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The Multimodality of corrective feedback in tandem interactions

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Abstract

Language tandem interactions provide a unique collaborative learning environment, as each participant takes turns being the native and the non-native side of the dialogue (Brammerts & Calvert, 2003). Although corrective feedback (CF) has received considerable attention in SLA literature (Lyster & Ranta, 1997, Sheen & Ellis, 2011), relatively little is known about CF occurring in these non-institutional peer-to-peer native/non-native interactions. We hypothesize that participants will mobilize resources that they share despite their different mother tongues and L1 cultures, namely non-verbal ones (prosody, gestures). Based on the qualitative yet systematic analysis in ELAN of 4 video recordings of interactions between French and English native speakers from the SITAF corpus (Horgues & Scheuer, 2013), we analyze CF focus, CF type, and the multimodal resources used for CF. Our study shows that CF is a highly multimodal activity (more than 86% of the time), identifies the main non-verbal resources used for CF request, provision and uptake and analyses the participants' consistent idiosyncratic multimodal CF strategies.

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Keywords: Corrective Feedback; Tandem Learning; L2 Acquisition; Multimodality; Spoken Interactions; Gestures; Prosody

1. The SITAF corpus

The present study analyses data gathered as part of the SITAF project (*Spécificités des Interactions Verbales dans le Cadre de Tandems Linguistiques Anglais-Français*), run at the

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University of Sorbonne Nouvelle between 2012-14. In this 25-hour video-recorded corpus, 21 pairs of undergraduate students interact in ‘tandems’ consisting of an English native speaker and a French one. The data – equally divided between the two languages – was collected during two recording sessions, separated by a 3-month interval. The participants perform 3 linguistic activities: (1) a speaking task – the *Liar, Liar* game (the native listener has to identify 3 lies incorporated by their partner into a personal story); (2) an argumentative task – the *Like Minds* game (after discussing a controversial subject, the interactants determine their degree of agreement); (3) a reading task.

We keep the definition of corrective feedback (CF) elaborated in SLA for language teachers’ classroom interventions (Lyster & Ranta, 1997, Sheen & Ellis, 2011) and transpose it to tandem interactions. CF is understood as an equivalent of *negative evidence*, following Long (1996) or Gass (2003), i.e. “the type of information that is provided to learners concerning the incorrectness of an utterance” (Gass, 2003: 225). In our specific context, CF corresponds to the production of negative evidence by the native speaker, who proposes a more target-like linguistic form than that of the L2 learner. The tandem interaction format is likely to have profound consequences on CF strategies. We hypothesize that participants will mobilize resources that they share despite their different mother tongues and L1 cultures, namely non-verbal ones (prosody, gestures). The use of 3 cameras, one aimed at each individual and one capturing the whole set (see Fig. 1), to video-record the tandem interactions allows for detailed multimodal analysis, including vocal and gestural output.

2. Participants selection

We selected the four analysed recordings based on previous studies on the SITAF corpus.

(i) Two studies on the SITAF participants’ attitudes (Manoïlov & Tardieu, in press, Horgues & Tardieu, 2015) revealed that some participants (‘declared hypocorrectors’) disliked providing CF while others (‘declared hypercorrectors’) liked providing CF, deeming it useful and enjoyable.

(ii) The *Liar, Liar* game entailed three times as many CF instances as the *Like Minds* game. One possible reason for this could be that the *Liar, Liar* game made the native-speaking participant focus more on their interlocutor’s discourse than on their own. Although the reading task led to more CF than the spontaneous tasks (Horgues & Scheuer, 2014), it was not included here because its CF focus is limited to pronunciation errors and reading from a written text drastically reduces the participants’ use of multimodal strategies.

(iii) In line with previous research on the psycholinguistic dimension of tandem learning (Brammerts & Calvert, 2003), the SITAF participants showed an increased tolerance to non-target use of their L1 in time, with the rate of CF instances decreasing by about 20% at the second session three months later.

Based on these findings, we selected the two French-speaking participants (F11, F14) and the two English-speaking participants (A01, A11) who produced the most CF in interaction (with A11 and F11 being declared hypercorrectors), and focused on the first recording session of the *Liar, Liar* game.

3. Method

We propose a qualitative yet systematic coding scheme to identify the multimodal features of CF in tandem interactions. Every CF occurrence is annotated in ELAN and coded according to the following parameters:

- CF focus: pronunciation, vocabulary, grammar/syntax,

- CF type: recast (in which the native speaker produces the target-like form directly), explicit correction (which involves metadiscursive comments), clarification request,
- CF request: requested, not requested, hesitation,
- CF uptake: uptake, partial uptake, mere acknowledgment, no uptake (we borrow the term *uptake* used in SLA literature to refer to “a student’s utterance that immediately follows the teacher’s feedback” (Lyster & Ranta, 1997: 49)).

Furthermore, for CF request, provision and uptake, we coded:

- Whether participants used verbal, vocal and/or visual resources, and for each modality:
 - o Verbal content,
 - o Vocal features: falling/rising tone, hyperarticulation, exclamation, tone imitation,
 - o Gestures: articulators, forms and functions (following Kendon, 2004): hand gestures (representational, pragmatic, interactive), head nods and shakes, facial variations (smile, squinting eyes, raised eyebrows).

The coding scheme allowed us to identify some CF strategies that are specific to the CF activity and/or participants.

4. Results

4.1. Data overview

For the four videos (total length: about 34 minutes), the coding scheme yields 67 occurrences of CF, distributed as follows:

Table 1. Corpus data.

Tandem pair	Tandem participants	CF occurrences	Time length of recording
A11-F11 FR	A11 French learner, F11 French native	24	10'36
A11-F11 ENG	F11 English learner, A11 English native	12	6'25
A14-F14 FR	A14 French learner, F14 French native	18	7'59
A01-F01 ENG	F01 English learner, A01 English native	13	8'54
TOTAL		67	33'54

Recast is the most frequent CF type with 69% of occurrences (46). Explicit corrections are less frequent (30%; 20) and clarification requests are very rare (1%; 1). CF focus is distributed as follows:

Table 2. CF focus.

Vocabulary	33
Grammar/syntax	19
Grammar and vocabulary	9
Pronunciation	4
Vocabulary and pronunciation	2
TOTAL	
	67

Most CF occurrences bear on one type of error only. Some CF (16%; 11) combines two types of error, e.g. vocabulary and grammar. Vocabulary errors are the most frequently corrected (66%; 44).

CF is requested 57% of the time (38), not requested 40% of the time (27), or more rarely (3%; 2) follows a hesitation on the part of the L2 learner. CF is often followed by the L2 learner's uptake (66%; 44 occurrences) or partial uptake (12%; 8). More rarely, the L2 learner produces no uptake at all, (16%; 11) or merely acknowledges the CF through back-channeling (“ok”, “yeah”; 6%; 4).

The coding scheme reveals that CF is a highly multimodal interactional activity:

- 94% of CF occurrences are multimodal (63), i.e. include verbal, vocal and visual resources. Only 6% (4) of CF is verbal-and-vocal only.
- 92% of CF request is multimodal (35 out of 38). Only 8% (3) is verbal-and-vocal only.
- 86% of CF uptake is multimodal (38 out of 44). 14% (6) is verbal-and-vocal only.

4.2. The role of visual resources in CF sequences

Hand gestures, head movements and facial variations are the most frequently used visual resources.

The native speaker's CF provision mobilizes hand gestures 66% of the time (44). As often in the context of talk-in-interaction, some gestures are multifunctional (Kendon, 2004). The most frequent hand gesture functions are representational (21) and pragmatic ones (18). Interactive gestures are less frequent (7). This suggests that the native speaker providing CF often supplements verbal content with a visual illustration to clarify the meaning (representational gestures), or highlights the special status of his or her intervention as an instance of CF with a pragmatic (metadiscursive) gesture. Head nods are another frequent strategy (18). If speaker nods can mark emphasis or certainty (Poggi et al., 2011), they here reinforce the assertiveness of the native speaker's verbal CF and his/her legitimacy in providing expert CF.

Hand gestures are often used during CF request (71%; 27/38). Representational gestures (20) are more frequent than interactive (7) and pragmatic (4) ones. CF request often mobilizes the upper face: the L2 learners repeatedly use squinting eyes (10) or raised eyebrows (5) in combination with hand gestures. Representational hand gestures in CF request are linked with vocabulary as a CF focus (17 occurrences out of 20); their frequent use suggests that L2 learners endeavour to provide visual hints for the native speaker. The use of squinting eyes probably has a metaphoric motivation (Bouvet, 2001): with seeing as a conventionalized metaphor for knowing, a face displaying difficulties seeing is used as a way to express difficulties understanding. Raised eyebrows are usually used as visually iconic of a rising tone marking emphasis or questions (Bolinger, 1983, Debras, 2013).



Fig. 1. L2 learner F11 multimodally aligns with native speaker A11 (“a rooster”).

Out of the 52 instances of total (44) or partial (8) CF uptake, hand gestures are used 39 times. Representational (13), pragmatic (13), interactive (13) gestures are used in equal proportions. Multimodal alignment (Du Bois, 2007) is a recurrent CF uptake strategy: 12 times, the L2 learner reproduces not only the verbal content proposed by the native speaker, but also the same intonation contour and/or gesture. This allows the L2 learner to both proceed to and indicate an appropriation of new knowledge. In Fig. 1, L2 learner F11 (left) repeats native speaker A11 (right)'s representational gesture as she integrates the word "rooster".

4.3. Individual multimodal strategies in CF sequences

A striking finding is that participants elaborate consistent idiosyncratic multimodal strategies dedicated to a specific CF stage (request, provision or uptake).

L2 learner F01 recurrently uses the same multimodal CF request strategy: when asking for vocabulary, she combines a paraphrase of the unknown word with a representational gesture to illustrate it, thereby clarifying her request. Fig. 2 (a) illustrates her representational gesture when describing "a kind of ball you put on trees":



Fig. 2. (a) F01's CF request strategy: paraphrase + representational gesture; (b) A11's CF pragmatic gesture; (c) F11's CF pragmatic abstract pointing gesture; (d) Figure 6. A14's CF uptake interactive gesture.

This CF request strategy is felicitous: each time, native speaker A01 proposes relevant CF, as in this case: “oh like a bauble”.

As a native speaker, A11 uses a stable visual strategy when providing CF: he combines the verbal content with a pragmatic gesture, with which he seems to hold a long, thin object between the thumb and index finger, literally manipulating verbal segments like concrete objects, as per Streeck (1994) (Fig. 2 (b)).

Native speaker F11 also uses a specific recurrent multimodal strategy: 10 times out of 24, she accompanies her CF with an abstract pointing pragmatic gesture (Fig. 2 (c)), as if pointing to her own words with her index, while hyperarticulating the verbal content. She marks vocal stresses with slight beats of the index, highlighting her prosody multimodally to clarify CF content.

Finally, L2 learner A14's CF uptake strategy is to take up F14's CF with a fast interactive citing gesture (as per Bavelas et al., 1992, Fig. 2 (d)) directly referring to the CF that has just been provided (11 times out of 15).

5. Conclusion and further perspectives

Corrective feedback in the course of tandem interactions is a highly multimodal activity. Both the native speaker and the L2 learner rely on shared non-verbal resources (e.g. representational hand gestures) to clarify their meaning during each of the three CF stages (request, provision, uptake). Multimodality seems to contribute positively to the negotiation of meaning between the two tandem partners, thereby facilitating the integration of new L2 knowledge. The latter aspect seems particularly salient in the field of lexical development. Concerning pronunciation, both native speakers and learners tend to rely on visual cues when providing or taking up phonetic CF respectively (e.g. hand or face movements; visual alignment in silently mirroring the expert's articulatory movement, e.g. in pronouncing the long /i:/ in geese).

Yet individual differences in corrector and learner profiles cannot be factored out and should be investigated more systematically, since some participants appear to be more proactive in requesting and/or providing CF than others. The picture is complex since the various instances of interaction are not directly comparable: after all, each native listener is confronted with slightly different L2 output, containing variable types and amount of errors calling for variable corrective strategies.

The present study has focused on CF in its immediate context. However, a broader, finer-grained exploration of CF timing could further account for the underlying processes at work. Indeed, CF provision and uptake are sometimes delayed, occurring much later in time. For instance, when A01 first mispronounces the silent <t> in French “rats”: “[A01] on a vu des raTs juste à côté”, her francophone partner rectifies the pronunciation as a recast in the follow-up question “[F01] mais, mais des rats où?”, which is not taken up by A01 right away. However when the question is asked again 2 minutes later, A01 has fixed the target-like pronunciation: “oui, beaucoup de rats”. On the whole, uptake permanency (i.e. stable L2 acquisition) remains a complex concept for researchers to apprehend and evaluate.

The socio-cultural aspect of CF should also be looked into. The French-speaking participants of the SITAF corpus provide twice as much CF as their native-English speaking counterparts (Horgues & Tardieu, 2015) and correct an equal amount of morphosyntactic and lexical errors, while English-speaking participants show a clear preference for lexical corrections (with 52% of all CF instances identified as vocabulary-oriented by Horgues & Scheuer, 2015). Requesting, providing and taking up CF is therefore, at least partly, socioculturally determined, with all the multimodal implications attached.

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