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## Teaching While Praying, Praying While Teaching: An Interactional Sociolinguistics of Educational Prayer

Robert Jean LeBlanc  
University of Lethbridge

*What are the linguistic resources for teachers who pray in contemporary Catholic school classrooms? This article considers the intersections of prayer and language practice, and makes central two arguments. The first is that educational prayer—a particular type of teacher-led extemporaneous prayer in Catholic schools—is a linguistic phenomenon, a highly-flexible set of linguistic resources, captured within a special interactional frame marked by ambiguous boundaries which contains both prescribed formulaic linguistic properties and those which allow the performer to attend to real time classroom contingencies. Drawing on interactional data from a Catholic school classroom, this article delimits the contextualization of linguistic signs during prayer: how teachers indicate the connection between their words and the sociocultural frameworks which are relevant for that action. The second is that both interactional sociolinguists and Catholic school researchers would greatly benefit from attending to these linguistic features, from seeing prayer unfold in real-time.*

### Keywords

Contextualization, Footing, Deictics, Repertoire

*You will understand then that prayer is education.*

- Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*

In Book II of *Confessions*, St. Augustine ponders why he prays: surely an omniscient and unmoved God already knows the desires of his heart, he asks, so why offer them in words, aloud or on the page? Augustine's answer is simultaneously educational and sociolinguistic: "I need not tell all this to you, my God, but in your presence I tell it to my own kind, to those other men, however few, who may perhaps pick up this book" (II.3.1). Rather than praying solely to cultivate an inner disposition or to motivate an impassable God's actions, here he suggests that he prays for any immediate or distantly-mediated listener, for anyone who might happen to overhear his fervent supplications.

As a speech genre, prayer is ubiquitous in Catholic schools, and St. Augustine's contemplation<sup>1</sup> offers an instructive entry point into the topic of *educational prayer*. To which *addressee* does a teacher address their prayers? What does it mean to pray amongst a listening *audience*, notably in a school amongst listening (Catholic and non-Catholic) students? *When* is a prayer? And *who* is praying when someone offers thanks and supplications in the common collective pronomial deictic "we"? Accounts like St. Augustine's remind us of the fundamentally linguistic and situational nature of prayer, attentive to institutional and personal histories of language use, but equally attuned to the particular exigencies of the moment. These tensions mark educational prayer as inescapably social—not merely in the sense that the words of prayer have been entextualized and recontextualized over decades, centuries, and even millennia—what Mauss (2008) calls "the echo of numberless phrases" (p. 33)—but also insofar as prayer is often constructed *in media res* amongst overhearers (heavenly and corporeal) to whom it must be attuned. Prayer is as much about managing relationships with those around the speaker as it is about addressing the Divine. For teachers in contemporary Catholic schools, this means, in part, managing relationships with their students.

Consider this familiar example of a classroom interaction from St. Sebal-dus, a Catholic high school that serves a range of Catholic and non-Catholic students (noted in this transcript as "Ss"). Mr. MacPherson (MP)<sup>2</sup>, the teacher, begins an improvisatory prayer amongst a busy and largely inattentive class to start the period.<sup>3</sup>

MP: ((Ss talking and moving in seats)) Dear Lord we thank you for this::  
 ((to Ss)) Alright let's take some prayer time  
 Let's be lead to this reflection and meditation  
 (3.8) ((most Ss stop moving and chatting))  
 Be at peace  
 Be open  
 (1.8)  
 Or at least just be still  
 (4.0)  
 Dear Lord we thank you for the gift of your church

1 For a robust contemporary account of Augustine and prayer, see Teubner (2018).

2 All names are pseudonyms.

3 See Appendix A for transcription format

This recognizable interaction presents the simultaneous intersection of a variety of sociolinguistic properties: speaking on behalf of another, speaking in the collective pronomial deictic “we”, providing educational directions as to how to bodily and mentally participate in a prayer, and the invocation of ritual formulae to let the listeners know *this is now a prayer*. It also presents familiar teacherly properties, most notably strategies for quieting a boisterous classroom. Through all of this, we see the way prayer and classroom relations are intertwined.

This article considers the intersections of prayer and language practice (Mauss, 2008), and throughout I make two principle arguments. The first is that *educational prayer*—a particular type of teacher-led extemporaneous prayer in Catholic schools—is a highly-flexible set of linguistic resources, captured within a special interactional frame marked by ambiguous boundaries which contains both prescribed formulaic linguistic properties and those which allow the performer to attend to real time classroom contingencies. This marks educational prayer as less a distinct genre than a hybridity of overlapping and blurring genres (Bauman & Briggs, 1990). The second is that both interactional sociolinguists and Catholic school researchers would greatly benefit from attending to these features, from seeing prayer unfold in real time in real contexts. This article describes the use of this blended genre in classrooms, examining how teachers deploy these flexible resources for a range of purposes which are simultaneously devotional and pedagogic. I begin by outlining three core concepts in interactional sociolinguistics—repertoire, contextualization, footing—and discuss their relevance for classroom discourse. From here, I look closely at emblematic interactional data from a Catholic school, and illustrate the process of contextualization of educational prayers: who is praying, to whom is the prayer being addressed, and how is that framing made known amongst the participants of classroom talk? I do so by drawing on Wortham’s (1996) framework for deictic mapping—systematically tracking deictic features like pronouns and demonstratives across an interaction. I conclude by suggesting an agenda for future interactional sociolinguistic research in Catholic schools.

### **Sociolinguistics of Prayer: Repertoire, Contextualization, Footing**

Where innumerable volumes from inside and out of the faith tradition have considered liturgy, ritual, divination, possession, glossolalia, and prayer—anthropological, linguistic, sociological, ecclesiological, and beyond (cf. Baker, 2008; Bell, 1992; Benedict XVI, 2013; Giordan & Woodhead, 2015;

Moss, 2003; Turner, 2008)—few studies have examined the extemporaneous language properties of prayer in contemporary Catholic schools (but see Baquedano-Lopez, 2008; LeBlanc, 2015, 2016, forthcoming). This article seeks not to develop an idealistic understanding of the purposes of prayer in Catholic schools (the *whys* or the *to what ends* of prayer) but rather looks to what *forms* prayers take in the interactional moment of an everyday classroom with hopes of illuminating both the linguistic structures of prayer and the potential exigencies with which teachers are regularly confronted. These include the kinds of mundane, everyday classroom contingencies of student attention (or lack thereof), variation in familiarity with the topic material, and bids for the interactional floor.

Interactional sociolinguistics is an interdisciplinary field of inquiry into face-to-face interactions and their associated language practices, with particular attention to the interplay between language and cultural processes (Heller, Pietikainen, & Pujolar, 2018; Hymes, 1974; Rampton, 2017). One of the innovations of sociolinguistics is to drag language out of the obscurity of Saussurean abstraction and into the light of dynamic and contingent real-time human semiosis (Gumperz, 1986; Hymes, 1972; Rampton, Maybin, & Roberts, 2015); unlike formal linguistics, which treats grammar, syntax, and lexicon as formal systems, interactional sociolinguistics pivots “from a focus on structure to a focus on function—from a focus on linguistic form in isolation to linguistic form in human context” (Hymes, 1974, p. 77). In this section, I outline three central concepts—repertoire, contextualization, and footing—which help bring an interactional sociolinguistics approach to the subject of educational prayer.

### Repertoire

Interactional sociolinguistics localizes its analysis not on *language writ large*, but rather on what Hymes (1996) calls linguistic repertoires—“a set of ways of speaking” (p. 33)—which intersect with individual speech styles, contexts of use, and the relations between them. Interactional sociolinguistics is concerned with the *social meaning* of the deployment of these repertoires in use in real-time. In what interactional scenarios and by which speakers are these resources deployed, and to what effect?

These notions play out in a variety of genres and forms, including prayer. Prayer, Baquedano-Lopez (2000) writes, “is an intrinsic human meaning-making activity that relates the known to the unknown” (p. 197), and human meaning-making is a semiotic activity; it is facilitated by signs and language.

Scholars examining religious discourse more broadly have focused on a number of linguistic properties, largely to do with unsettling notions of intentionality, speaker/listener relations, voice, and textual ideologies (cf., Crystal, 1990; Du Bois, 1986; Wirtz, 2007). While prayer draws on and modifies common narratives, structures, rituals, and historical language practices, it is also an act of community: one's repertoire develops not in isolation, but as part of one's historical trajectory through various socially-mediated language communities, including families, social organizations, and state institutions like schools (Blommaert, 2005).

In the *educational* form of prayer, where one is simultaneously teaching while performing the act of communication, this includes educating participants into the genre of the activity (Poveda, Cano, & Palomares-Valera, 2005; Rosowsky, 2008): who can talk, when is it appropriate to talk, and what are the typical forms of that talk? Genres, like ritualized or extemporaneous prayers, are not static, but rather sets of conventionalized expectations to which not all participants may be equally familiar (Blommaert, 2010). Where much research on face-to-face interaction assumes a relatively shared set of generic knowledge by participants for facilitating harmonious and relatively smooth discourse, we would be wise to attend to situations of unequal familiarity, notably in stratified institutions like schools. In the case of educational prayer, particularly in contemporary Catholic schools which have a robust mix of Catholic and non-Catholic students (Louie & Holdaway, 2009), this means seeing how seemingly collective genres (novenas, Hail Mary, Act of Contrition) may play out differentially amongst participants.

Developing this theme, Capps and Ochs (2002) outline a variety of interactional data of parents praying with their small children, initiating them into the specialized prayer formats of their faith. This includes, on one hand, directed attention to the child's bodily orientations, and on the other, socialization into linguistic qualities of "reverent voice... honorific titles for deities, archaic and formal lexicon, formulaic expressions, and conventional predicates" (p. 40). These all constitute a prayerful repertoire for the children, one which can only be accomplished interactionally; maintaining the genre through transitions and marked speech, corralling inattentive children back on line through meta-talk when they go astray, and going so far as to urge them to attend to conventions through predicate speech to God ("Help us to remember that we're praying now..." p. 48). Relatedly, in her study of instruction on the Act of Contrition in a Catholic doctrina class, Baquedano-Lopez (2008) discusses how teachers provide running meta-commentary parallel

to the words of the ritualized text, helping students personalize the material by transforming it extemporaneously—from the singular recontextualized pronomial deictic “I” (“Whenever I have sinned I have offended you”) into the collective pronomial deictic “We” (“We have offended God”) in providing interpretation during instruction. Collectively, these illustrate the need for a variety of strategies amongst educators for accomplishing the (un)familiar genre of prayer and integrating a particular repertoire amongst a variety of participants.

### Contextualization

One of the principal problems for any group of speakers is contextualization (Goodwin & Duranti, 1992)—indicating what type of speech situation this is, to whom this speech situation is being addressed, and what kind of speaker is speaking. This is a particularly vexing issue for religious language and religious practitioners. As Keane (2004) points out, if an underlying foundation of face-to-face conversation is default knowledge and frames, including *who* is speaking or being spoken to, religious speech frequently destabilizes this foundation. Addressees may be in radically different spatio-temporal envelopes from those immediately co-present: in what spatio-temporal frame, for example, is the Holy Mother when a teacher, in a contemporary North American classroom, addresses her to intercede to an eternal God on their behalf? Animators of speech may be equally unclear, as God may be speaking *through* them (Lempert, 2015). We can further see this tension play out in issues of heteroglossia, a term drawn from Bakhtin (1981) to illustrate how we repurpose the words of others in everyday speech, in something like the real-time recitation of the words of the Lord’s Prayer (“Our Father...”).

This “problem of presence” (Keane, 1997b, p. 50) is frequently smoothed discursively. For example, much ritual or religious speech is highly referential, continually reminding the listener (and apparently the addressee themselves) who is indeed the actual formal addressee: “Hail, Holy Queen”, “Mother of mercy”, “O clement, O loving, O sweet Virgin Mary.” One reason for this, Keane continues, is “presumably that the supposed participants do not all share the same spatiotemporal context” (p. 50) and as such continual repetition or regular reference helps mark this context as special, distinct, and sacred. In classrooms with Catholic and non-Catholic students, this becomes particularly useful for teachers to outline the object of prayer. Prayers and ritualized language, Keane (1997b) furthers, are “highly marked and self-conscious uses of linguistic resources” (p. 48) meant to help the listener



contextualize the speech act as a religious speech act. Moreover, much of the language of prayers is metapragmatic (Lucy, 1993), wherein the speaker comments on or characterizes the act of speaking itself. For example, rather than simply performing the act of gratitude (“Thank you God for the Church”), someone praying collectively may instead characterize the act of praying by a co-present group (“Dear Lord we thank you for the gift of your church”), and in doing so describe the very act of prayer presently ongoing—this represents a metapragmatic performative, where the act of narrating the action is the action itself.

Notions of context, as a sociolinguistic construct, have evolved in recent years—away from what some have called the bucket theory of context (that is, some general, static background information about where the interaction is taking place) to a more dynamic and interactional conception (Rampton, Maybin, & Roberts, 2015). Because language is continuously pointing beyond itself (that is, beyond its purely referential function) to histories of use, people, and tacit assumptions, scholars have encouraged the field to focus on processes of *contextualization* (Auer, 1996): the connections between the discursive features of an interaction and the relevant (often non-representational) background knowledge of participants (Blommaert, Smits, & Yacoubi, 2018). Context is therefore not a pre-given but an “interactively constituted mode of praxis” (Goodwin & Duranti, 1992, p. 9)—each participant will orient themselves differently to a speech event, turning what is a ‘solemn and formal affair’ for the teacher into a ‘tired and drawn out waste of time’ for a student. Metapragmatic speech is therefore often an attempt by institutional actors to set the parameters of a speech act (Bauman & Briggs, 1990), to narrow and delimit the context of what is happening, to “shape the reception of what is said” (p. 69).

How contextualization plays out is contingent on language ideologies (Blommaert, 2005), and this is as true for a genre such as prayer as any other—the meaningfulness of a sign (or a genre) is contingent on other historically-developed factors. Speaker rights, acceptable topics, and relevant contexts for a speech act are all predicated on shared (or disputed) cultural knowledge about what is happening. Classrooms, of course, also hinge on long-standing and evolving language ideologies (Rampton, 2006), and participant roles are more or less tightly organized based on these—the language ideologies of the classroom (for example, that the teacher controls the speaking floor) often overlap and dovetail with familiar language ideologies of prayer. These all have a tangible impact on forms of talk. For example, Shoaps



(2002) analyzes how public prayer in the Assemblies of God tradition must balance supposed tensions between spontaneous extemporaneous prayers with more ritualized textual prayers. These tensions hinge, she suggests, on language ideologies in this tradition of ‘earnestness’ and ‘speaking authentically from the heart’, which emerge out of broader contemporary Protestant Western concerns with “intentionality” and “sincerity” (Keane, 1997a). Concerned about being overly “textual”, congregants and clergy invoke markers of spontaneity—while clearly recontextualizing stock phrases—such as locatives and performative predicates which indicate their present action (“say”, “claim”, “give glory”) as well as temporal deictics such as “right now” or “this morning” which indicate the prayer is happening “in the moment” rather than being rehearsed “unthinkingly” (p. 55). Consequently, while recontextualizing formulaic prayers like the Our Father in a speech act, members of these congregations seek to narrow contextualization to the here and now, undergirded by a historically-developed language ideology which favors spontaneity over repetition. These represent some of the strategies available for contextualization within extemporaneous prayer, and the means by which existing texts are woven into real-time action.

### Deictics and Footing

All semiotic resources point to (index) something about the speaker and the setting, and the notion of *indexicality* has become fundamental to the field (Eckert, 2008; Rymes, 2003): beyond denotational meaning of a word, acts of speech produce social cognates, telling the listener something about who is speaking and the context of the utterance. Indexicality has been taken up with great energy to explain processes of identity and identification (cf., Anderson, 2008; Johnstone, Andrus, & Danielson, 2006), but for this sake of this article I would like to limit my discussion to a tangible and familiar indexical, *deictics*. Deictics—spatial, temporal, and pronomial—are a common form of indexical, and words like *there*, *now*, and *we* all point to things within the speaking situation itself in order to be understood. These can quickly shift over the course of an utterance—the *us* of one moment might be a different *us* a few moments later (Hanks, 1993). Speakers, consequently, cannot be assumed to inhabit particular repertoires simply by virtue of their social position, but must actively work to be identified in particular ways or to have a speech situation made relevant in a certain way (for example, as a solemn moment and not a joke). Deictics like *this*, *us*, *they*, *there*, *here*, etc. are all central to context because they construct relationships between interac-

tants. Should one invoke the *You* of God, saints, the Holy Mother, etc., one simultaneously invokes a complex set of relationships, converting an abstract linguistic pronoun by embedding it within the field of the classroom. We can see this at work in something as simple as a teacher's prayer using the pronomial deictic "we" in the classroom (as in "Dear Lord we thank you for the gift of your church"), which is predicated on an authority relationship which allows the teacher to speak on behalf of the students. Deictics are thus a means by which speakers invoke and manage social relationships (Wortham, 1996).

What position one takes with reference to the contents of prayer is best illuminated by Erving Goffman's interactional analysis (1967, 1974, 1981; see also Collins, 2005). We have seen already that the notion of a solitary speaker has been brought into question by much sociolinguistics research. Most pressingly, Goffman provides the conceptual terminology to deconstruct overly tidy speaker-listener dyads through what he calls participation roles. In the place of the unified speaker, Goffman (1974) offers the Animator (the one doing the speaking), the Author (composer of the words), and the Principal (one who takes responsibility for the words): in any interaction, these roles can overlap and fade apart, as in the case of a ritualized liturgical action like the Lord's Prayer (where the speaker in the pew is the Animator, but Christ is the Author, and both the speaker and Christ are the Principal). In the place of the singular listener, Goffman offers Ratified Participants (those who are acknowledged as listeners, both addressed and unaddressed), the Target, and Overhearers (eavesdroppers and bystanders). In the case of an extemporaneous educational prayer, the Addressed Ratified Participant might be quasi-co-present spiritually (Christ, the Holy Mother, the saints), while students may be Unaddressed Ratified Participants (acknowledged as listening and perhaps even the target of the prayer ["Mother Mary, help us listen carefully and diligently to this message"], but not specifically addressed). Further, in any interaction, Goffman outlines (1981), speakers regularly shift *footing*—their alignment or interactional posture across a strip of behavior (like a prayer)—moving in and out of addressing different individuals and taking different stances on the material they are uttering. In an extemporaneous prayer, this could include moving in and out of addressing God to shush a noisy student, or making meta-commentary on the words of the prayer to help students understand the context of the supplication. A shift in footing is often a shift in social relationship. All these provide a robust technical vocabulary for decomposing in-the-moment prayer in schools.

Drawing these concerns all together, let us return to our example of Mr. MacPherson (MP) and his busy class (Ss) at St. Sebaldus, to see what might be illuminated by this framework.

MP: ((Ss talking and moving in seats)) Dear Lord we thank you for this::  
 ((to Ss)) Alright let's take some prayer time  
 Let's be lead to this reflection and meditation  
 (3.8) ((most Ss stop moving and chatting))  
 Be at peace  
 Be open  
 (1.8)  
 Or at least just be still  
 (4.0)  
 Dear Lord we thank you for the gift of your church

We can see a variety of sociolinguistic properties simultaneously at work in this short interaction. On one hand, Mr. MacPherson must be attentive to the repertoire of a formalistic prayer within his Catholic tradition—indicated by a formulaic vocative honorific structure (“Dear Lord”) to cue the recipient, and the use of performative predicates, furthering the illocutionary force to carry on the prayer (“we thank you for the gift of your church”). These work in addition to norms of reverence and silence when prayer is ongoing (Keane, 2004). On the other, he must also attend to his institutional role as teacher and the corresponding cultural logics of legitimate participation in classrooms that accompany it—that the teacher holds the floor when speaking, that students should not interrupt teacher talk, that student talk should be relevant to the teacher’s given topic (Heap, 1985). Consequently, Mr. MacPherson needs to recruit the attentiveness of his students (and their participation in the requirements of the genre) while simultaneously addressing a divine co-present God. We see the management of these concerns through a shift in footing, pivoting from addressing God to addressing his students to addressing God, all within a few short lines. We see the invocation of collective pronomial deictics (“we thank you”, “let’s [let us] take some prayer time”) as a strategy of involvement, with the teacher speaking on behalf of the students in both addressing God and the class itself. Mr. MacPherson is the Animator and the Author of this prayer, but the Principal is seemingly the entire assembled co-present classroom. Finally, we see explicit meta-talk

meant to socialize and educate his restless students into the practices and dispositions of prayer: “Be at peace/ Be open/ Or at least just be still” reinforcing that “the positioning of the hands, arms, legs, heads, eye gaze, and torso [are a] means of positioning their minds and soul” (Capps & Ochs, 2002, p. 40). Such are the tensions of educational prayer, worked out in real-time.

Repertoire, contextualization, and footing: we now have the theoretical framework to enable us to understand Catholic school educational prayer sociolinguistically. In what follows, I provide some illustrative data of educational prayers in a contemporary Catholic school in hopes of demonstrating the social properties of its enactment. I focus specifically on the use of deictics in this analysis, outlining how their contextualizing properties are mobilized by teachers for managing social relationships amongst a student populace that can only be explained by virtue of the transformations of Catholic school (LeBlanc, 2017)—the co-mingling of Catholic and non-Catholic adolescents, the presence of listeners who are simultaneously students and devotees, the participation of individuals with a range of familiarity with the generic requirements of prayer.

### Methodology

These interactional sociolinguistics data are drawn from a classroom at St. Sebaldus, an urban Catholic high school (approximately 1000 students) in a small city (approximately 100,000 people), and the instruction of Mr. MacPherson, a middle-aged, married, Catholic school educator. St. Sebaldus is the flagship high school in the local Catholic district, and was known in the region for its college-preparatory atmosphere, its rigorous academics, and its high-quality instruction by its teaching staff. Like many Catholic schools in the area, St. Sebaldus was attended by both Catholic and non-Catholic students. Uniquely, St. Sebaldus runs on the quarter system, rather than semesters, which makes all classes notably intensive. I conducted language-focused ethnographic research (Maybin, 2009), with concentrated observation and audio-recording in a Grade 10 Religion class. Audio data from St. Sebaldus were collected during the course of a unit on Christ and Culture, approximately 1.5 hours a day, once or twice a week, for 6 weeks. Producing a significant amount of audio data, these were transcribed selectively using conventions typically associated with linguistic ethnography (Wortham & Rymes, 2003). These audio-recording data were supported by daily ethnographic fieldnotes providing additional information about the context of the

classroom interaction classroom micro-culture, and a host of interactions that I could not capture on my digital audio-recorder for a variety of reasons.

Analytically, I drew on procedures from ethnographically-oriented interactional sociolinguistics, and which is concerned with “studying linguistic patterns in use... trying to connect micro- and macro-level processes (Wortham, 2003, p. 4). Because this approach is primarily discourse analytic, I originally coded across a much larger data set developed during my time at St. Sebaldus to identify instances of prayer by the teacher within classroom settings. These produced dozens of interactional transcripts which I could then subject to another set of codes to see emergent themes and patterns across contexts. Finally, individual transcripts were analysed for patterns of language use, with particular attention to Goffmanian (1981) concepts of audience, footing, and speaker roles, and ethnopoetic structures of performance (Bauman & Briggs, 1990). For the sake of this article, I will focus analysis on processes of *contextualization*, which involve metapragmatic discourse and deictic use. To do so, I outline my procedure for mapping participant deictics (Wortham, 1996) within prayer, which illuminates strategies of participation through strategies of inclusion and address.

### Mapping Participation Deictics

While contextualization can be indicated by any number of semiotic cues, deictics play a central role in this process. Deictics are referred to as *shifters* because their denotational meaning can shift over the course of use—the *we* of one minute might be a different *we* of the next—and are dependent on the interactional context for their meaning (Jakobson, 1971). Hanks (1993) calls deictics “schematic templates made up of prefabricated categories” (p. 129) which establish relationships between the speaker (“I”, “we”) and the referents (“you”, “this”). Deictics, Hanks continues, are central to understanding speaker footing, since they are used to inhabit certain roles in relation to one another: “By using first and second person pronouns, along with proximal spatial, temporal, and nominal demonstratives, speakers [map] the current event framework” (p. 140). Deictics anchor the speaking event, and help us distinguish between what Wortham (1996), after Jakobson (1971), calls the *narrating* event (the interactions amongst participants) and the *narrated* event (what they’re discussing). “Shifters bridge the narrating event and narrated event,” Wortham (1996) explains, “because they depend on aspects of the narrating event to identify what they are saying about the narrated event” (p. 333). For example, when someone is reporting speech, rehearsing or re-

peating (or ritually reading) a previous utterance or text, or telling a story—as in the case of someone saying, “I always loved the Psalm, ‘I lift my eyes up to the mountains...’”—this narrated event has its own shifting deictic field (Hanks, 2005). The two “I’s” in this utterance are different: this shift in deictic use indicates a shift in speaker roles (continuing our Psalmic example, from Goffman’s Author to Animator).

Over the course of an interaction we can map deictic use to see shifts in the relationships between speakers and speaker position. This can help us see the interactional organization of an event. Wortham (1996) helpfully outlines procedures for systematically mapping participation deictics line-by-line. For this article, I have drawn on Wortham’s framework to chart deictic use across a prayer to demonstrate the evolution and management of social relationships within the prayer. This chart (see Appendix C) include several shifter categories: personal pronouns, demonstrative, temporal, and spatial deictics, and verb tense (see Wortham, 1996, p. 336). While every shift in deictic use may not be relevant, they may reveal changes in relationships and social positions amongst speakers, and as such can be a unique tool for investigating language use in prayer.

### **Classroom Dynamics of Educational Prayer**

Commenting on the normal order of schooling, what others have called the “deep grooves” of classroom talk (Rampton, 2006), Edwards and Westgate (1994) provide the following summary of business-as-usual in most classrooms:

communication is centered on the teacher. It is he or she who talks and decides who else is to talk, asks the questions, evaluates the answers, and clearly manages the sequence as a whole... [A]ppropriate participation requires of pupils that they listen or appear to listen, often and at length. They have to know how to bid properly for the right to speak themselves (Edwards & Westgate, 1994, pp. 40, 46; quoted in Rampton, 2006).

Teachers keep the proverbial ball of classroom talk rolling along these deep grooves: they orchestrate the topic and the major turn-taking bids, and assess the quality of student responses (Heap, 1985; McHoul, 1978). What I hope to illustrate with the following data is the means by which educational prayer fits in amongst this kind of interactional order. What are the functions of prayer amidst classroom talk?

### As a Strategy of Classroom Order

One tangible deployment of educational prayer is for the purposes of classroom order: calling the class to attention (and silence) at the top of the lesson, stilling busy bodies once they've settled, and setting focus for the class through the use of prayer. Ritual prayer is used as framing. This framing (and ordering) is accomplished not simply by the ritual invocation of the words of prayer, but by accompanying obligatory physical postures—hands, eyes, fingers, and feet—which echo and buttress broader ideologies of classroom talk.

Mr. MacPherson regularly used prayer as a means to orchestrate the opening moments of class:

#### Excerpt 1

1		((Class loud and boisterous))
2	MP:	Okay guys:::
3		((Some Ss cross-talk))
4		(6.6)
5		Let's take a minute in <u>silence</u> and <u>stillness</u>
6		Everyone let's say hi to:: Professor LeBlanc today
7		((Ss chorus of 'hi' and 'hello!'))
8		((Ss cross-talk returns slowly then comes to silence))
9		(8.1)
10		Okay <u>guys</u> :::
11		Take a minute in <u>silence</u> and stillness
12		Unplug ourselves
13		Put our phones away
14		((silence now))
15		(5.4)
16		Take some deep breaths:::
17		(2.2)
18		Hands to <u>ourselves</u> :::::
19		((light laughter from Ss))
20		Catherine ((says to S1—Catherine quiets))
21		Hands to ourselves ((to Ss))
22		(7.2)
23		Close our eyes if we need to:::
24		((total silence now))
25		(11.0)
26		Call to mind all that we are thankful fo::r
27		(30.9)



This is the initiation of a ritual frame (“Let’s take some time in silence and stillness”), one marked by student quiet and teacher guidance of the interactional floor (a pivot from ‘hallway time’, marked by free peer talk to ‘classroom time’ marked by teacher organization) (cf. McLaren, 1986). Mr. MacPherson noticeably shifts footing twice in this short interaction, the first to call attention to the presence of the researcher (“Everyone let’s say hi to: Professor LeBlanc today”) and the second to specifically target a disruptive student (“Catherine”), but maintains the speaking floor the entire time. And where teachers in a range of schools must open their classroom with a call to attention in order to enter the focal discourse of the lesson, Mr. MacPherson (and other Catholic teachers) has an alternative strategy—in addition to providing a focal call, prayer is accompanied by a habituated cultural practice of quiet, respect, and reverence, which is less likely to be violated than the teacher’s hold on the interactional floor during regular class time—unlike unmarked speech, formal “sacred speech... gives the speaker special authority or persuasiveness, or places the listeners under special obligations” (Keane, 1997b, p. 59). Irvine (1979) suggests that as a concept, ‘formality’ has a number of valences, including the structuring of code (intonation, phonology, use of particular lexical items, etc.), co-occurrence of social rules (speaker rank), the invocation of positional identities (known speaker roles) and the construction of a central focus. What is evident in Mr. MacPherson’s use of quasi-formal prayer language is that it draws on several of these properties simultaneously—speaker roles fuse with teacher identity and what Irvine calls “side involvements” fade away: “In the main sequence, speech is governed by constraints on topic, continuity, and relevance” (p. 779) and a sole speaker prevails as central focus. While there is clearly a register shift (both in lexicon—such as honorifics—and intonation), because this is improvised prayer, the level of constraint on Mr. MacPherson appears to be minimal. By accompanying this with explicit metapragmatic speech (“Hands to ourselves:::”), Mr. MacPherson is able to center the interactional floor on his own voice. Bandak (2017) notes that these kinds of explicit instructions “can be found in social situations where prayers in themselves mould listeners in their own formulations” (p. 8).

This process of educating into the ritual frame goes as far as to request that God perform actions which produced the desired comportment in the co-present listeners: the illocutionary content of prayers mobilized to quiet a busy classroom.

**Excerpt 2**

MP: Dear Lord Jesus quiet our hearts and our minds  
 And our voices and our hands  
 Close our eyes (0.3) if need be  
 (4.3) ((scanning room))  
 Dear Lord let us be aware of your presence always

**Excerpt 3**

MP: Dear Lord open our hearts and minds  
 That we may gain all that you would have us gain (.) from this video  
 ((clicks PLAY on computer to start Youtube video))

In these interactions, the signifier Jesus becomes an additional educator in the process of ritual ordering, highlighted by a set of imperatives to “quiet our hearts and our minds”, “open our hearts” and “Close our eyes (0.3) if need be.” McLaren (1986) notes that the relative ambiguity of Christian symbols in schools makes them mobilizable for a range of educational projects—in our case here, adding a level of authority to the utterance—not just the teacher calling the genre (and accompanying postures, speaker roles, etc.) into being, but also the Divine. Returning to Goffman’s language, in these utterances the Addressed Ratified Participant is Jesus Christ, but the students are transparently the secondary Target of these prayers as the Unaddressed Ratified Participants (acknowledged as co-present in the utterance [“Dear Lord Jesus quiet our hearts and our minds”], but not specifically addressed). Thus, teachers have a range of strategies within prayer to ritually order the classroom in anticipation of the lesson.

**As an Instructional Lever**

Determining the *when* and *who* of a prayer is a key interactional task. Returning to questions of contextualization, Keane (2004) notes that “Face-to-face interactions commonly build up an indexical ground, an emergent consensus among the participants about the nature of the shared here-and-how that forms the center of their conversation” (p. 438). As the interaction continues, contextualization coheres and also varies—the deictic ground can change as participant deictics shift—personal pronouns, demonstrative, temporal, and spatial deictics, and verb tense. What is interesting about prayer is that when it is set within an interactional space like a classroom, it

must adhere to multiple contexts, including an instructional context. Prayer can consequently be an instructional lever (among many), a means to both address the Divine and simultaneously teach students (or contextualize them into the instructional setting).

In January, Mr. MacPherson opened his class with an extemporaneous prayer (see Appendix B for a full transcript; see Appendix C for a full deictic map). For the previous few days, Mr. MacPherson had been leading his Christ & Culture class through lessons on singleness and chastity, and today's class would continue—the lesson would proceed by way of a prayer, a short YouTube video by a Catholic speaker on the subject of friendship, a word association activity, and finally independent work in a booklet on the focal subject.

We see in the opening lines of the prayer the organization of two distinct parties—"we", the assembled (including Mr. MacPherson), and "you" (Lord Jesus). This sets up a relationship between these two parties, which Mr. MacPherson outlines in some detail. For the sake of organization and its relation to the deictic map, I have included line numbers here.

#### **Excerpt 4a**

37	MP:	Dear Lord Jesus we thank you for this day
38		We thank you for the gift of <u>life</u>
39		Thank you for the gift of love
40		(1.2)
41		Lord we (.) thank you for your great example (.) of life giving love
42		In the midst of the Holy Trinity
43		Father (.) Son and Holy Spirit
44		We see a mutual self-giving
45		(4.1)
46		We see the Father (.) giving his whole life and love to you Lord Jesus

Organizing this interaction by deictics, we can see how Mr. MacPherson draws on a small handful of pronominals, outlined in present continuing tense ("We thank you..."), to orchestrate the interactants.

Line	Spkr	1 <sup>st</sup> Person	2 <sup>nd</sup> Person	3 <sup>rd</sup> Person	Spatial	Temporal	Tense
37	T/MP	<i>we-</i> class w/ teacher	<i>you-</i> Jesus				pres.
38	T/MP	<i>we-</i> class w/ teacher	<i>you-</i> Jesus				pres.
39	T/MP		<i>you-</i> Jesus				pres.
41	T/MP	<i>we-</i> class w/ teacher	<i>you-</i> Jesus				pres.
41b	T/MP		<i>your-</i> Jesus' great example				pres.
44	T/MP	<i>we-</i> class w/ teacher					pres.
46	T/MP	<i>we-</i> class w/ teacher		<i>his-</i> God the Father			pres.

Figure 1. Deictic Map 1—January Extemporaneous Prayer

In this familiar prayer organization, Mr. MacPherson has only arranged two classes of interactants, and the “we” (which includes him as teacher) are fundamentally active in this present-tense process—they “see” and “thank.” In this interaction, as teacher, Mr. MacPherson is able to speak collectively for the students, to proclaim to God what they “see” and for what they are thankful, echoing a common theme in corporate prayer: the “expansion of the presupposed speaking subject beyond the level of the individual... and fostering a collaborative authorship” (Keane, 1997a, pp. 57). Each student is now implicated in the speech act. For teachers, this can act as a strategy of mutual engrossment, of drawing students into the lesson while simultaneously teaching them the content of the speech act. This prayer is a small lesson in Trinitarian theology, narrating to the Divine that which God seemingly already knows (*pace* Augustine) but lecturing for students on new material in an atmosphere of quiet and attentiveness. In Goffman’s terms, prayer is communication with Ratified Overhearers.

This instructional angle becomes more obvious as the prayerful interaction continues and the collective speaking subject, “the presumptive speaker *above* the level of the individual” (Keane, 2004, p. 442), becomes less stable by virtue of the content.

**Excerpt 4b**

62 Dear Lord as we (.) live the single life at this moment in high school  
 63 When we are still discerning our vocation (.) our future calling  
 64 To marriage  
 65 To life as a priest (.) or life as a religious sister or brother  
 66 Or life as a single person  
 67 In the world  
 68 Help us to be open to your will  
 69 For our vocation (.) it is how we will live out this call to love  
 70 And it is how we will become truly fulfilled in our life  
 71 Today Lord (1.0) help us to understand this great virtue

The pronomial division of “we” and “you” (“your” for Lord Jesus) continues, but is now joined by the use of temporal shifters—“this moment” and “today”. These temporal deictics play up the indexical ground of the interaction, anchoring it not in some distant (or unclear) temporal action (“We thank you...”) but to a specific here-and-now for the assembled (and seemingly speaking).

Line	Spkr	1 <sup>st</sup> Person	2 <sup>nd</sup> Person	3 <sup>rd</sup> Person	Spatial	Temporal	Tense
62	T/MP	<i>we- class w/o teacher??</i>				<i>this moment</i>	pres.
63	T/MP	<i>we- class w/ teacher ??</i>					pres.
63b	T/MP	<i>our/our- class w/ teacher??</i>					pres.
68	T/MP	<i>us- class w/ teacher??</i>	<i>your- Jesus</i>				pres.
69	T/MP	<i>our- class w/ teacher??</i>					pres.
69b	T/MP	<i>we- class w/ teacher ??</i>					pres.
70	T/MP	<i>we- class w/ teacher</i>					pres.
70b	T/MP	<i>our- class w/ teacher</i>					pres.
71	T/MP	<i>us- class w/ teacher</i>				<i>today</i>	pres.

Furthermore, we see the relative slippage between *speaker* (Animator/Author) and *those spoken for* by the pronomial deictics “we”, “us”, and “our” (Principal). I have indicated confusion as to who is included in the collective pronomial deictics with “??” on key lines. This confusion begins on Line 62, as Mr. MacPherson, a middle-aged married father, says “Dear Lord as we (.) live the single life at this moment in high school.” The pronomial category of “we” typically includes the speaker, Mr. MacPherson, but here he is seemingly ruled out of this category by virtue of the content it holds: “we live the single life at this moment in high school” cannot include him. This continues in the following lines, as the “we” is narrated as “discerning our vocation” to married, priestly, religious, or single life—vocations that seemingly Mr. MacPherson has long-since discerned and for whom are no longer an option. It would appear that Mr. MacPherson has shifted footing, indicated by the content of the utterance, from Principal to Animator/Author of the class. It is notable that the temporal deictics appear in the only portion of the prayer where the speaking voice is uncertain—by playing up the indexical ground of this moment, Mr. MacPherson makes the specific moment salient, and in doing so highlights those presently listening. Du Bois (1986) outlines that in much ritual speech, the goal is to play down the indexical ground of an interaction (that is, to make it entextualized so as to be timeless, lifted from its context) (see also Bauman & Briggs, 1990), but here we see the exact opposite. Just as Mr. MacPherson begins what is clearly pedagogic talk (for the ratified listeners, not the target), the contextual ground comes into the fore. Pedagogically, this also comes at a moment, noted in my fieldnotes and captured faintly in the audio, that students seemed more restless and began to whisper—thus, playing up the indexical ground of the interaction functions as a strategy for highlighting the interactional moment, and in drawing attention to that moment draws attention the interaction norms implicated by contextualizing the speech genre—attention, quiet, readiness. These overlap with and amplify the “deep grooves” of classroom talk.

### Conclusion

Prayer is a common speech genre in Catholic schools, so common that it frequently goes unnoticed and unexplored. By looking closely at how a range of speakers take up everyday prayers and put them into practice, we might see the range of applications at work. Returning to our initial framing, *educational prayer* is a blurred genre containing traditional formulaic religious material alongside obliquely instructional texts—“all genres leak” (Bauman & Briggs, 1990 p. 149) and those leakages can reveal intention and application. Once

an utterance is marked as prayer (though ritual invocation, through bodily alignment, etc.), teachers are able to flexibly maneuver the properties of the genre—phonology, morphology, lexicon, syntax, and deixis—to achieve pedagogic ends: teaching while praying, praying while teaching. In this article, I have outlined how deixis and contextualization play a role in the common exigencies of teaching, working prayer into the long-established ‘deep groves’ of classroom talk, but there remain a host of other strategies and features to be explored in this same vein.

For scholars of Catholic education, interactional sociolinguistics provides a robust theoretical and analytical repertoire for examining real-time language practices, allowing us to open the black boxes of long-circulating concepts like “Catholic school advantage”, “diversity”, and “social justice” and see them unfold piece-by-piece in classrooms, moving us away from idealizations toward an empirically-dense evidentiary base. The capacity of prayer to transform is spiritual, but also linguistic. “Prayer is speech”, we are reminded by Mauss (2008) and speech “is an instrument of action” (p. 22). While not currently part of the contemporary Catholic school research lexicon, *deixis*, *contextualization*, and *repertoire* are valuable additions to understanding what kind of action is in process in Catholic schools. By examining the ritual and extemporaneous properties of prayers at work amongst living speakers, scholars of Catholic education might see a range of contextualization processes at work—around issues of race, nationality, language, gender, age, and faith—united and dividing, focusing and blurring.

For scholars of interactional sociolinguistic, Catholic schools remain woefully understudied—as interactional spaces, as intersections of multi-scaled transformations to education, as sites of learning and language socialization. Catholic schools serve millions of children from diverse cultural, racial, linguistic, and religious backgrounds, yet remained largely unexplored by language researchers. Relatedly, prayer has received little attention in the research literature to date (Baquedano-Lopez, 2000), particularly in the linguistic anthropology of education, despite longstanding preoccupations with ritual, intertextuality, and authority. When one considers the performative aspects of prayer (Hymes, 1996; Rampton, 2006) in relation to the performative aspects of teaching—maintaining engrossment, opening up speech to criticism and aesthetic judgement, lifting talk up out of the mundane—we see an entire range of possibilities for considering prayer as part of a larger school-based speech economy. All these features speak to the need to think of prayer as flexible, multi-faceted, and social. For scholars of interactional sociolinguistics and scholars of Catholic schools, a great deal more work and a great deal more potential remains.



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## Appendix A

### Transcript Conventions

?	Rising intonation, often associated with asking a question
[ ]	Overlapping speech
	Quick halt to the prose
—	Stress or emphasis
...	Break in transcript
:	Elongated sound
(#. #)	Timed pause
(( ))	Researcher commentary on uncaptured action
XXXX	Unheard portion

## Appendix B

### January Extemporaneous Prayer Transcript

37 MP: Dear Lord Jesus we thank you for this day  
38 We thank you for the gift of life  
39 Thank you for the gift of love  
40 (1.2)  
41 Lord we (.) thank you for your great example (.) of life giving  
love  
42 In the midst of the Holy Trinity  
43 Father (.) Son and Holy Spirit  
44 We see a mutual self-giving  
45 (4.1)  
46 We see the Father (.) giving his whole life and love to you Lord  
Jesus  
47 You receiving that life and love  
48 And trusting in the Father's will completely  
49 And the love between you (.) outpours  
50 And flows out to us in the Holy Spirit  
51 Dear Lord help us to see in that example our purpose  
52 Our life  
53 How we are to live (.) our life  
54 In self-giving love  
55 That we are (.) are to be a gift of self to others  
56 And freely receive that gift from others  
57 A love between each other  
58 In bringing new life  
59 Friendship  
60 Joy  
61 (2.3)

62 Dear Lord as we (.) live the single life at this moment in high  
school  
63 When we are still discerning our vocation (.) our future calling  
64 To marriage  
65 To life as a priest (.) or life as a religious sister or brother  
66 Or life as a single person  
67 In the world  
68 Help us to be open to your will  
69 For our vocation (.) it is how we will live out this call to love  
70 And it is how we will become truly fulfilled in our life  
71 Today Lord (I.O) help us to understand this great virtue  
72 This great virtue of chastity  
73 This (.) strength  
74 This habit that we build in our life to love  
75 Without hesitation  
76 And dear Lord help us to (.) develop good friendships  
77 That strengthen us  
78 The encourage us  
79 That call us to action  
80 And call us to the best version of ourselves  
81 Dear Lord open our hearts and minds  
82 That we may gain all that you would have us gain (.) from this  
video  
83 ((clicks PLAY on computer to start Youtube video))

**Appendix C**  
**Deictic Map—January Extemporaneous Prayer**

Line	Spkr	1 <sup>st</sup> Person	2 <sup>nd</sup> Person	3 <sup>rd</sup> Person	Spatial	Temporal	Tense
37	T/MP	<i>we-</i> class w/ teacher	<i>you-</i> Jesus				pres.
38	T/MP	<i>we-</i> class w/ teacher	<i>you-</i> Jesus				pres.
39	T/MP		<i>you-</i> Jesus				pres.
41	T/MP	<i>we-</i> class w/ teacher	<i>you-</i> Jesus				pres.
41b	T/MP		<i>your-</i> Jesus' great example				pres.
44	T/MP	<i>we-</i> class w/ teacher					pres.
46	T/MP	<i>we-</i> class w/ teacher		<i>his-</i> God the Father			pres.
47	T/MP		<i>you-</i> Jesus				pres.
49	T/MP		<i>you-</i> Jesus and the Father				pres.
50	T/MP	<i>us-</i> class w/ teacher					pres.
51	T/MP	<i>us/our-</i> class w/ teacher					pres.
52	T/MP	<i>our-</i> class w/ teacher					pres.
53	T/MP	<i>our-</i> class w/ teacher					pres.
55	T/MP	<i>our-</i> class w/ teacher					future
62	T/MP	<i>we-</i> class w/o teacher??				<i>this moment</i>	pres.
63	T/MP	<i>we-</i> class w/ teacher??					pres.
63b	T/MP	<i>our/our-</i> class w/ teacher?					pres.
68	T/MP	<i>us-</i> class w/ teacher??	<i>your-</i> Jesus				pres.
69	T/MP	<i>our-</i> class w/ teacher??					pres.
69b	T/MP	<i>we-</i> class w/ teacher??					pres.
70	T/MP	<i>we-</i> class w/ teacher					pres.
70b	T/MP	<i>our-</i> class w/ teacher					pres.
71	T/MP	<i>our-</i> class w/ teacher				<i>today</i>	pres
74	T/MP	<i>our-</i> class w/ teacher??					pres.
76	T/MP	<i>us-</i> class w/ teacher					pres.
77	T/MP	<i>us-</i> class w/ teacher					pres.
78	T/MP	<i>us-</i> class w/ teacher					pres.
79	T/MP	<i>us-</i> class w/ teacher					pres.
80	T/MP	<i>us-</i> class w/ teacher					pres.
80b	T/MP	<i>ourselves-</i> class w/ teacher					pres.
81	T/MP	<i>our-</i> class w/ teacher					pres.
82	T/MP	<i>we-</i> class w/ teacher	<i>you-</i> Jesus				pres.