Learner beliefs and corrective feedback in telecollaboration: A longitudinal investigation

Yuka Akiyama[*]

Department of Linguistics, Georgetown University, United States

A R T I C L E   I N F O

A B S T R A C T

While many studies highlight the role of telecollaboration for language learning, there is a lack of research investigating focus on form practices in synchronous, video-based exchange, let alone studies that do so longitudinally. Furthermore, none of the previous studies on telecollaboration examined beliefs as one of the individual differences that may mediate the effectiveness of corrective feedback (CF). This study examined the dynamicity of learner beliefs about error correction and its relationship with actual CF practices regarding provision and uptake of CF in a 14-week, *Skype*-based eTandem project between American and Japanese universities. The study collected mixed-method, longitudinal evidence from survey ($N = 24$), interaction ($n = 6$ pairs), and interview data ($n = 5$). The analysis of survey data revealed that by the end of the semester, the majority of participants chose recasts as the most preferred way to give and receive CF, since recasts were considered immediate, time-saving, unintrusive, and easy to provide. The interaction data revealed that successful uptake increased when CF was provided in the way learners preferred to receive it. However, no relationship was found between native speakers' preferred method of CF provision and actual practices, suggesting a complex picture of face and identity negotiation as a friend vs. language tutor.

© 2017 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

1. Introduction

Advances in technology, particularly the development of synchronous and asynchronous computer-mediated communication (CMC) tools, have made it possible to break down the classroom walls and connect language learners around the world. Telecollaboration is a way to engage foreign language learners in an organized partnership, linking language learners in one part of the world with learners in other parts of the world. Previous studies on telecollaboration have shown that social interaction with native-speaking peers of similar age via CMC broadens the range of available discourse options in comparison to traditional second language (L2) classrooms (Belz, 2003; Belz & Kinginger, 2003; Belz & Vyatkina, 2008; Kinginger, 2000, 2004; Thorne, 2003) and creates conditions that result in enhanced L2 performance (Dussias, 2005; Ware & O'Dowd, 2008). In response to such great potential, more and more language practitioners have started to incorporate telecollaboration as part of language curriculum under various names, such as online intercultural exchange (O'Dowd, 2007), cyber language exchange (Sauro, 2013), and eTandem (Cziko, 2004).

eTandem is a form of telecollaboration in which a pair of language learners team up and help each other teach and learn their first (or competent) and second languages (Bower & Kawaguchi, 2011; Cziko, 2004). What makes eTandem distinct from

---

 * 525 N Monroe St. Arlington, VA 22201, United States.
   E-mail address: ya125@georgetown.edu.

other forms of native and non-native speaker dyadic interaction are (1) the expectation that participants correct each other, as "error correction is the central overtly pedagogical element of a tandem partnership" (Little et al., 1999, p. 39) and (2) the dynamic shift of learner-tutor relationships (i.e., reciprocity). For instance, an English-speaking individual who is learning Japanese takes on the role of an expert/tutor and provides corrective feedback (CF) for half an hour in English, but the same individual takes on the role of a novice learner when communicating in Japanese for the next half an hour. Because autonomous learning environments have been reported to lower anxiety (Noels, Clement, & Pelletier, 2001), a context like eTandem may function as a space where learners can focus on form (FonF) and practice their target languages without feeling overly self-conscious about their speech production.

Despite such great potential, eTandem has not been characterized as a venue where error correction naturally takes place (Bower & Kawaguchi, 2011; Lee, 2011; O'Rourke, 2005; Schwienhorst, 2000; Ware & O'Dowd, 2008; but see Vinagre & Muñoz, 2011 for another view). In fact, there seems to be a dichotomy between participants' beliefs about the important role of error correction and actual practices of CF in eTandem (e.g., Ware & O'Dowd, 2008). Accordingly, it seems imperative that more studies examine CF practices vis-à-vis participants' beliefs. It is also important to take into account the impact of video mediation in examining the relationship between CF beliefs and practices because different online environments offer affordances for different types of CF (Schwienhorst, 2008) and that video-based environments have not been investigated as extensively as other types of CMC (e.g., text chats, emails) (but see Akiyama, 2014; Tian & Wang, 2010 for studies on *Skype*-based eTandem).

Thus, the present study investigated CF beliefs and practices of Japanese and American college students who engaged in a 14-week, video-based eTandem project. The participants, after having been trained to provide CF, engaged in a total of seven bi-weekly sessions outside the classroom on a designated weekend, spending half of the time speaking in Japanese and the other half in English. The focus of analysis was on the mediating effects of beliefs on the provision and potential noticing of CF by comparing perceptional and behavioral data. The perceptional data were collected through surveys and interviews, while audio-recordings of six dyads' interaction in Japanese were used for the analysis of CF behavior.

2. Literature review

2.1. Provision of CF and its uptake

A pedagogical perspective known as FonF (Long, 1991, 2007) states that conversational interaction facilitates language acquisition by providing learners with both positive and negative evidence (Long, 1996) and by triggering useful cognitive processes for L2 learning such as noticing (Schmidt, 2001). One way to promote noticing is the provision of negative evidence through CF. Several meta-analyses have confirmed the positive effect of CF (Li, 2010; Lyster & Saito, 2010; Mackey & Goo, 2007; Russell & Spada, 2006). Thus, studies on CF have moved on from *whether* CF works to *how* it works, exploring the effectiveness of CF vis-à-vis learning contexts and individual differences in cognitive capacities (e.g., short-term memory, working memory) (Goo & Mackey, 2013).

The effectiveness of CF has often been measured by uptake (i.e., a learner's response to CF) and, particularly, successful uptake, or the ability of a learner to repair a mistake after receiving CF (Sheen, 2004). A number of researchers (Mackey & Philp, 1998; Ohta, 2000) have argued that uptake is merely a discourse phenomenon, which may or may not facilitate language learning. In fact, even researchers who have used uptake as a measure of potential acquisition have cautioned against using uptake as the sheer measure of language learning (Ellis, Basturkmen, & Loewen, 2001; Lyster & Ranta, 1997). Nonetheless, learner uptake has been seen as a legitimate object of inquiry, as it may serve as evidence that learners have understood the corrective nature of the interlocutor's move (Mackey, Gass, & McDonough, 2000). Additionally, several studies (Alcón-Soler, 2009; Chen & Eslami, 2013; Loewen, 2005) have found a significant role of successful uptake (i.e., successful self-repairs) for language learning. For instance, Loewen (2005), who examined incidental FonF practices in a private English school in New Zealand, studied whether presence and quality of uptake in Language Related Episodes (LREs) make a difference in subsequent retention of forms in focus. The study found that successful uptake was a significant predictor of correct scores in tailor-made tests, indicating that learners benefit from incorporating targeted linguistic items into their own production.

In sum, although the theoretical value of uptake as a sole indicator of language acquisition and noticing is controversial, it seems that the presence of uptake opportunities and successful incorporation of CF can only have neutral or positive impact on learning. Keeping this premise in mind, the present study investigated how eTandem participants' uptake practices were influenced by their beliefs about CF.

2.2. Training learners to provide CF

In order to alleviate the difficulties that peers face in providing CF of high quality, an increasing number of studies in the field of second language acquisition are looking into the effects of learner training. For instance, Fujii, Ziegler, and Mackey (2016) examined the effects of metacognitive instruction on learner-learner interactions in the task-based EFL classroom. The training offered tips and practice on how to provide CF to their peers. The results showed that metacognitive instruction led to greater provision and use of interactional feedback in subsequent interactions. Sato (2013) trained his EFL learners to provide CF to each other. The results of the study revealed the effectiveness of the intervention in facilitating "trust in their classmates as learning resources" (p. 611) and increasing willingness and confidence in providing CF.

In telecollaborative/eTandem settings, only a couple of studies have considered the possibility of training expert users of the target language about CF, despite the fact that such a reciprocal form of learning takes on a natural role of assisting each