A Multimodal Analysis of Task Instructions for Webconferencing-supported L2 Interactions: A Pilot Study of the ISMAEL Corpus

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Abstract

This pilot study examines how trainee language teachers use the different semiotic resources available to them during webconferencing-supported interactions to give task instructions. The sub-corpus examined is taken from the ISMAEL corpus (Guichon *et al*., 2014) that structured interaction data from a six-week telecollaborative exchange between trainee teachers of French and learners of French, who majored in Business. The study explores, firstly, how the corpus of synchronous CMC interactions was structured in order to be used by researchers who were not involved in the pedagogical project. Secondly, we will describe how the interactions were transcribed with reference to a multimodal interactional analysis approach. Thirdly, a sequential analysis of two trainee teachers' instruction-giving practices for a role-play task will be presented. The aim of the pilot study is to determine whether research and pedagogical leads emerge that warrant a larger investigation of the corpus with relation to multimodal instruction-giving practices.

Keywords: instruction-giving, LEarning and TEaching Corpora (LETEC), multimodality, teacher-training, webconferencing

1. Introduction and Research Aims

Tasks in the second language classroom allow for authentic communication with a focus on meaning (Ellis, 2003; Nunan, 2004). Alongside recent pedagogical moves towards task-based language teaching (TBLT) approaches, telecollaboration is also gaining increasing interest and research has started to explore how, by bringing together different student populations from different cultures and languages, telecollaboration can support language learning and help prepare students for physical mobility programmes, or, if involving teacher-trainee populations, prepare trainees for online mediated teaching contexts (Guth & Helm, 2010). Many telecollaboration programmes based on TBLT use synchronous means of communication to bring together the student populations that are in geographically distant locations. However, as Guichon & Cohen underline whilst "synchronicity is generally seen as bringing real value to online pedagogical interactions […], research investigating the potential of a broad array of channels has been much less frequent" (2014:332).

In any foreign-language classroom, instruction-giving is a significant part of teacher-talk time. Indeed, in TBLT, specific teacher roles include guiding and facilitating learning during task completion and explaining the purpose, expected results and task completion steps in understandable ways for learners (Raith & Hegelheimer, 2010). Although a limited number of studies have explored teachers' instruction-giving practices (see Section 2), research on instruction-giving practices in synchronous online contexts is currently non-existent.

This pilot study attempts to bridge the research gaps mentioned above by focusing on how trainee teachers of French as a foreign language give task instructions during webconferencing-supported interactions and, more specifically, how they use the multimodal semiotic resources available to them during these practices. The data examined in this qualitative study is taken from the ISMAEL corpus (Guichon *et al*., 2014) that structured the interaction data from a six-week telecollaborative exchange between undergraduate Business students learning French at an Irish higher education institution and trainee teachers on a Master's programme in Teaching French as a Foreign language at a French University. In our paper presentation, we will, firstly, examine how the corpus was structured. Then, drawing on multimodal interactional analysis and conversation analysis approaches, we will examine a sub-corpus of two trainee teachers' instruction giving practices for a role-play rehearsal task (Nunan, 2004). In particular, we examine how the trainee teachers contextualise instruction-giving sequences. The aim of the pilot study is to discern whether a larger investigation of the corpus would be pertinent and more specific research questions such a study could address.

2. Instruction-giving

Instructions are defined as directives, explanations or questions, etc. used by the teacher in order "to get the students to do something" (Watson Todd, 1997:32). Instructions could constitute such a crucial aspect of the classroom activities that successful task outcomes may

depend on effective instructions (Watson Todd *et al.*, 2008). Seedhouse (2008) investigated instruction-giving practices from a conversational analysis approach, focusing on how teachers create, manage and maintain a shift in focus through the use of discourse markers, changes in the spatial configuration of participants and metadiscoursal comments. He describes how semiotic means, through the proxemics distance placed between the teacher and resources allowed a shift in focus.

Markee (2015a) examined instructions from an ethnomethodological perspective, concluding that "non-verbal aspects of communication are a vital part of instructions" (p. 126). These non-verbal aspects included gaze, cultural artifacts, gestures and embodied actions. His observation of overlaps between teacher instructions and learner responses indicated that instructions are not monologues, but they have an interactional nature. According to Markee (2015a), teachers' instructions in the classroom comprise six fragments: "(1) how [students] will be working (in dyads or small groups); (2) what resources they will need; (3) what tasks they have to accomplish; (4) how they will accomplish the task; (5) how much time they have to accomplish these tasks; (6) and why they should do something" (pp. 120-121). Markee (2015b) concluded that further research is needed on teachers' instruction-giving practices particularly in second language teaching.

Whilst Markee appears to be referring to face-to-face teaching contexts, his statement appears all the more true for computer-assisted language learning contexts as we failed to identify any studies specifically that detailed instruction-giving sequences in synchronous online pedagogical interactions. This observation was the starting point for the analysis presented in this paper.

3. Methodology

This section presents our research methodology. The corpus design will be the focus of the first part of our paper presentation.

3.1 ISMAEL Corpus and the Pedagogical Context

This study draws on the ISMAEL corpus (Guichon *et al.,* 2014) that structured data from a telecollaboration project between Business undergraduates at Dublin City University (DCU) and trainee teachers (henceforth, trainees) at Université Lyon 2 (Lyon2) on a French as a foreign language Master's programme. For the Lyon2 students, the exchange formed part of an optional module in online teaching that aims to help the trainees develop professional skills to teach French online and to analyse their online teaching practice and develop reflective analysis around this. For the undergraduate DCU students, the exchange composed part of a 12-week blended French for Business module that had CEFR level B1.2 as its minimum exit level (Council of Europe, 2001).

Participants completed six 40-minute weekly online sessions via webconferencing in autumn 2013. Two of the trainees planned each session (except the introductory session) around a theme of Business French according to the needs of DCU students as they prepare for an internship in France. Therefore, the topics for the sessions were preparing for an internship, project management, pitching a project, interviews, and labour law. The online webconferencing sessions took place on *Visu* (Guichon, Bétrancourt, & Prié, 2012) as part of a larger circular learning design (detailed in Guichon & Wigham, 2016). In this presentation, we will only draw on the data from the synchronous sessions.

Twelve of the 18 students (eight females, four males) and all of the trainees (ten females, two males) gave permission for their data to be included in the ISMAEL corpus. Thus, the corpus includes data of 7 groups. Because of differently sized groups, five groups comprised a trainee working with two learners whilst the other two groups were learner-trainee pairs. Currently, 24 of the 35 synchronous interactions included have been transcribed, totalling 13h04m30s of data. Pseudonyms are used for all personal information.

During the structuration phase of the ISMAEL corpus, the different participants' webcam videos had been extracted from the *Visu* software and imported into the transcription software *ELAN* (Sloetjes & Wittenburg 2008). The spoken interaction of all the online sessions had been transcribed and, using the timestamps created in *Visu*, the parallel text chat logs had been synchronized with these transcriptions. With regards to LEarning and TEaching Corpora (LETEC, Reffray *et al.,*2012), the learning design for the telecollaboration project, as well as documents related to the research protocol, was also available within the corpus.

3.2 Sub-corpus Examined

This preliminary study examines data from the fourth session of the telecollaboration project. During this session, participants engaged in a role-playing task that concerned project management. This task was planned in three stages. First, the trainees would introduce the roles for the learners (co-workers at McDonalds) and for themselves (manager). At this stage, learners needed to collaboratively find a new formula for children's birthday parties organized at the fast-food restaurant. During the second stage, the learners were asked to list the actions required to execute their new idea in text chat. In the final stage, the trainee (in the role of the manager) would guide a reflection session on the ideas of the learners (i.e. the employees) using questions such as: What action would you need to put into place first: which is the most important for you? Why?

A sub-corpus of the instruction-giving interaction data from two of the seven teacher trainees (Samia, Etienne) was chosen for analysis. Samia is a 23 year old female who has completed several teaching observation placements and who has experience of one-to-one tuition and some French language teaching at first school in Germany. One of her learners spoke English as his first

language (Sean) whilst the other's (Angela) mother tongue was German.

Etienne is a 24 year old male who has no formal teaching experience. He had been involved in running conversation workshops in French as a foreign language at an American University over a five-month period. Etienne's leaners were Conor, who was of Irish origin and Sophie who was a Spanish speaker (L1). Neither of the trainees was involved in preparing the lesson plan for this session which had been prepared by their classmates. Samia's session lasted 35m21s whilst Etienne's session lasted 20m46s. Figures 1 and 2 give an overview of the verbal interaction data for these sessions.

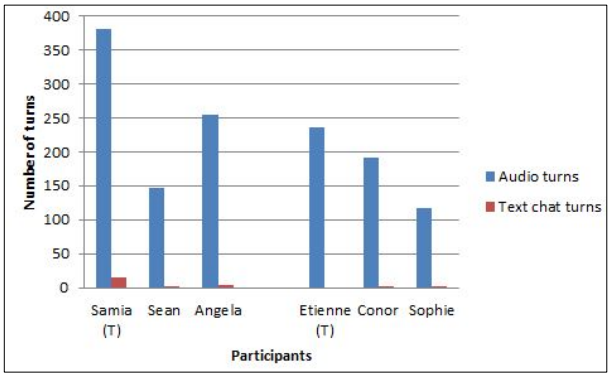

Figure 1: Overview of verbal interaction data.

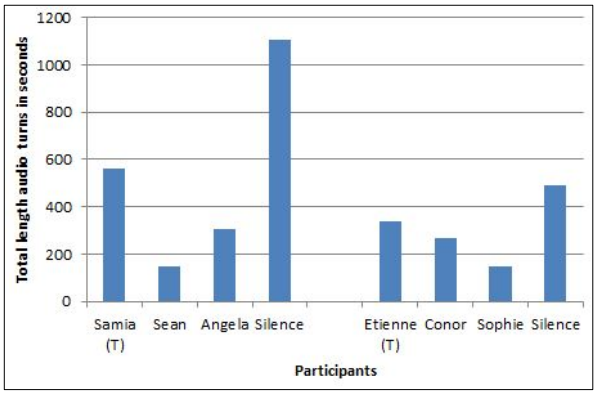

Figure 2: Total length audio turns.

3.3 Analysis approach and procedures

Data for this presentation was analysed using multimodal interactional analysis (Norris, 2004) which aims to explore people's meaning-making practices in the moment-by-moment construction of interaction with an emphasis on "how people employ gesture, gaze, posture, movement, space and objects to mediate interaction in a given context" (Jewitt, 2011: 34). For the verbal data, we also make use of conversation analysis techniques. The initial step in the analysis was to identify instruction-giving sequences for the role-playing task by isolating trainees' transition into the task and the several fragments that were introduced to cover all aspects of the instructions. The second analysis step was the annotation of the co-verbal acts that accompanied task instructions. The co-verbal actions included gaze, facial expressions, head movements, gestures and distance between the webcam and the participant.

It is worth noting that the approach to the analysis of the sub-corpus involved a researcher who was closely in the data collection, data transcription and the structuration of the corpus and an 'outsider' who did not know the participants and the context (cf. Guichon, in print). Both researchers worked on the sub-corpus together, constantly comparing their interpretations of the data and how the instruction-giving sequences were organised. We will briefly touch on the advantages and disadvantages of data analysis that involves 'insider' and 'outsider' researchers.

4. Preliminary Findings

In the second part of our paper presentation, we will look closely at the interaction data and will present a sequential analysis of each of the two instruction-giving sequences. Due to space constraints, it is not possible here to go into depth concerning the micro-analysis conducted. Rather, we summarise the analysis of each case.

The analysis of the instruction-giving sequence in the session conducted by Samia shows a clear step-by-step approach to instruction giving. Gaze plays an important role in punctuating these steps.

Samia combines the audio and text chat modalities to elicit key vocabulary for the task and concept check these items.

Gaze shifts, accompanied by vocatives play an important part in assigning learner roles. Samia then makes use of the visual mode to communicate, through a change in proximity, that she is giving greater control of the floor to learners as they begin the task and, thus, that she wishes to step out of her interaction management role. A shift in pronoun use to the inclusive 'we' also allows her to show verbally that she has moved into the fictitious role of manager rather than the managerial role of task instruction-giver.

In contrast, in the analysis of Etienne's instruction-giving sequence, the trainee first of all sets the context for the task by checking the concept of children's birthday parties and then proceeds by indicating his role and providing examples of possible themes. This helped learners identify what constitutes the trainee's expectations concerning successful task completion. However, as they had not yet been given their roles some confusion ensues. Learner role allocation was achieved through a side-sequence during a long task-preparation phase rather, as was the case with Samia, as a main step in the instruction-giving process. The trainee's multimodal interaction during this phase is of particular interest. In the visual mode he attempts to remove his presence from the interactional order through a change in posture and proximity, underlining that this is an individual-work phase. Gaze change during this preparation phase allows the trainee to monitor whether he has covered all of the information points that are

necessary for the task and prompt Etienne to introduce a side sequence in which he allocates learner roles. The laughter and posture change that follow help to signal the learners' better understanding of the task instructions.

5. Discussion

Our initial analysis suggests that in order to draw pedagogical conclusions, it would be of particular interest to further examine instruction-giving sequences with reference to how the beginning and different stages of the task instructions are marked; how the trainees allocate roles required by the task during these sequences and trainees deal with key lexical items.

With reference to these points, the data examined in this pilot investigation suggests, firstly, that changes in proximity to the webcam may be a successful technique to highlight changes in role and show learners that the trainee is moving into his fictional role required by the task. Secondly, the multimodal analysis sheds light on different strategies employed by the trainees to introduce vocabulary for the task. Whilst Samia used elicitation to concept-check key vocabulary that she often then put into the text chat modality, Etienne preferred to use pre-emptive vocabulary explanation to establish the context for the task and used reduced proximity to signal when he was willing to leave the floor/interactional order.

Thirdly, combining vocatives in the audio modality and gaze in the visual mode appeared effective in role allocation whilst the other session demonstrates what happens when task instructions, especially role allocation are not complete and how the resulting confusion and uneasiness can be resolved.

The presentation will conclude with pedagogical recommendations highlighting the need to raise teacher trainees' awareness of the multimodal features of webconferencing that can be employed to facilitate instruction-giving.

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