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Mechanisms for the control of intersubjectivity: anchorage and the control of the other's words

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Abstract

The analysis of a sequence of interaction in which two students from ELE of intermediate level conducted an activity of information gape suggests that the learners deployed two types of mechanisms for control of intersubjectivity: anchor and the control of the other's words. Through anchorage, the partners point out their perspective and clarify the other's perspective by clarification requests and confirmation checks. Through the control of the other's words, strengthen their understanding of the perspective of the other.

Keywords: Intersubjectivity, anchor, control, perspective.

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1. Introduction

During the realization of activities of information gaps, the partners can share the same goal, but take different intentions to achieve it or interpret the linguistic symbols from divergent perspectives. In this regard a key concept is that of intersubjectivity that involves the ability to understand the perspective of the other. In this study, I propose to investigate the mechanisms that the partners deploy to ensure understanding of their perspectives.

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2. State of the art: The linguistic symbols: the voice of the I and the you

The linguistic symbols are social conventions by which a partner attempts to share the attention with other towards an object in the outside world (Tomasello, 1999, 2003).

The use of linguistic symbols, both in mother tongue and second language, allows human beings to develop a cognitive representation different from that of other animal species. While primates and newly born infants represent their environment based only on their own experience, the human being from nine months points out objects in the outside world which are not their individual experiences which they want to share with others, and this makes use of the symbols. Symbols, according to Tomasello (1999: 96), have two exclusive characteristics of the human species: they are intersubjective in the sense that they are socially shared with other people and are equipped with perspective which represents a particular way of seeing an object or event.

They are socially shared because the speaker assumes that he understands and produces the same symbol as the listener and this one understands and produces the same symbol as the speaker. It is a process that Tomasello called reversible imitation whereby each partner assumes that you can adopt the role of the other in a scene of joint attention (Bruner, 1983). In other words, the speaker uses symbol to direct the attention of the listener in the same way that the listener uses them to attract the speaker's attention. The result of this process of reversible imitation is the linguistic symbol: a communicative device including intersubjectively from both sides of the interaction, something very different from what happens with communicative signals emitted by chimpanzees and some communicative gestures of pre-linguistic children because in these cases, each participant understands only his role, from his unique perspective. On the other hand, to understand and express a communicative intention is necessary to understand of the intention of the other.

The second feature of linguistic symbols is that they are equipped with multiple perspectives. This property derives from the human ability to adopt different perspectives on the same object for different communicative purposes. This ability multiplies indefinitely the specificity with which symbols can be used to manipulate the attention of others, but it can create a problem since such a high degree of specificity required the interlocutor to understand the intentions of another regarding their attention. Hence, the need for intersubjectivity. Defined as explicit or implicit knowledge sharing on the orientation of the task (Rommetveit, 1979), intersubjectivity has been put into relation with the concept of decentration (Piaget & Inhelder, 1969) with take of perspective (Gillespie, 2007; Gillespie & Cornish, 2010), i.e. with the ability of the subject to adopt the perspective of the other and, thus, share a same universe (Mead, 1922).

The concept of significant symbol of Mead (1922), is very close to the sign of Vygotsky (1978), as notes Gillespie (2007). Mead defines the significant symbol as a gesture which includes the experience of one's self from his perspective and from the perspective of the other. Both Vygotsky and Mead conceived the sign or linguistic symbol as a device comprising two perspectives: the actor and the observer, i.e. it is intersubjective insofar as that evokes the perspective of actor and observer in each one of the partners at the same time, and then when a person internalizing the perspective of the other, he can see his own perspective from the other's perspective. Only when one is capable of being another, the symbol becomes significant. The two perspectives are evoked in the symbol, because one is the I and the you simultaneously.

3. Objectives

The objective of this study is as follows: investigate and analyze the mechanisms of control that the partners deployed to establish the intersubjectivity and understand the perspective of the other.

4. Method

For this study I made use of a qualitative methodology. The analysis has been inductive and interpretive. I have

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