how the role-play task was done before. Nods and silent affirmative responses from several pupils indicated that this effectively constituted a support. Beyond this, the only other thing the teacher did before the dialogue-writing activity started was to hand out the task sheet, and to help organise pupils into pairs. The teacher did not spend much time at all giving explicit instructions for the task. However, the pupils appeared to remember how to do the task, and quickly started composing and writing their role-play dialogues.

Another change to the demands and support was that whilst the task was still perceived to be a pleasant break from the normal routine, the need for creating an entertaining dialogue (a cognitive demand in table 4.8) seemed to be more on the pupils' minds than had been the case in the previous role-play tasks. This observation was based on a combination of clues provided by the different sources of contextual data, including informal conversations with pupils inside and outside the classroom (cf. sub-section 4.4.4), as well as the conversations that were a part of the follow-up activity (cf. sub-section 4.4.3). This new demand on the pupils did not seem to be related to the change of English teacher.

4.5.4 Data Collection: January 2001

Table 4.9 shows the event structure for the role-play task that took place in January 2001. Just as for the third role-play task, the teacher arranged for the class to have two consecutive English periods. The table shows that it took the pupils a full nine minutes to return from their break. The reason for this was that the school bell was broken. The teacher decided to finish the entire role-play task, including the performances, before giving the pupils their next break. Other than the time spent on giving instructions for the task, the event structure in this final role-play task was similar to the role-play task in October 2000.

Table 4.9: Event structure of role-play task in January 2001

Period	Time	Activity
5th period + Beginning of 6th period	9 min	Pupils return from their break
	6 min	Teacher explains why they will have English in period 6 Teacher hands out the task sheet Teacher gives instructions for the task
	1 min	Pupils form pairs and find places to work
	20 min	Dialogue-writing activity
	10 min	Some pairs are still writing Some pairs rehearse their role-play dialogue Some pairs are finished altogether and do other things
	10 min	Pupils perform their role-play dialogues
Break	10 min	This break was delayed in order to finish role-play task.

The role-play task once again involved writing a dialogue between two fictional characters. This time it was a dialogue between a person doing something wrong in a park and an angry park keeper. The task was adapted from an activity in the workbook, and was therefore linked to the theme of the textbook unit that the pupils had been doing over the last couple of weeks. The theme of the unit was ‘Signs and Symbols’, and the relevant workbook page showed a picture of a park with a number of signs saying things like: “Do not drop litter”, “Do not feed the ducks”, and so on. Each of these signs was accompanied by a picture of a person breaking the rule printed on the sign (cf. appendix D). The task sheet provided two suggested beginnings for the dialogue the pupils were asked to write (cf. appendix B).

The task-as-plan demands and support for the dialogue-writing activity were now quite different from that of the first role-play task held almost a year ago. The task-as-plan demands and support are shown in table 4.10.

Table 4.10: Task-as-plan demands and support in January 2001

	Demands	Support
Cognitive	• Writing a dialogue on a given topic • Imagining a scenario • Creating roles • Creating an entertaining role-play • Resolving a conflicting message between how they had solved the task in the past and the task materials	• They have done the role-play task five times before
Language	• Finding lexis and grammar to express what they want to write	• Glossary in back of their textbook • Topic of task is related to theme of textbook unit they are/have been doing
Interactional	• Working in pairs • Writing the *same* dialogue on individual sheets of paper	• Experience of working in pairs • Cooperation is emphasised in the curriculum
Metalinguistic	• Understanding instructions on task sheet in English	• Teacher goes through instructions on task sheet with whole class • Instructions are translated and repeated in Norwegian
Involvement	• Sitting down in pairs to write for 20 - 25 minutes • Knowing that they are going to perform the role-play dialogue in front of the whole class	• Pupils are accustomed to writing at length

By now the new English teacher was more comfortable with the format of the role-play task. He had even done a role-play task with this class, independently from the present research, in November 2001. The teacher's increased confidence was evident by the detailed instructions he gave for the task. Unlike the year 6 English teacher, he used mainly Norwegian in his instructions, thereby eliminating the combined language and metalinguistic demand on the pupils for understanding instructions in English (cf. demands and support for the year 6 role-play tasks in table 4.5 in sub-section 4.5.1). The teacher's instructions were methodical, including reading through the task sheet step-by-step, and frequently stopping to ask the pupils what the English instructions meant in Norwegian. Extract 4.3 illustrates one step in this methodical process. In line 125 the teacher reads from the task sheet 'the angry park keeper', and then in line 126 asks a pupil what this means in Norwegian. Only when the right answer is provided, in line 130, does the teacher move on. The teacher went through the entire task sheet in this manner.

Extract 4.3: Teacher's instructions for the role-play task in January 2001

Line	Speaker	Text	Comments
124	Teacher:	(...) <L1 the role-play is called L1>,_	
125		the angry park keeper.\	
126		(..) <L1 what does that mean Henry L1>?/	
127		1.5	
128	Teacher:	the angry [pa-] --	
129	Pupil:	<L1[the] angry forest keeper or something L1>._	
130	Pupils:	parkevakten./*{Norwegian equivalent of park keeper}*	Several pupils respond
131	Teacher:	ja.\	
132		2	

Despite these careful instructions, neither the teacher nor the researcher noticed that there was a potential conflict between the workbook page, which the task sheet directed the pupils to look at, and the way they had solved the role-play task in the past. That is, the workbook page showed pictures of several signs, with a different person breaking the relevant rule next to each of these signs. The message that this workbook page communicated was that the park keeper encountered several different people as he made his way through the park (cf. appendix D). The way they had done the role-play task in the past, however, had invariably involved a dialogue between two people only. Hence, making sense of these conflicting messages was an additional, and unexpected, demand on the pupils.

A further change in the demands on the pupils was the pressure for producing an entertaining role-play. This demand had begun to appear in the previous role-play task, which took place in October 2001. However, in January 2001 this demand was becoming increasingly strong. Moreover, as a result of this emerging demand, the role-play task was not, to the same extent, viewed as the pleasant change from the normal routine it used to be. Rather, it seemed that over successive role-play tasks, this pleasant change from the normal routine had evolved into something like a 'showcase' for who could come up with the most entertaining role-play performances.

Much of the above description of how the pupils perceived the last role-play task was gained from the follow-up activity, which took place a few days later. Since this was the last role-play task, and there was no danger that explicit questions would influence the participants approach to future tasks, the follow-up activity took a somewhat different form. In addition to its regular elements (cf. sub-section 4.4.3), more direct questions about the participants' experience of the last role-play task were asked. This questioning was conducted somewhat like an open-ended interview, with initial broad questions followed by additional

probes picking up on points raised by the pupils. Moreover, in light of the above-mentioned unexpected demands on the pupils, the teacher and researcher together agreed that it was necessary to have a brief whole class discussion. This was to tell the pupils that we (the teacher and researcher) were aware of the pressures they had experienced, and in effect to apologise that we had not foreseen this development. The pupils were also given a chance to speak, and the ensuing discussion raised a lot of interesting points, some of which have been incorporated into the above account of the role-play task.

4.6 Summary

This chapter has outlined the research questions for the study, and discussed the design of the data collection, the sources of data, as well as the contingencies associated with the collection of data across the series of similar role-play tasks.

The next chapter, which develops visualisation as a method for representing the dynamics of learner interaction, relies mainly on the primary data on learner interaction. That is, it relies on the tape-recorded data from the dialogue-writing activity of the role-play task (cf. sub-section 4.4.2). As has been pointed out, the other sources of data where mostly used in building the profiles of the participants, and to establish the demands and support associated with each role-play task. However, where these other sources of data have been used in the subsequent development, application and discussion of the visual method, this will be clearly indicated in the relevant text.