

Form-focused social repertoires in an online language learning partnership

Vincenza Tudini^{*}

*Research Centre for Languages and Cultures, School of Communication, International Studies and Languages,
University of South Australia, Magill Campus, Magill 5072, Adelaide, South Australia, Australia*

Received 3 July 2012; received in revised form 3 December 2012; accepted 16 December 2012

Abstract

This study explores how mutual language learning partners, a native speaker (NS) and learner of Italian as a foreign language, use conversational repair as an authentic resource for out-of-class social interaction and focus-on-form during online text chat sessions. Specifically, it analyses the sequential organization of prototypical form-focused exposed correction sequences where the NS both initiates and completes repair of the learner's non-target grammar in the same turn, also known as recast. Findings indicate that despite the face-threatening nature of exposed correction within an unequal speech exchange system, participants maintain social solidarity by orienting to expert-novice roles and integrating recasts into phatic action-accepting and appreciation routines to bring form-focused trajectories to a polite conclusion prior to returning to topical talk. The learner's role as interaction manager is evident in her regular transformation of NS-initiated pedagogical actions-in-progress into social ones. Comparison of these form-focused pedagogical-social trajectories with a prototypical teacher-fronted instructional repertoire, the Initiation-Response-Feedback (IRF) sequence, reveals previously unidentified differences in how participants manage their interactions, especially exposed correction, in a formal-pedagogical and an informal social-pedagogical environment. While IRF is only one of many instructional repertoires in which correction activity is nested, fundamental structural differences suggest that online dyadic chat within language learning partnerships provides a potentially empowering and spontaneous alternative to classroom-based instructional repertoires, in preparation for real-life interaction in the target language.

© 2012 Elsevier B.V. All rights reserved.

Keywords: Online chat; Conversation analysis; Second language acquisition; Foreign languages; Italian; Focus-on-form

1. Introduction

Foreign language (FL) programmes need to provide learners with opportunities for real life out-of-class interaction to expose them to a variety of naturalistic conversational repertoires. This would support intercultural learning and foster the ability to build relationships with native and other speakers of the target language.¹ It would also better prepare them for informal social interaction in the target language both at home and during residence abroad. Kinginger (2008) in fact proposes that computer-mediated communication is a promising avenue for connecting students to their study-abroad destinations to develop “the specific skills required of intercultural speakers in informal interaction” (p. 111).

^{*} Tel.: +61 8 83024592; fax: +61 8 83024396.

E-mail address: enza.tudini@unisa.edu.au.

¹ Though this study is based on interaction with a native speaker of Italian, it also acknowledges the value of foreign language learners' interaction with expert speakers (ESs) other than native speakers, or with other learners. See also Rampton (1990) and Davies (1991) on the inadequacy of imposing a native speaker standard on learners of second or foreign languages.

While a variety of interactions are achievable in the language classroom, many of these are task-based or in some way contrived to achieve instructional goals (cf. Seedhouse, 1999). Classroom based interactions are also frequently mediated by the teacher hence are likely to provide only limited preparation for naturalistic conversation outside of the classroom. For example, one instructional sequence which discourse analysis research on both L1 and L2/FL interaction has identified as prevalent between teacher and student is the initiation-response-feedback (IRF) (Sinclair and Coulthard, 1975) or initiation-response-evaluation (IRE) (Mehan, 1979) sequence, which is a result of teachers' in-class orientation to institutional goals (Drew and Heritage, 1992). While there are many variants on this instructional format (cf. Zemel and Koschmann, 2011), the basic three part sequence entails (1) initiation of a known-answer question by the teacher; (2) a student response to that question and (3) teacher feedback or evaluation of that response, where responsibility for management of interaction rests with the teacher throughout. Payne and Hustler (1980) identified the unique organization of teacher talk as "two party talk" (p. 55) so that pupils are addressed as a cohort, and attention needs to be directed entirely at the teacher as the "single focus of attention" (p. 55). McHoul (1978) also noted the different turn-taking procedures of classroom talk, which is a "heavily pre-allocated system in which the locally managed component is largely the domain of teachers" (p. 211). This leads him to conclude that the "social identity contrast 'Teacher/Student' was expressed in the system in terms of differential participation rights and obligations" (p. 211).

2. Out-of-class interaction and learner participation

Out-of-class face-to-face interactions also have potential drawbacks in terms of participation opportunities for language learners. Participation concerns related to the discursive power of native speakers (NSs) are highlighted in Shea's (1994) study of naturalistic conversations between NSs of English and Japanese background advanced speakers of English living in the U.S. This study demonstrated that in real life out-of-class contexts NSs have the power to impede or encourage participation in conversation, even where advanced speakers are involved. According to Shea (1994), "reciprocity in conversation entails that communication between NSs and NNSs be democratically enacted" (p. 383) to ensure the development of second language proficiency through "joint engagement". In particular, Shea (1994) contends that success or exclusion from conversation is dependent on how the discursive position of the non-native speaker (NNS) is constructed by the NS, who may amplify or reduce the significance of what is said.

Kasper (2004) identifies a similar pattern of "interaction management" on the part of the NS in a dyadic "conversation for learning" between a beginner student and NS of German where a "question-answer-acknowledgement or question-answer-alignment-alignment structure with fixed participant roles" are evident (pp. 556–557). According to Kasper (2004) these sequences parallel the "three-turn exchange structure of interviews and the *initiation-response-feedback* (IRF) routine in teacher-fronted discourse" (p. 557). Kasper's study suggests that the IRF routine is not confined to the teacher-fronted FL classroom and may be replicated in informal peer-to-peer FL interactions.

Conversation analytic studies on second language acquisition (SLA) in social contexts during residence abroad provide further insights into learners' interaction in FL environments other than the classroom. Wilkinson's (2002) study is of particular relevance to this study on online social chat as it provides evidence that norms of the instructional environment may transfer inappropriately to informal social contexts, such as conversations between language learners and NS homestay hosts. Wilkinson (2002) refers specifically to the "pervasiveness of teacher-like correction in host-family talk" (p. 160), citing numerous examples of NS correction of learner talk, even where it does not interfere with understanding. Language learners also delegate topic-initiation to NSs, including NS children (pp. 165–167). Given the "omnipresence of instructional norms in the data" (p. 168), Wilkinson (2002) suggests that learners tend to conform inappropriately to classroom discourse patterns even in naturalistic out-of-class contexts, which potentially leads to misunderstanding and communication breakdown.

Kasper (2004), Wilkinson (2002) and Shea's (1994) studies have implications for the IRF dominated form-focused language classroom. They suggest that to develop learners' confidence and intercultural competence, out-of-class interaction with NSs is crucial to provide them with opportunities to practice conversation and interaction management in real-life contexts. To complement highly structured classroom interactions where the teacher controls turn-taking and participation, learners require exposure to alternative naturalistic environments and conversational structures which are likely to be produced in an out-of-class context. Online dyadic text chat is one such environment which reputedly provides learners with added benefits, such as the potential for contextualized form-focused interaction (Long, 1991) and equality of participation (Kern, 1995; Warschauer, 1996).

3. Participation and language learning in online text chat

According to Long (1991): "Focus on *form*... overtly draws students' attention to linguistic elements as they arise incidentally in lessons whose overriding focus is on meaning or communication" (pp. 45–46). Though Long (1991) refers to 'lessons' rather than informal contexts, online chat has previously been described as an optimal environment for SLA,

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/932930>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/932930>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)