This paper explores the roles of the participants during an evaluation session in the context of labour market training for immigrants. The data consist of video-taped conversations between a trainee (speaker of Finnish as L2), and her evaluators (a kindergarten teacher and a supervisor) after an internship in a Finnish kindergarten. I will show how the evaluators’ judgements about the trainee and her professional, personal and linguistic skills are structured both according to the global agenda, and by the actions which emerge locally as a part of the unfolding interaction. On the macro level, the two native-speaker participants are engaged in the act of assessing, while the trainee is the target of evaluation. In addition to the asymmetrical constraints on the participants’ actions built in the situation, the conversations are also characterized as a collegial interaction between adult professionals. I will demonstrate that this multilayered character of the interaction is manifested as changes in the activity type: (i) from an explicit evaluation by the evaluators, (ii) to a joint justification of an assessment, or to a jointly produced narrative sequence by the evaluators and the trainee. This fluctuation of activity types is implemented through changes in the participation framework (Goffman 1981), more specifically in and through the foregrounding of situational vs. discourse roles or identities (cf. Zimmermann 1998). The participants are involved in the joint construction of interpretations of categories used in the evaluation talk such as ‘interactional skills’, ‘motivation’ and ‘sufficient language proficiency’. The speech of the evaluators activates speech chains (Bahtin 1986, Agha 2007) that represent discourses of social bureaucracy, employment practices and language testing. These embedded discourses produce polyphony and scale-jumping (Blommaert 2010) in the conversation. I will demonstrate how some of these (language) ideological categorizations are made explicit and negotiated among the participants during the interaction.

Keywords: asymmetrical interaction, multi-layered discourse, participation framework.