Computer-mediated synchronous and asynchronous corrective feedback provided by trainee teachers to learners of French: a preliminary study

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Abstract. In this paper, we investigate whether trainee teachers' practices, with respect to multimodal feedback, differ from current research, and to what extent it may affect students' language development. More specifically, the goal of the present study is threefold: (1) it observes how trainee teachers responded, whether synchronously, asynchronously, or a combination of both, to their students' incorrect language while or after interacting orally with them in French via a videoconference platform, (2) it considers the trainee teachers' beliefs regarding the efficacy of their feedback in light of semi-structured interviews, and (3) it explores the students' responses to corrective feedback received in synchronous and asynchronous settings through recorded videoconferencing sessions and interviews. The data set used for this preliminary study is drawn from a multimodal learning and teaching corpus, the InteractionS and Multimodality in lAnguagE Learning (ISMAEL) Project, a large collection of multimodal interactions and productions occurring between French trainee teachers in France and learners of French at university level in Ireland. Results show that asynchronous written feedback might strengthen the reception of oral synchronous feedback, thus leading to internalisation.

Keywords: corrective feedback, multimodality, synchronous, asynchronous, trainee teacher.

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1.   Introduction

Corrective feedback, defined as "any indication to a learner that his or her use of the target language is incorrect" (Lightbown & Spada, 1999, p. 172), may be provided to students synchronously or asynchronously, where the main contrast "lies in the timing of the feedback – namely, whether it is immediate or delayed", respectively (Shintani, 2015, p. 17). Corrective feedback may also be implicit or explicit. As specified by Ellis, Loewen, and Erlam (2006), "[i]n the case of implicit feedback, there is no overt indicator that an error has been committed, whereas in explicit feedback types, there is" (pp. 340-341).

Advanced technology nowadays enables teachers to provide corrective feedback in several modes. Multimodality is defined by Siegel (2012) as "the social practice of making meaning by combining multiple semiotic resources" (p. 671). Multimodal corrective feedback, in the context of this preliminary study, implies feedback provided to students both orally during interactive sessions and in writing in an end-of-session report, in which each feedback items could be accompanied with video excerpts from the sessions and audio recordings.

After briefly presenting the data, this paper focuses on how feedback emitted by French trainee teachers either synchronously or asynchronously was received by learners of French.

2.   Methodology

2.1.   Participants and context

The ISMAEL corpus includes multimodal interactions and productions of 19 first-year university students in Ireland learning French as a foreign language (Blin, Guichon, Thouësny, & Wigham, 2014). They participated once a week during 6 weeks in 45-minute videoconferences with 12 French trainee teachers based in France. Of relevance to the present study are the recordings of 8 videoconferencing sessions involving 4 trainee teachers and 7 students, for which we have the former's immediate and delayed feedback, as well as most post semi-structured interviews for both.

2.2.   Data coding and analysis

The data was coded in terms of feedback emission and reception. Our classification with respect to emission of synchronous and asynchronous corrective feedback

(Table 1) is arranged from implicit to explicit and is adapted from the work of Ellis (2009), Lyster and Ranta (1997), and Zourou (2012). The grid of feedback reception is built from our own data observation (Table 2).

Table 1. Feedback emission

Emission	Synchronous	Asynchronous
E0	inconspicuous markers[3]	n/a
E1	facial mimics and/or visible markers	n/a
E2	recast, clarification requests, elicitation, repetition	recast (orally) emphasis (in written)
E3	incorrect form pointed out without further explanations	equivalent
E4	incorrect form pointed out and a link to help students correct the incorrect form provided	equivalent
E5	incorrect form pointed out and metalinguistic explanations provided	equivalent
E6	correct form provided without explanations	equivalent
E7	correct form provided with explanations	equivalent

Table 2. Feedback reception

Reception	Synchronous
R0	students do not show any evidence feedback is received
R1	students do not show intentional evidence feedback is received
R2	students show intentional evidence feedback is received
R3	students show feedback is received with a simple "yes" or "ok"
R4	students ask for clarifications
R5	students use feedback to correct themselves, but inappropriately
R6	students use feedback to correct themselves appropriately

3.   Results and discussion

3.1.   Trainee teachers' responses to students' incorrect forms

Table 3 shows that trainee teacher Adèle, for instance, identified 29 + 13 errors while interacting with her students, thus providing 42 synchronous opportunities for learners to notice their incorrect forms, from which 29 incorrect forms were further detailed in her written report. In addition, Adèle described 3 errors in her written report, for which she did not provide any synchronous explanations. In general terms, trainee teachers provided more synchronous – or a combination of synchronous and asynchronous – corrective feedback rather than asynchronous only.

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3. See Guichon, Betrancourt, and Prié (2012).

Table 3. Incorrect forms identified by trainee teachers

Trainee teachers	Errors in sequences for which the trainee teacher provided feedback as:							
	asynchronous feedback only		asynchronous + synchronous feedback		synchronous feedback only		Total	
Adèle	3	6.67%	29	64.44%	13	28.89%	45	100.00%
Melissa	16	38.10%	20	47.62%	6	14.29%	42	100.00%
Samia	6	26.09%	8	34.78%	9	39.13%	23	100.00%
Victor	5	16.66%	8	26.67%	17	56.67%	30	100.00%
Total	30	21.43%	65	46.43%	45	32.14%	140	100.00%

3.2. Trainee teachers' beliefs regarding feedback strategies

The interviews with the trainee teachers reveal that their beliefs with respect to feedback strategies are not always in alignment with their actual practices. For instance, Victor claimed that he deliberately chose not to offer any synchronous feedback while interacting with his student. Yet, we count as much as 83.24% of synchronous feedback compared to 16.66% of exclusive asynchronous feedback. This statement is in line with numerous studies which have found that teachers' beliefs with respect to corrective feedback in educational settings and their actual practices were not always aligned (e.g. Junqueira & Payant, 2015; Roothooft, 2014). For instance, Roothooft (2014) observes that while teachers trust it is important not to disrupt the students' flow of conversation and prefer to leave an error uncorrected, they are convinced that providing oral corrective feedback is an essential stage in language learning; they seem to be unaware of the amount of feedback they actually provide to students while interacting with them.

3.3. Students' responses to corrective feedback

Table 4 displays the tendency of how feedback was received while emitted synchronously. For instance, trainee teachers placed 17 markers (E0) – indicating their intention of asynchronous feedback –, which naturally were not perceived by students (R0). Although it is worth mentioning that no feedback was provided at levels E3, E4, and E5, and that almost half of the feedback was provided at level E2 with only 20.83% of feedback received and properly re-employed (R6), our intention is not to infer that to ensure feedback is received 100 percent of the time (R6), they must be emitted at level E7. As Lantolf and Poehner (2011) argue, "if the instructional aim is simply to help learners arrive at a correct response, then explicit feedback is certainly an efficient means. However, [...] if the intention is

to promote development then process must be foregrounded, as in the [zone of proximal development]" (p. 17).

Table 4. Synchronous feedback emission/reception

	R0	R1	R2	R3	R4	R5	R6
E0 (n=17)	100.00%						
E1 (n=5)	80.00%						20.00%
E2 (n=48)	14.58%	8.33%	6.25%	16.67%	6.25%	27.08%	20.83%
E3 (n=0)							
E4 (n=0)							
E5 (n=0)							
E6 (n=37)	2.70%	2.70%		18.92%		10.81%	64.86%
E7 (n=3)							100.00%

In line with sociocultural perspectives, we noted that some corrective feedback (25 in total) was provided as a discussion, where meaning was negotiated, rather than as standalone pieces of information on one particular linguistic aspect. One discussion, for instance, evolved around the word bailler (to yawn). Mélissa, a trainee teacher, asked Ana (student #1) for clarification as she did not understand the student's request. Ana, understanding the trainee teacher's recast, repeated herself (E2/R6). Mélissa asked this time for clarification in writing using the chat modality. Ana understood the task but requested help with respect to spelling (E2/R4). The trainee teacher further requested clarification before seeing what the student meant and proposing the correct form, whose suggestion was straight away accepted by Ana and successfully re-employed (E6/R6). At this stage, Alejandra (student #2) seemed to grasp the meaning of the word with a smile and a timid "yes" (E6/R3). The trainee teacher then went on with Alejandra and offered her the opportunity to repeat and use the word, though this did not happen, as the student only confirmed she understood (E2/R3). While in general, and more particularly in this example, feedback emission (when provided as a set of interactions) tends to go from implicit to explicit, our certitude that the feedback is actually received and at what level is, however, not predictable.

With respect to asynchronous feedback, our dataset shows that more than half of the feedback provided were at level E2, the rest being mostly offered at level E6/E7 (E2=65.55%; E6=15.2%; E7=7.6%; positive feedback related to negative synchronous feedback=1.9%). From Ana's post interview (student #1), we know that the verb bailler (to yawn), further explained in her end-of-session written report, is now fully internalised, thus confirming her reception at level R6 while interacting synchronously. However, the level of reception for Alejandra (student #2) could not be further investigated as this linguistic point was not part of her report.

4.   Conclusion

It is worth recalling that the findings of this preliminary study are drawn from the data of a small sample, thus implying that further research is necessary to shed a clearer light on the relation between emission and reception of synchronous and asynchronous feedback.

Although trainee teachers' beliefs with respect to feedback and their actual practices were not always aligned, they tried to make the most of the situation to help students notice their incorrect forms. They all provided synchronous oral corrective feedback during the sessions and gave a more detailed account to some of the errors in their end-of-session written reports.

Either provided synchronously or asynchronously, feedback was mostly emitted at a very implicit or explicit level. Only 1 in 5 implicit feedback was re-employed at the time of the interactions. However, it is worth mentioning that a feedback labeled with a lower reception level does not infer that it was not received, it just indicates that we do not know whether or not it was noticed for later re-use, for instance, in the same or subsequent sessions; this would need further investigation.

Finally, students in general – Ana in particular – were pleased with the additional explanations provided in the end-of-session written reports. While being post interviewed, students talked about their incorrect forms occurring in their reports, which clearly shows that the correct forms for most of them are now fully internalised.

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