How to Do Things with Words and LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY®

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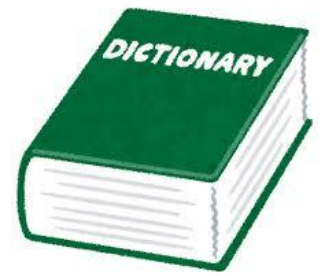
Outline

- Background
- Purpose and Research questions
- Literature review: Metalanguage
- Literature review: "How to do things with words"
- Method (date collection)
- Analysis
- Conclusion and Implication

Background

Metalanguage is a language used to describe or analyze language itself.

- **Lexicography:** In a dictionary, the definition of "apple" is written in metalanguage.
- **Philosophy:** Examining the structure and the semantic aspects of language.
- **Education:** Teaching grammar (e.g., noun, verb) and language rules. Correcting speech and giving feedback on writing.
- **Interaction**: A speaker may use metalanguage explanations to correct.

→**The role of metalanguage in supporting speech acts has not been adequately explored in ELF research, particularly in relation to achieving meaning negotiation.**

Purpose and Research questions

- We investigate how ELF (English as a lingua franca) speakers <u>negotiate meaning through the use of speech acts and metalanguage</u> while building a LEGO model.

Research questions:

1. Which speech acts and metalanguage are used?

2. How do ELF speakers <u>negotiate meaning through the combination of speech acts and metalanguage</u> during LEGO model building?

Literature review: Metalanguage

Metalanguage

- 'language about language' (Johnson and Johnson 1998: 212)
- 'a language which is used to describe language' (Lyons 1995: 7)
- 'a higher-level language for describing an object of study . . .' (Crystal 1997: 239)
- Technically, the concept of "metalanguage" is understood as either an "identifiable object separable from other manifestations of 'language'" or – more broadly – as "a dimension of language – to be found in all language use" …(Verschueren, 2000: 440)

Verschueren, J. (2000: 441) based on Jakobson (1971).

Type	Description	Example
Message referring to message (M/M)	Quoted or reported speech	He said, 'It will rain tomorrow.'
Code (language system) referring to code (C/C)	Self-referential like proper names	'John' is the name of a specific person.
Message referring to code (M/C)	Defining a word	'Pup' means a young dog. 'Pup' is a monosyllable.
Code referring to message (C/M)	Context changes, message changes.	Alice says "I am going to the store." <- "I" refers to Alice Bob says "I am going to the store." <-"I" refers to Bob

Jakobson (1960:356)

- Metalanguage is not only a necessary scientific tool utilized by logicians and linguists; it plays also an important role in our everyday language.

1 Boy: The sophomore was plucked.

2 Grandpa: But what is plucked?   <- Asking about language (M/C)

3 Boy: Plucked means the same as flunked.   <-Clarifying the meaning (C/M)

4 Grandpa : And flunked?   <- Asking about language (M/C)

5 Boy: To be flunked is to fail in an exam.   <-Clarifying the meaning (C/M)

6 Grandpa : And what is sophomore?   <- Asking about language (M/C)

7 Boy: A sophomore is a second-year student.   <-Clarifying the meaning (C/M)

*(modified by the presenter)*

Literature review: "How to do things with words"

How to do things with words
John L. Austin

- The book focuses on how we use language not just to share information, but to **actually do things**, like making promises, giving orders, or offering apologies.

- Instead of simply saying something to inform others, the speaker is **doing something with their words**.
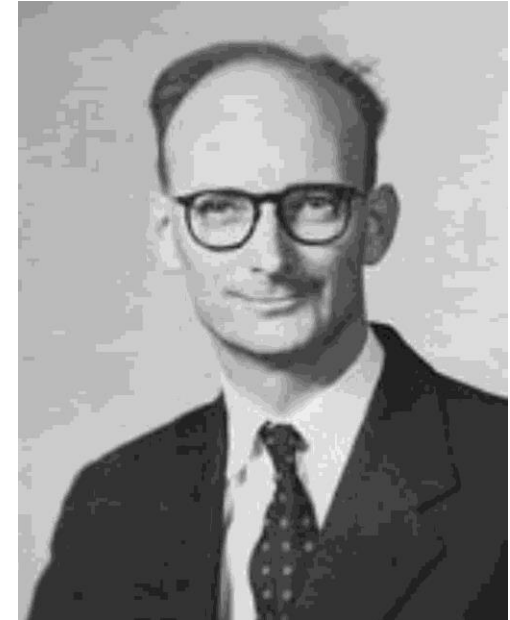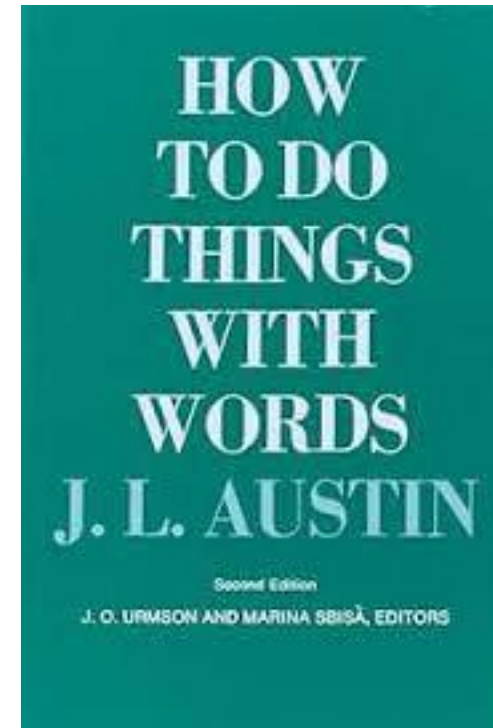
Speech act (Searle 1975)

Type	Description	Example Verbs
Assertives	to explains the facts about how things are	assert, claim, state, affirm, report, conclude, describe, suggest
Directives	to get the listener to do something	request, command, order, ask, invite, advise, recommend, beg
Commissives	commit the speaker to do something	promise, vow, pledge, guarantee, offer, agree, threaten, swear
Expressives	express the speaker's feeling and attitude	apologize, congratulate, thank, condole, compliment, praise, welcome
Declarations	change the reality through someone's utterance	declare, resign, baptize, pronounce, sentence, name, appoint

Clarifying

1. E1: what did he say? a guard? ← Directives
2. F1: guard   ← Metalanguage (C/M)
3. M5: ah:: guard   ← Metalanguage (C/M)
4. E1: you said God? or guard?   ←Metalanguage（M/C）
5. M5: uh no no I say guard   ←Metalanguage（C/M）

- **Assertive**: The speaker confirms a fact or situation.
- **C/M:** Words (code) are used to confirm or clarify the content of the message. E.g., confirming what was previously said.
- **M/C:** The message refers to the words (code) used. E.g., trying to confirm the pronunciation of the word.

Clarification and Self-correction

1 M1: the story is like he kills somebody?   ← Assertive/Directives

2 M1: like not life penalty like death penalty ← Metalanguage(C/M)

3 F1: yeah he was sentenced   ← Metalanguage(C/M)

Providing additional context

- **Assertive/Directive:** M1 in line 1 asserts a fact about the story while asking the listeners to confirm it.
- **C/M**: M1 in lin2 corrects and clarifies the term from "life penalty" to "death penalty." This self-correction refines the message. F1 in line 3 clarifies the legal aspect of the situation, using language to refine or clarify the message.

Defining

1 F1: I don't know the name but the thing ←Assertive

2 F2: yeah. I don't know how to say   ←Metalanguage (M/C)

((movement of mallet))

3 F1: me neither   ←Metalanguage (M/C)

- **Assertive:** F1 asserts their knowledge of the situation.
- **M/C:**F2 and F3 refer to their difficulty in finding the right words, commenting on the use of language (code) itself.

Method

Background to the data collection: Lego tasks

- A lager project for examining interactions for the tasks using "Lego Serious Play" (cf. Bjørndahl, Fusaroli, Østergaard, & Tylén, 2014; Fusaroli, Bjørndahl, Roepstorff, and Tylén 2016)

- Lego Serious Play   a task scene

  (214 pieces)

Six Tasks

Participants are given five minutes to build a model that illustrates an abstract concept with LEGO blocks on each task

(see the table on the right)

Practice trial: "future"	
Task 1: "responsibility"	
Task 2: "collaboration"	
Task 3: "knowledge"	
Task 4: "justice"	
Task 5: "safety"	
Task 6: "tolerance"	
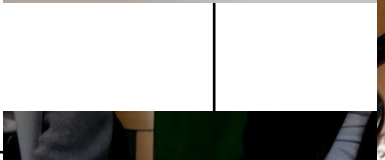
Profile of the participants

Group #	Stdt ID	Gender	First language	Proficiency level
#1	Stdt 1	F	Chinese	TOEIC 905
	Stdt 2	M	Japanese	TOEIC 915, IELTS 6.0
	Stdt 3	F	Japanese	TOEIC 840
	Stdt 4	F	Japanese	TOEIC 895
#2	Stdt 1	F	Chinese	Immigrated to the U.S. circa. 10 yrs ago.
	Stdt 2	F	Japanese	TOEIC 835
	Stdt 3	F	Japanese	TOEIC 885
	Stdt 4	F	Japanese	TOEIC 835
#3	Stdt 1	F	Polish	Lived in the UK for 10 yrs
	Stdt 2	F	Japanese	TOEIC 795
	Stdt 3	F	Japanese	TOEIC 700
	Stdt 4	F	Japanese	TOEIC 880
#4	Stdt 1	F	Chinese	CET-6
	Stdt 2	F	Italian	Cambridge Certification (C1)
	Stdt 3	M	Japanese	TOEIC 830
	Stdt 4	M	Japanese	TOEIC 845

Group #	Stdt ID	Gender	First language	Proficiency level
#5	Stdt 1	F	Chinese	CET-6
	Stdt 2	F	Chinese	CET-6
	Stdt 3	M	Spanish	TOEFL 670
	Stdt 4	M	Japanese	TOEIC 845
#6	Stdt 1	F	Italian	CEFR C1
	Stdt 2	F	Japanese	TOEIC 900
	Stdt 3	F	Japanese	TOEIC 700
#7	Stdt 1	F	Portuguese	FCE (B2)
	Stdt 2	F	Japanese	IELTS 6
	Stdt 3	F	Japanese	TOEIC 650
	Stdt 4	F	Japanese	TOEIC 630
#8	Stdt 1	M	Bilingual	English & Japanese
	Stdt 2	M	Japanese	Ireland for a year, TOEIC 650
	Stdt 3	F	Japanese	TOEIC 845
	Stdt 4	F	Japanese	TOEFL 83, TOEIC 885

2c: An overview of the participants

Number of participants/ number of groups	31 participants/ Eight groups
First language(s)	Japanese (20), Chinese (5), Polish (1), Portuguese (1), Italian (2), Spanish (1), and bilingual of English and Japanese (1)
English proficiency level	Between CEFR B1 and C2
Age range	Between 18-30 years old
Gender ratio	Female: 24 vs. Male 7 (circa. 3:1)

Data Analysis

Clarification

G8 Justice
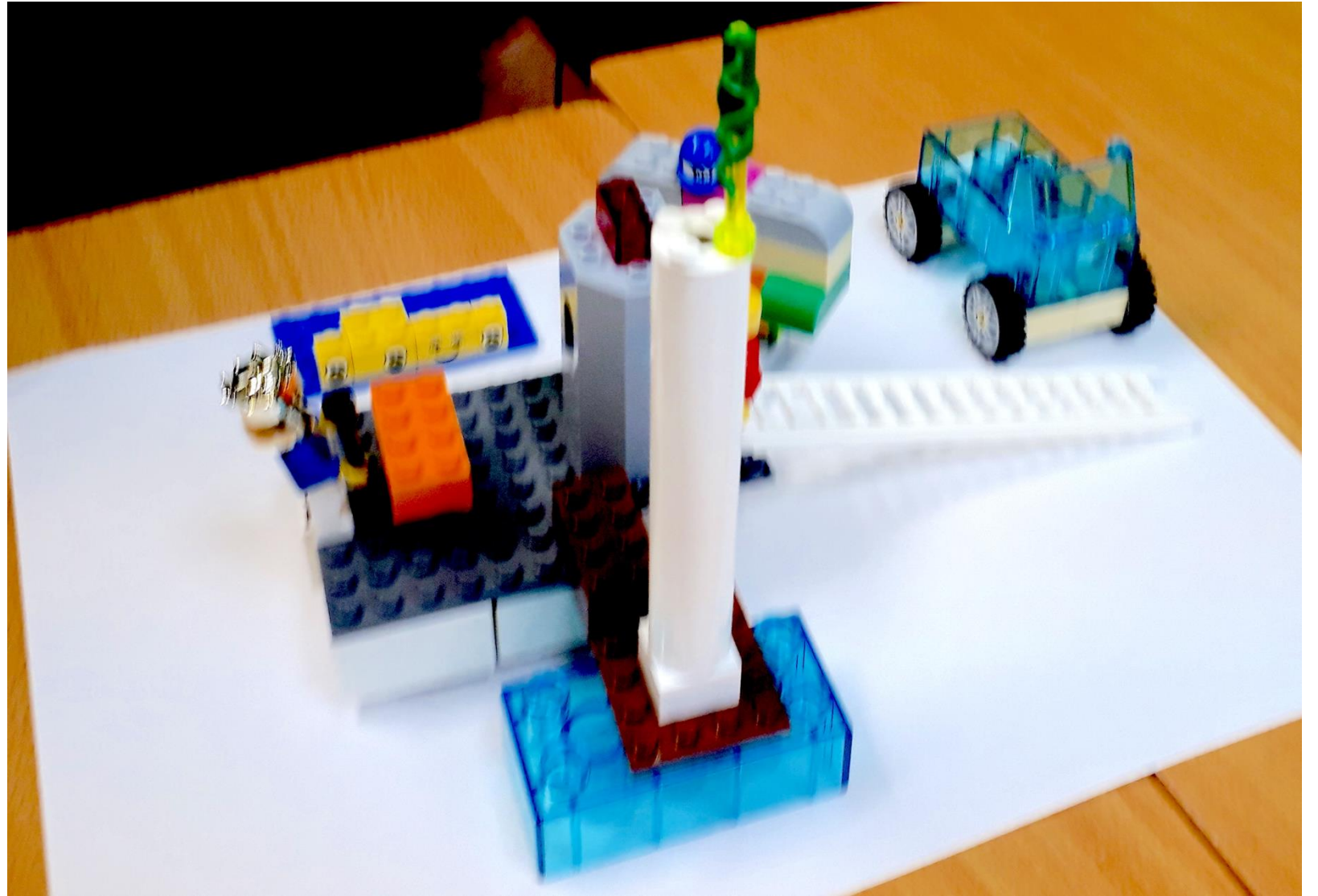
1M5:here you go, the audience. (inaudible) hh

2F15: (giggle)hh

3F14:he's making it.

4M5: oh is this a audience

5F14:right?

6E1: No: it is a guar:d. it's a guar:d

7F14:oh:

8E1: he:y remember you said you need [a guar:d and I (inaudible)

9F15:   [what he's saying? a guard? (directives)

10E1: guar:d (C/M)

11F15:(giggle)

12M5: ah:: °guard° (C/M)

13E1: oh=you said go:d? [or guar:d?(M/C)

14M5:   [uh no=no=I say guard (C/M)

16E1:   yeh guard (C/M)[yeah:

17M5:   [yeah:

18F14: oh this-

19E1:   it's uh: eh:↑::? there's one:. there's two:. and no:w here's a guar:d you know, a police officer:. (C/M)

20F14: yeah

21M5; yeah I get it hh

22F15: that's goo:d

Confirming the content, meaning, and pronunciation of their speech helps speakers prevent misunderstandings and achieve language clarification and confirmation of understanding

Self-correction

G1 Justice

```
1.F2: °yeah but- jus[tice°    ]
2.M1:                [we can] build, a
   hanger?
3.C1: m[mh ]
4.F1:  [yea][h      ]
5.F2:    [    m][mh?]
6.C1:[ mmh ]
7.M1:[like,]the story is like he kills
   somebody?(assertive/directive)
8.C1: mmh [mmh=mm:h]
9.F2:      mm[h?
10.F1:  ye[ah.
11.M1:     [so=like]
12.C1: mm:h ye:s.
13.F1:  ye[ah he-]
14.M1:     [  if it'   ]s good to: like,
```

```
15.F1:   [he wa:s]
16.M1:   [  do:,   ] like li:-
   not °life penalty° like death
   penalty?=  (C/M)
17.F1:   =yeah [he was] sen[tenced
   t-] (C/M)
18.M1:            [or not   ]
19.F2: [        mm:]h
20. C1:   mmh. justice to- but it
can stand.
21. F2:    uh[:mm      ]
22. F1:       [  mmh   ]
```

M1 initially presents a story, then uses metalanguage (C/M) to correct their terminology, in line 16 ensuring the language is accurate. F1 in 17further clarifies the legal outcome (sentencing), contributing to the shared understanding of the situation.

Defining the word meaning

G6 Justice
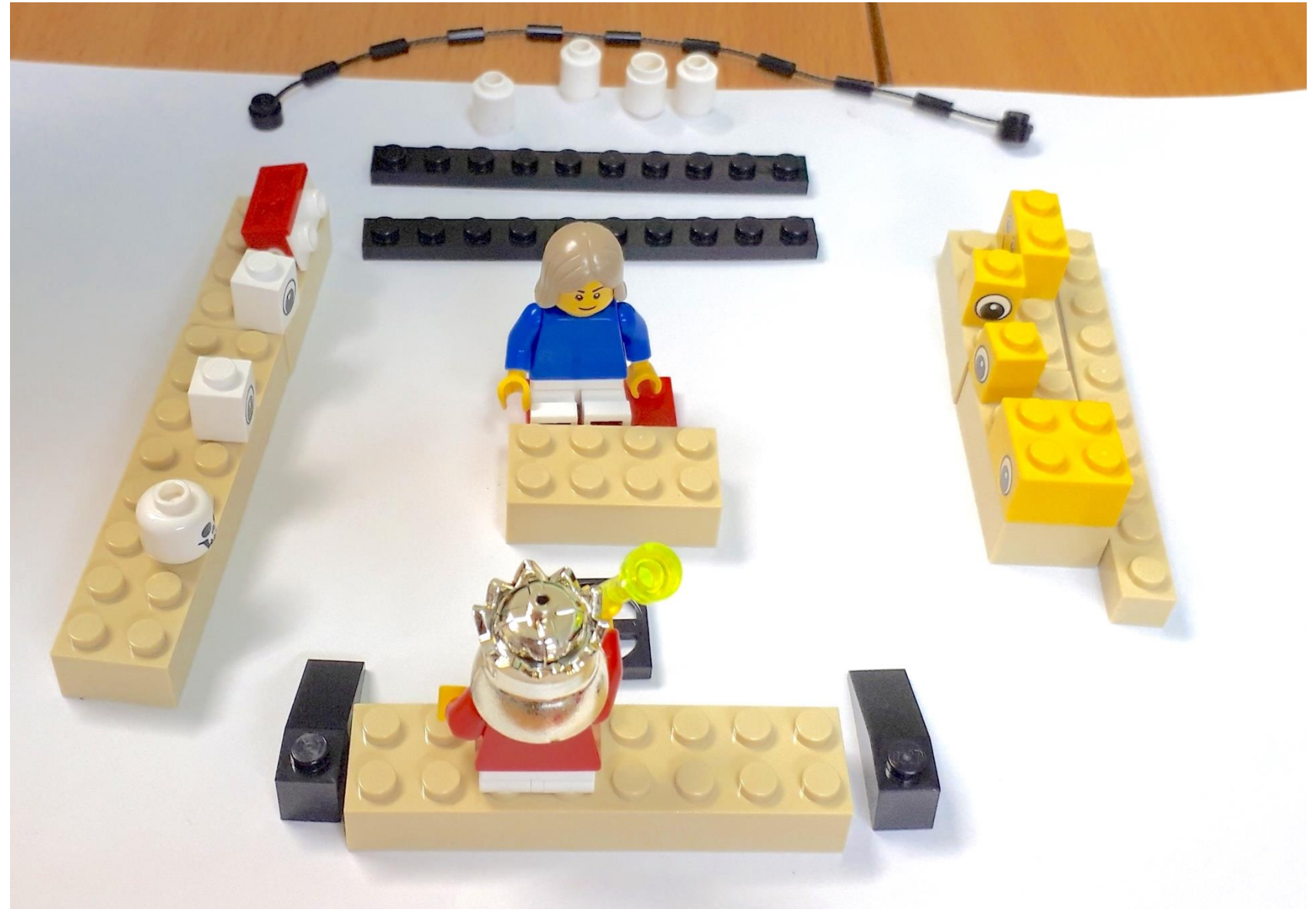
1 F10: maybe a book of law? it can be a bible ° ( ) a
book of law°

2 F9:   ah-hm   uh-hm

6 I2: yeah

7 F9: ° this°   ((reaches a piece))

8 F9: hmmm ((I2 assembles two pieces))

9 I2: ° ( )°   and judge has something to ((movement
of mallet))

10 F9: ah ((movement of mallet))

11 I2: yeah

12 F9: [a   h   h   h   h   ]

13 I2: [I don't know (by/of) the name assertive] but
the thing

14 I2: maybe it looks more like a king↑ but it will be

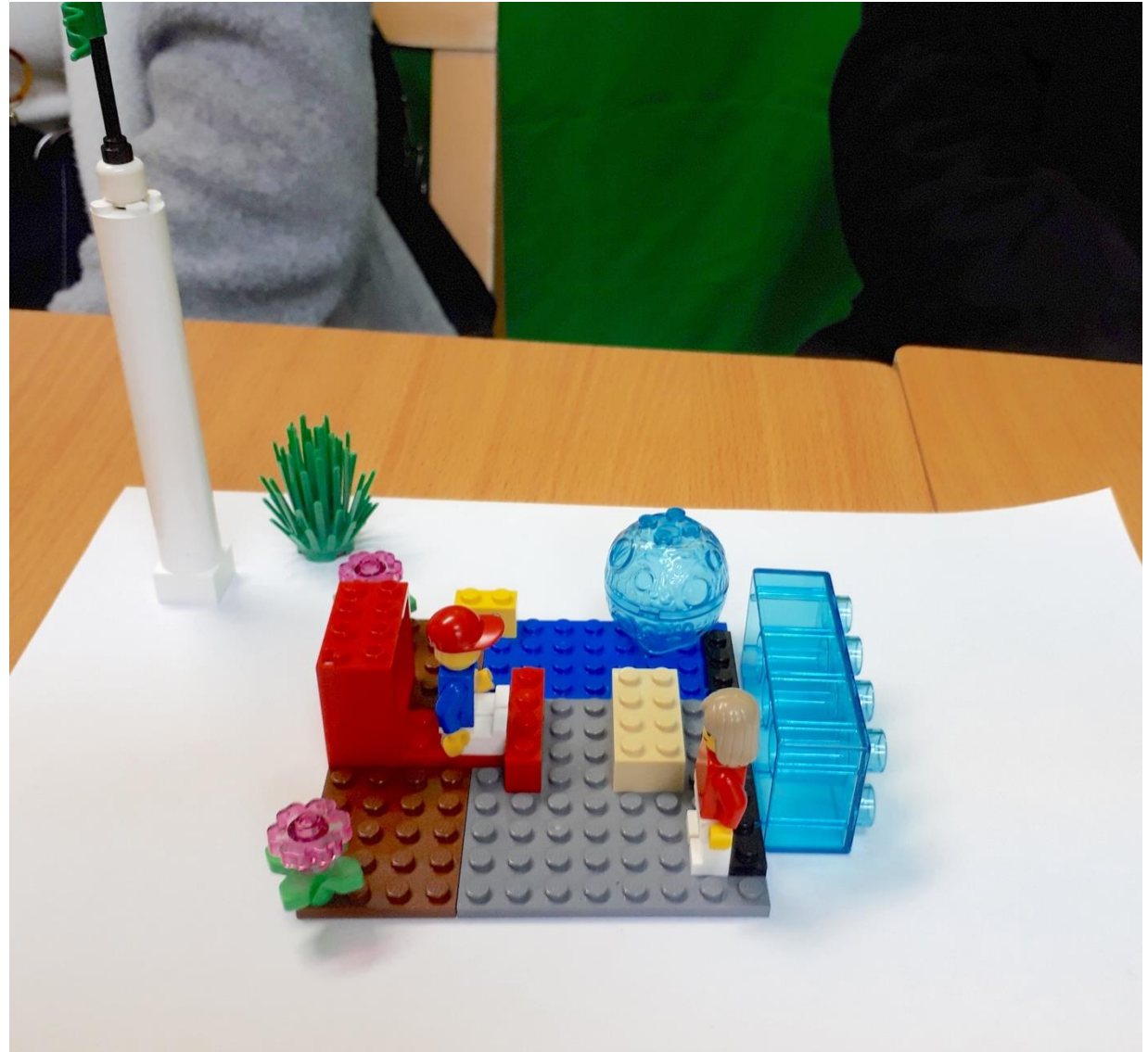15 F9: yeah. I don't know how to say (M/C)

((movement of mallet))

16 I2: me neither↑ (M/C) and I don't kno:w↑

17 F9: ° hmm°

I2 in line 13 states that she don't know the name of the object, but they understand what it is. F9 and I2 sharing their difficulty with expression. They all align their understanding.

Quoting someone's utterance

G5 Justice

1 S1:Maybe, we can put like a thi:s, like a:, [bad gu:y¿] directive

2 M4:[bad guy:?]

3 C4:.Hh

4 M4:[AHHH]

5 C5:[hhhh]

6 S1:Yeah^ look like a [bad guy,] no?=

7 C4:   >[bad guy.]

8   =Yeah.

9 S1:Look at. [AHHHHH

10M4:   [Ye[ah:

11C5:   [Yea AHH

12C4: [h [Yea.

13M4: [BUT-]

14S1:   [A:nd,] I don't know, this one is a crown?

15M4: ° Uhm-

16S1: Yea:y! It's a crown!

17C5: M^mh.

18M4:   hhh

19S1: Like a: in the PAST¿ have the: a KI:ng¿

20M4: Yeah^

21S1: [And [the King] can^ just, for the bad people and say >like uh< "YOU'RE-

22C5: [Y e a h?

23C4:   [Y e a h.]

24C5: Ay [yah yah yah:]

25S1:   ["You will die"] (M/M) or] something like that¿ then, that is Justice? (C/M)

26C4:   [(still   )]

27S1:I [don't know?]

28M4: [So: let's] create the court

S1 in line 1 suggests adding a "bad guy" to the plot for the scenario. S1 in line 21 builds on this idea by suggesting the King's action of declaring death. Then S1 states the King's action can be considered "justice," adding a moral dimension to the discussion.

Creating hypothetical scenario

G7 Justice

PT1: Ok, his hands are in the way. Ok. Oh yeah. He goes up. What else does a king need to judge someone? direcitve

F11: Hh::m[m].

PT1: Oh, that's the one (stick).

F11: Oo::hh. He is fake.

F12: fake. H[hh   ].

PT1:   [If he], let's say he is the criminal. (M/C)

F11: Ok.

F13: A:hh.

PT1: H:mm. How do we make him look like a criminal?

F11: Uh:mm. Oh- skeleton?

PT1: Oh yeah. He used to be a bad person.

F11: Yeah.

PT1: Hh. Ok, he is a bad person. He has a hat, cause it makes him look more,

PT1: Hhhhh.

F11: Hhhhh.

PT1: Ohh ok.

G7

"Let's say" is used to imagine something and talk about it. it helps us perform **the act of creating a hypothetical scenario**. All participants understand and agree on the setting.

Conclusion

Conclusion

Research question 1: Which speech acts and metalanguage are used?

ELF speakers used two types of speech acts: directives (to give instructions or requests) and assertives (to state facts or describe situations). They also employed various types of metalanguage, including (M/C), (M/M), and (C/M), to clarify and correct misunderstandings.

Conclusion

Research question 2: How do ELF speakers negotiate meaning through the combination of speech acts and metalanguage during LEGO model building?

ELF speakers use speech acts (directives and assertives) to express their intentions, describe actions, or state facts during LEGO model building. Then, they use metalanguage to clarify or correct misunderstandings (e.g., adjusting unclear terms or verifying the meaning). This combination helps them ensure mutual understanding, resolve ambiguities, and effectively collaborate while building the LEGO model.

Implications for Teaching:

- **(M/C) - Clarifying terms**:
  Encourage students to ask for clarification of unfamiliar terms to enhance their vocabulary and comprehension.

    e.g., *I don't understand what you mean by 'XXXX*.'

- **(M/M) - Clarifying understanding**:
  Promote summarizing and rephrasing to confirm understanding of key concepts.

    e.g., *So, you're saying that we need to increase the budget.*

- **(C/M) - Adjusting language usage**:
  Teach students to self-correct and refine their language to improve clarity and communication.

    e.g., *Sorry, I mean 'increase the sales,' not 'increase the profit.'*

Thank you for your attention.