Online peer feedback in beginners' writing tasks

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Fourth Biennial International Conference on Task-Based Language Teaching

Auckland, New Zealand

19 November 2011

Context and motivation for the study

- Language teachers seek to provide authentic opportunities of interaction for their learners.

- Efforts in New Zealand to overcome the geographic limitations of authentic interaction between learners of foreign languages and TL speakers.

- Challenges faced by elementary school teachers who teach a language that they are learning themselves.

Aim of the larger study:

To investigate the academic, social and motivational outcomes in students as a result of online peer tutoring involving 12 year old students learning Spanish as a foreign language in an intermediate school in New Zealand and peers of the same age learning English as a foreign language in Colombia

Language learning online

Seems to provide optimal conditions for interaction by engaging learners in tasks that provide opportunities for quality language input and output as well as focus their attention to form (Polio, 1994; Mackey & Polio , 2009).

Language learning online

- Genuine collaboration
- Authentic interaction
- Higher motivation, less anxiety, autonomy
- Linguistically: fluency, accuracy, complexity
- More attention to form (esp. in writing)
- More attention to quality of communication
- Intercultural communication

  (Chapelle, 2007; Kern, R., Ware, P., & Warschauer, M.,2004; Lai & Li, 2011; Ortega, 2009; Sotillo, S. M., 2000).

Reciprocal peer tutoring

- Peer tutoring interactions (Fantuzzo, King, and Heller, 1992)

- Mutual scaffolding of L2 writing; authentic audience; promotes writer's autonomy and confidence (Ware, 2004)

- Interaction with native speakers (Thurston, Duran, Cunningham, Blanch & Topping, 2009)

- Role of peer corrective feedback in developing accuracy (Vinagre & Muñoz, 2008, 2011)

- Feedback / correction processes (Ware & O'Dowd, 2008)

The present study

Examine the processes by which students tutor each other in an online environment:

- analyse the nature of peer tutoring
- examine the scope of peer interaction during the exchange of the messages between matched pairs

Research questions

1. What aspects of language were corrected by the peer tutors?

2. What was the rate of accuracy of the corrections?

3. What types of feedback were used by the peer tutors?

4. Is there evidence of learner uptake after correction and feedback?

Description

- Reciprocal peer tutoring writing system
- Pairs of students responded to each other's written messages in Moodle.
- Establishment of 29 dyads.
- Messages exchanged during eight weeks on topics for beginners (description of self, family, school, city; favourite music; likes and dislikes)
- Data analysed: cycle of three messages by 17 dyads

Results (1): interaction

	Views	Posts
October	1,497	237
November	6,111	650
December	147	9
Total	7,755	896

Number of words

- Total: 2,038
- Average 37 words per message
- 831 words in Message 1
- 718 words in Message 2
- 489 words in Message 3

Results (2): Error identification

	Grammar	Spelling	Vocabulary	Total
Message 1	35	61	20	116
Message 2	69	28	42	139
Message 3	71	26	25	122
Total	175	115	87	377

Results (3): Accuracy

	Errors identified by peer			Errors identified by researcher			% of accuracy		
	Gra	Spe	Voc	Gra	Spe	Voc	Gra	Spe	Voc
Mess. 1	35	61	20	61	115	25	0.57	0.53	0.80
Mess. 2	69	28	42	101	43	54	0.68	0.65	0.78
Mess. 3	71	26	25	96	46	31	0.74	0.57	0.81
Total	175	115	87	258	204	110	0.68	0.56	0.79

Results (4) Feedback

	Mes 1	Mes 2	Mes 3	Total
Identify error	1	2	0	3
Provide correct answer	17	17	17	51
Comment on the content	0	1	0	0
Provide an explanation	3	1	1	5
Correction not needed	0	2	2	4
Wrong correction provided	1	3	0	4
Re-writing	0	1	2	3
Other comments	2	5	5	12
Total	24	31	27	82

Providing answer (dyad 4)

S1: Mi coplianos esta es 17 de Decembere (My birthday is December 17).

S2: Mi cumpleaños es el 17 de diciembre.

Explanation (dyad 2)

S1: En mi familia esta es mi madre mi padre mi hermana mi hermano mi gato y yo (*In my family there is is [sic] my mother, my father, my sister, my brother, my cat and I*).

S2:En mi familia estan esNo es necesario mi madre, mi padre, mi hermana, mi hermano, mi gato y yo.

Grammar explanation (dyad 12)

Hola [name of student]. The errors that I have highlighted belong mostly to the same category. When you are describing anything in Spanish, the adjectives need to agree (= follow the same pattern) as the nouns they are describing. So, if you are describing pelo which is masculine, your adjectives need to be masculine too: rubio, rizado, largo (remember that in Spanish we signal masculine usually ending in o and feminine ending in a (most times).

Other corrections

Unnecessary explanantion (dyad 10)

Mi numero de telefono es …

Mi numero de <mark>telefono telefónico</mark> es ….

Wrong explanation (dyad 3)

Soy necolandesa (I am a New Zealander, should be spelled neocelandesa)

Soy <mark>necolandesa, necolandeza</mark>.

Other explanations

- Improvement: (dyad 13)

S1: *"Soy no baja y no alta"*, roughly translated to "I am neither short nor tall".

S2: *"Soy mediana"* (I am of average height).

- Praise: "good job"
- Process of writing: "I AM STILL WORKING ON THIS ENTRY"
- Social: Excellent! I like talking to you.
- Further interaction: *I'll keep in touch with you on the forum or facebook or skype if you have one. Feliz Navidad.*

End of the intervention (dyad 16)

- Tienes un buen español te felicito tienes que mejorar los (me) pero tienes un buen español te mando muchos saludos (You have good Spanish, congratulations. You need to improve on the use of me, but you have good Spanish. Best regards).

- Lastima que esta sea la despedida parece que tenemos mucho en comun adios muchos saludos (It's a shame that this is our farewell. It seems that we have much in common. Good bye. Best regards).

- Te mando mi mail (I send you my e-mail).

Learner uptake

- Tutees accepted the corrections provided by the tutor.

- There were no new versions of any of the messages.

Key findings

- Authentic interaction with a peer of their same age who was a native speaker of the TL.

- Exchanges constituted richer instances of authentic input and output.

- Engagement in cognitive co-construction through the peer pairing achieved

- Learner's autonomy and self-regulation

- Real audience to their writing

Lessons learned:

- The task was too controlled.
- Time was needed to develop the relationship.
- Effectiveness at beginners' level.
- Involvement of the teachers.
- Training in providing feedback.

Conclusions

- Participants were willing to contribute to peer correction and used different strategies and correction techniques to foster attention to linguistic form.

- CMC technologies have the potential to enhance the process of SLA and encourage the formation of communities of learning.

Gracias

We welcome questions and comments.

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