

Modified output and metalanguage during conversational interaction: a qualitative look at interactional feedback

Laia Canals

Universitat Oberta de Catalunya, Spain

Abstract

The present study draws on earlier research on learner-learner dyadic interactions in an e-tandem virtual exchange and examines negotiation of meaning episodes based on the qualitative data. These data come from learner-learner interactions during oral tasks carried out using a video conferencing tool. The aim is to unveil the interactional patterns that emerge during negotiation of meaning episodes which have been deemed beneficial for L2 development, particularly those which offer opportunities for modified output to occur (Long, 1996; Gurzynski-Weiss & Baralt, 2015; Pica, 1994; Schmidt, 1990). The results highlight the role that metalinguistic information plays in scaffolding the process of negotiation of meaning and emphasize the benefits of e-tandem exchanges where learners alternate between the roles of expert and learner, depending on the language used during each language related episode.

Keywords: interactional feedback; negotiation of meaning; virtual exchange; language related episodes; language learning online

1. Introduction

In the context of dyadic oral interactive tasks between learners involved in an e-tandem format of virtual exchanges, learners often stop the meaning-focused conversation to discuss linguistic aspects of the languages which are being practiced. These discussions have been termed language related episodes (LREs) in which learners focus on different aspects of the target language, namely, lexical, morpho-syntactic, or phonetic issues (Varonis & Gass, 1985; Gass & Mackey, 2007). Generally, when LREs focus on lexical aspects, they involve negotiation of meaning and often address communication breakdowns, whereas LREs which focus on morpho-syntactic, or phonetic aspects entail negotiation or focus on form without necessarily interfering with communication or involving non-understandings. Negotiation of meaning where the interlocutors have the possibility of modifying their utterances and produce comprehensible input or modified output is deemed beneficial for L2 acquisition (Long, 1996; Loewen & Sato, 2018; Pica, 1994; Varonis & Gass, 1985; Ziegler & Phung, 2019).

The present article examines learner-learner interactions in an e-tandem virtual exchange (VE) (O'Dowd, 2018), also known as tandem telecollaboration or e-tandem (O'Rourke, 2007; Tian & Wang, 2010), between two universities, one in Spain and one in Canada. Learners met in pairs using a synchronous computer-mediated communication (SCMC) video-conference tool (Skype) to practice each other's target language (Spanish and English). E-tandem VEs have been found beneficial for comprehensibility (Akiyama & Saito, 2016) and oral skills development (Canals, 2020). However, this study focuses on the uniqueness of these types of interactions where learners alternate between the roles of

expert and learner, by analyzing interactional patterns in a qualitative manner. The potential affordances of these types of interactions will be examined given their relevance for the field of second language acquisition.

2. Literature review

2.1 Interaction in SCMC: negotiation of meaning and form

Most studies investigating negotiation of meaning in interactions in SCMC settings have focused on text-based contexts where communication occurs via text-chat (Eslami & Kung, 2016) or have compared text-chat and face-to-face (FTF) settings (Gurzynski-Weiss & Baralt, 2014; Lai & Zhao, 2006; Yilmaz & Yuksel, 2011). The findings of these studies are somewhat inconclusive. Some studies have indicated that text-based SCMC makes interactional feedback (e.g., recasts or reformulations of learners' non-target-like utterances) more salient and effective (Yilmaz & Yuksel, 2011) and promotes more noticing (Lai & Zhao, 2006) than FTF settings. However, others have failed to find a difference between both settings regarding the noticing of the feedback (Gurzynski-Weiss & Baralt, 2014).

More recently, other studies researching interactions and LREs have incorporated audio (Bueno-Alastuey, 2011, 2013; Yanguas, 2012), and only very recently, a few of them have also included video-interactions (Akiyama, 2014; Akiyama & Saito, 2016; Monteiro, 2014; Saito & Akiyama, 2017; Strawbridge, 2021; Van der Zwaard & Bannink, 2014, 2019; Yanguas & Bergin, 2018). Several of these studies are still aimed at comparing the specificities of these settings for the affordances they bring to focus on form in otherwise meaning-related tasks or interactions, either between FTF and audio- and video-based SCMC (Bueno-Alastuey, 2011; Loewen & Isbel, 2017; Yanguas, 2010), or between text-based and audio-based SCMC (Van der Zwaard & Bannink, 2014; Torres & Yanguas, 2021; Yanguas, 2010, 2012). Yanguas (2010 and 2012) made a three-way comparison between FTF, video and audio-SCMC task-based interactions and found that turn-taking in FTF and video-based SCMC was very similar and both differed from the interactional patterns found in audio-based SCMC. Audio-based interactions lacked visual cues which translated into a higher number of negotiation turns and longer-term comprehension gains regarding vocabulary acquisition (Yanguas, 2012) and increased learner engagement (Torres & Yanguas, 2021). Bueno-Alastuey (2011) found that the audio-SCMC group outperformed the FTF one in post-test scores and task achievement. Finally, Ziegler's (2016) meta-analysis revealed that tasks carried out using SCMC generate greater benefits than face-to-face interactions and that multimodal features facilitated the L2 development of productive skills, which has also been backed up by recent studies focusing on multimodal features (Canals, 2021; Dao et al., 2021; Saito & Akiyama, 2017; Ziegler & Phung, 2019).

Given that initiating a negotiation of meaning can potentially be face-threatening for the interlocutors who fail to understand but do not want to show non-understanding, Van der Zwaard and Bannink (2014) suggested dividing learner responses in LREs into task-appropriate responses and face-appropriate responses. The authors indicate that the difference between text-based and video-based SCMC lies in the fact that the latter mode prompts more face-appropriate responses than the former mode. The chat-based mode helped learners save face due to the lack of a webcam and gave them the possibility of

having more time to reflect on their responses. In later articles, Van der Zwaard and Bannink confirmed these findings and noted that “(SCMC) environments show behavioral patterns that are similar to L2 learners’ behaviors in non-digital L2 classroom environments” (2016, p.119). Additionally, these studies highlighted the problems learners can have when carrying out interactions with users of the target language with whom they are not acquainted.

The moderating effects of tasks on the presence and nature of LREs has been the focus of several studies (Loewen & Isbel, 2017; Yanguas & Bergin, 2018; Yilmaz & Granena, 2010), while other studies have targeted the frequency and types of LREs generated by different types of pairings based on linguistic background or proficiency levels (Bueno-Alastuey, 2013; Eslami & Kung, 2016). Different tasks have been found to promote different types of learner interactions; overall, convergent tasks, that is tasks learners need to come to an agreement about a specific outcome, shown more negotiation of meaning than opinion or divergent tasks where learners exchange opinions or information (Gilabert et al. 2009; Loewen & Isbel, 2017). According to Yilmaz and Granena (2010), dictogloss tasks generated more LREs than jigsaw tasks. However, according to Yanguas and Bergin (2018), the type of tasks did not reveal any differences regarding the number of LREs they elicited.

In regards to the different types of pairings, some studies have indicated that pairing up first and second language speakers or second language speakers with different L1s among themselves is more beneficial for L2 development (Bueno-Alastuey, 2013) than L2 speakers-same-L1 dyads. However, other research has not yielded significant differences between the different pairings (Eslami & Kung, 2016). With respect to the differences between LRE types, there are some studies that have identified the frequency of a particular trigger, lexical in most cases (Canals, 2021; Strawbridge, 2021; Yanguas, 2010), or phonetic (Bueno-Alastuey, 2013).

The particularities and unique nature of e-tandem interactions where learners alternate between the roles of expert and less proficient speaker/learner depending on the language and focus of the LRE have been largely underexplored in video- or audio- SCMC to date, with a few exceptions (e.g., Fernández-García & Martínez-Arbelaiz, 2014; Strawbridge, 2021). Strawbridge (2021) noted that the beneficial characteristics of these types of virtual exchanges “may furthermore be aided by the fluid roles played by participants as both language learner and language expert” (p. 97) while Fernández-García and Martínez-Arbelaiz (2014) concluded that the fact that both interactants shared a language learning identity facilitated learner involvement in the conversations.

As noted throughout this section, previous research on learner-learner interactions from an interactionist perspectives has tried to account for the most beneficial settings, tasks, pairings or dyadic compositions of these interactions. Most of the earlier research reviewed in this section has been based primarily on quantitative analyses of the interactional data and only very few have included a qualitative component by tapping onto learners’ perceptions. However, to the best of the author’s knowledge, studies on video-based SCMC from an interactionist perspective which focus on qualitatively analyzing the actual interactions between learners particularly in e-tandem virtual exchanges are very scarce. By embarking on the qualitative examination of interactional patterns between learners, the present study will also fulfill the identified need for more qualitative research that helps us understand how digital environments meet learners’ needs (Hampel & Stickler, 2019).

2.2 Modified output and metalinguage during conversational interaction

During the conversations established in task-based interactions, learners receive feedback from other learners or expert speakers, be it from the teacher or, in the case of this study, from their partners who act as experts half of the time (when the interactions are in their L1). Some studies (e.g., Akiyama, 2014) indicate that the feedback from the expert speakers in these conversations tends to be interactive corrective feedback. Corrective feedback in these interactions takes the shape of partial or total reformulations of a preceding non-target-like including the target-like form(s), that is, recasts (Long, 2007; Saito & Akiyama, 2017) or clarification requests which refer to the questions that one of the interlocutor asks to be able to fully comprehend what the other interlocutor is trying to convey (Foster & Ohta, 2005). Learners are sometimes prompted to respond to that feedback, modifying their prior utterances in order to be understood by their interlocutors. The opportunities provided in a conversation for modified output to occur have been deemed crucial for second language acquisition (Akiyama, 2014; Long, 1996; Schmidt, 1990) because the presence of modified output implies that the feedback provided has been noticed (Gurzynski-Weiss & Baralt, 2015).

Learners' utterances following feedback have been classified as repairs (Ellis, Basturkmen, & Loewen, 2001) or uptake (Loewen, 2005) in earlier studies. More recently, Gurzynski-Weiss and Baralt (2015), following Lyster and Ranta (2013), suggested adopting uptake as the general construct to incorporate all responses to corrective feedback. Thus, uptake is understood to encompass all responses following corrective feedback moves whether or not they include understanding of the feedback or just a simple acknowledgment. Gurzynski-Weiss and Baralt (2015) adopted the term modified output to indicate whether learners noticed the feedback. According to Gurzynski-Weiss and Baralt (2015), the feedback is less noticeable to the learner when full modified output is produced, which is a mere repetition of the feedback received. However, if the learner's modified output is partial and it focuses on the non-target-like issue pointed out by the feedback, it could potentially indicate increased noticing of the feedback. These two types of modified output have not yet been analyzed with the help of a qualitative approach based on the analysis of learner-learner interactions, as it is the case in the present article.

Another way of focusing the attention on the problematic utterances discussed during LREs is the use of metalinguage or metalinguistic information. Metalinguage, understood as the language that learners use to talk about the rules of the language, allows learners to center their attention on the problematic utterances, and to scaffold the negotiation of meaning process to better understand the comprehensible input and facilitate the production of modified output (Fortune, 2005). Sustained metalinguistic discussions in pairs have also been found to facilitate L2 learning (Storch, 2008) and the use of metalinguage has been linked to learner autonomy (Ellis, 2016). In a recent study, Canals (2022) analyzed LREs from an e-tandem VE and found that LREs initiated by the more proficient speaker tend to lead to more modified output (repairs) and more successful LRE resolutions. The presence of metalinguistic information resulted in an increased number of modified output and repairs. Finally, reactive LREs, that is, those initiated by the more proficient speaker, and preemptive LREs (Ellis et al., 2001), which are initiated by the less proficient interlocutor (the learner of each target language at each given episode) generated higher rates of corrective feedback (the former, reactive LREs) and modified output (the latter, preemptive LREs). All these

findings came from analyses of the LREs that took a quantitative approach and therefore a qualitative approach to analyzing these findings is warranted.

3. The present study

Earlier studies (Canals, 2022; Ellis, 2016, Ellis et al., 2006) have found that the presence of metalinguistic information in LREs has an effect on the successive occurrence of modified output and an increased number of repair sequences (Fortune, 2005). Similarly, these studies have noted that preemptive LREs, initiated by the less proficient interlocutor as opposed to the expert speaker (Ellis et al., 2001; Loewen, 2005), lead to significantly more modified output and confirmation checks. On the other hand, LREs which are initiated by the expert-speaker interlocutor (reactive LREs) have been found to lead to significantly more clarification requests and to contain more explicit corrective feedback, but not necessarily more modified output than preemptive LREs.

This article draws on earlier research on dyadic interactions in e-tandem virtual exchanges and particularly on learner-learner interactive behavior and attempts to illustrate the aforementioned findings with qualitative examples to support earlier claims. While earlier research aimed to find out which interactions proved more beneficial for L2 development (Canals, 2022; Ellis, 2016, Ellis et al., 2006), the current article aims to examine the same data from a qualitative perspective. The aim is to show how these claims are instantiated with the use of qualitative data examples within the framework of negotiation of meaning during second language acquisition through SCMC using video conferencing (Hampel & Stickler, 2012; Van der Zwaard & Bannink, 2014, Wang, 2006). This framework emphasizes the importance of context and situated interaction, while focusing on the speech situations in which interlocutors are immersed and in which they express themselves and interact with others while they co-construct meaning. In the current study, these interactions exhibit the particularities of e-tandem interactions where learners alternate between the roles of expert speaker (of their dominant language) and less proficient learner of their target language, depending on the language and focus of each LRE. The following research questions guided the current study.

1. How do learners convey metalinguistic information in LREs which contain modified output?
2. How does modified output materialize in preemptive LREs?
3. Which types of interactional feedback patterns (clarification requests and explicit corrections) can be observed during reactive LREs?

4. Method

4.1 Context

The data for the present study was collected from a three-month virtual exchange between language learners at a Canadian university and at a Spanish one. The exchange was set up as an e-tandem virtual exchange in which participants alternated between the roles of expert (in their most proficient language) and learner (in their target language, either Spanish or English). The virtual exchange was a component of the foreign language course they were taking.

4.2 Participants

The learners who took part in this study were 11 males and seven females with an average age of 22.3 years. The learners at the Canadian university were intermediate (B2) learners of Spanish and the learners at the Spanish university were advanced (C1) learners of English. Neither one of the participants had taken part in a virtual exchange prior to this one. The learners had signed up for these courses after having taken a placement test. They had weekly regular contact with the target language in their English as a foreign language and Spanish as a foreign language courses at the university. The learners were informed of their data protection rights, how the data would be treated and stored, and signed a consent form.

4.3 Procedures and tasks

In order to get to know one another, the learners interacted as a group in a closed online community during two weeks. After the initial introductions, learners at the Spanish institution paired up with those at the Canadian one according to their time availability in order to carry out the three speaking tasks online in pairs over the course of two and a half months. They used a video conferencing tool that allowed them to video-record their conversations which were then sent to their instructors for assessment purposes, and to the researcher and author of the present article to analyze their interactions.

The three tasks that they had to carry out in pairs (see Appendix A) were two-way open-ended conversation tasks in which learners had to exchange information, to compare and contrast two intercultural aspects (university life and urban regeneration projects) of their own communities. In the last task (3), learners were asked to devise a regeneration project proposal together, and therefore this task also involved some decision-making and coming to an understanding about the proposal, which they later had to write together.

The three tasks lasted an average of 39 minutes and the students were free to arrange the time spent speaking Spanish and English, but we suggested that each of them tried to speak at least 15 minutes in their target language. Learners were also encouraged to provide help by demonstrating pronunciation or providing lexical items and grammar explanations to their partners in the language in which they acted as experts, whenever their interlocutors asked for it.

4.4 Data treatment

After transcribing the data resulting from the video conferencing sessions, 444 LREs were identified and labeled as preemptive or reactive LRES, and were also coded for the presence of modified output, metalinguistic information, and the type of feedback provided by the most competent speaker in each interaction. The data was analyzed mainly qualitatively, but some additional quantitative frequency counts were run to be able to complement the qualitative data presented. Multimodal expressions or non-verbal communication were also identified in the coding and transcripts by adapting Seedhouse and Richards (2007) transcription conventions (see Appendix B).

The LREs were labeled as preemptive LREs if they were initiated by the learner who was using the target language rather than the more competent speaker occupying the role of the expert. In these cases, the learner usually requested the assistance of the expert speaker preemptively (Loewen, 2005). The LREs which were initiated by the expert speaker in the

same context were labeled reactive LREs. The following excerpts 1 and 2 illustrate preemptive and reactive LREs respectively.

Excerpt 1

SP2: During the week I:: I run? But I don't remember the special word. It's not jogging. When you run fast? Or at least for an hour? It's not jogging. Right? ← Preemptive LRE

CAN2: No. Jogging is running more slowly eh:: But if you're running fast I would call it going for a run.

Excerpt 2

CAN2: Toda sus vidas.

[All their lives.]

SP2: Su vida. Claro, tú lo has hecho pensando en inglés que dices *their*. ← Reactive LRE + Metalinguistic information

[Their life. Of course, you said that thinking of the English 'their'.]

CAN2: Their lives, *sí*.

[Their lives, yes.]

SP2: Que es plural, claro, pero en español es su. No sus vidas sino toda su vida, es una expresión así. ← Metalinguistic information

[Which is plural of course, but in Spanish it's 'su'. Not their lives but all their life, the expression goes like this]

The LREs were further coded to identify the presence of metalinguistic information according to Ellis's (2016) metalanguage definition. Metalinguistic information consists of the use of technical or non-technical terminology by the participants to explain a language point – lexical, morpho-syntactic, or phonetic – to their interlocutors. Excerpt 2 provides an example of the use of metalinguistic information in order to explain a grammatical point – the need to use a singular possessive pronoun in Spanish for the third person 'su' rather than the plural form it would take in English 'their'.

For the present study, modified output is operationalized as the utterances learners produce after obtaining feedback from their interlocutors. The modified output does not need to include repairing of the problematic utterance. In fact, according to Sheen (2008), "modified output cannot be equated with either learner uptake or learner repair (...) learners might produce uptake but not necessarily modify their output, whereas even when they do produce modified output, they might not repair their original error" (p. 841). Modified output involved the learner trying to correct the original utterance after their interlocutor's indications of non-understanding (clarification requests, recasts, explicit corrections, or metalinguistic information). Modified output occurrences were further coded into full and partial modified output following Gurzynski-Weiss and Baralt (2015). Full modified output included the use of the entire feedback provided in the preceding utterance by the expert speaker (see excerpt 3). In contrast, when learners focused on a specific element of the feedback provided and their utterance contained only that specific, presumably problematic element, it was coded as partial modified output as shown in excerpt 4.

Excerpt 3

CAN3: Me gusta mucho am: aprender am: sobre.. Am: cuál es am: *brain* en español?

[I like lot learning about.. How do you say 'brain' in Spanish?]

SP3: Cerebro ← Explicit correction

[Brain.]

CAN3: Cereb? Ah cerebro. ← Full modified output

[Brai? Oh, brain.]

Excerpt 4

CAN3: Este año es el *anniversaire*?

[This year is the anniversary.]

SP3: Aniversario.

[Anniversary.]

CAN3: De doscien años

[Two-hundred years.]

SP3: Doscientos años. ← Explicit correction

[Two-hundred years.]

CAN: Doscientos, sí! ← Partial modified output

[Two-hundred, yes!]

Following Gurzynski-Weiss and Baralt (2015) simple acknowledgments ('Ok', 'Yes', 'Hm', 'Aha', 'Yeah') or repetitions of the original non-target-like forms were not coded as modified output.

Finally, the type of corrective feedback that the expert speakers provided to their interlocutors was also coded. Corrective feedback was divided into the categories suggested by Foster and Ohta (2005) according to the type of feedback which could be observed in each LRE. These included metalinguistic information, explicit corrections, recasts, clarification requests, elicitations, and comprehension and confirmation checks (for examples of each of them, see Canals, 2022).

Several LREs display examples of learners switching back and forth between Spanish and English in the same utterance. In the present study, this phenomenon is not addressed because it is out of the scope of this article and also due to space constraints. The author has examined this issue in the same corpus in previous articles (Canals, 2022).

After the first round of coding, a second coder examined a subsample of the data (25% of the LREs, $N = 111$) and coded the above-mentioned variables. A percentage agreement was calculated for each variable and the interrater agreement reached 90% for all variables. The disagreements between the coders were solved until a consensus was reached.

5. Findings

The LREs that follow were isolated from 444 LREs identified in the transcripts from the video-call recordings of the learners' interactions. The examples presented in the following sections show interactional patterns taken from several dyads (1, 2, 3, 5 and 9) and illustrate the phenomena observed in earlier research (Canals, 2022). Examples of the different phenomena previously identified in these interactions were selected to show how the most common interactional patterns were instantiated in conversations and to provide a qualitative complementary look at the same data presented in Canals (2022).

In Example 1, we observed that the use of metalinguistic information (research question 1) was used at the beginning of the preemptive LRE by the less proficient speaker (CAN3) to frame the conversation around the linguistic aspect she was unsure of, the gender of the word 'song' in Spanish. The answer from the proficient speaker (SP3) following her metalinguistic terminology rather than providing the form 'las canciones,' allowed the learner to repair her utterance and to continue the conversation.

Example 1. Dyad 3. Preemptive LRE, metalinguistic information, and modified output

CAN3: El.. la.. canciones? *Is that feminine or masculine?*

[The.. the.. songs] ← Metalinguistic information & Preemptive trigger

SP3: *Feminine.* ← Metalinguistic information

CAN3: Ok, las canciones. So, ah: Creo que las canciones en español son bien.* ← Full modified output

[Ok, the songs. So, I think that the songs in Spanish are good.]

*None of the transcripts have been corrected to purposefully illustrate non-target-like utterances.

Another case in which the metalinguistic information was crucial to help the learner to produce modified output, Example 2, also contained a metalinguistic query that acted as the preemptive trigger at the beginning of the LRE. CAN3 asked about the use of the verb 'hacer' to talk about the weather in Spanish. The expert speaker provided feedback in the form of metalinguistic information in turn 2, and while CAN3 was processing the information in turn 3, SP3 repeated the feedback without almost any gap between the turns. Finally, CAN3 produced a full modified output utterance in turn 5.

It should be noted that 60% (149 out of 247 instances including modified output) of the instances of modified output in the data corresponded to full modified output. Additionally, 23% ($N = 58$) out of 149 instances of full modified output, this modified output was incorporated into a complete new utterance (see Examples 1 and 2). In contrast, partial modified output was rare, representing 8% ($N = 20$) of the total modified output.

Example 2. Dyad 3. Preemptive LRE, metalinguistic information, and modified output

CAN3: *Ah::, when you say weather it's hacer, right?*

So am: hace mucho ventoso, *is that really windy?* ← Preemptive trigger

[So ah: it's very windy]

SP3: *Yeah, very windy sería hace mucho viento, pero ventoso, we don't use it too much, ventoso.* ← Metalinguistic information

[Yeah, very windy would be it's very windy, but 'windy', we don't use it too much, 'windy'.]

CAN3: = No. Ok. ← Uptake

SP3: = No. Hace mucho viento.

[No. It's very windy]

CAN3: Hace mucho viento especialmente a: hoy y no me gusta el viento. Es el tiempo que no me gusta más.* ← Full modified output

[It's very windy especially ah: today and I don't like the wind. It's the weather I like the least.]

The data examined also included instances of LREs without metalinguistic information, in contrast with the previous examples (1 and 2). In this case, as seen in Example 3, SP9 had been talking about a pocket-knife in English. At some point, the Spanish learner asked what the equivalent to 'pocket-knife' was in Spanish, in turn 1. This led to several

misunderstandings on the part of the expert speaker, who had a hard time understanding the word 'pocket-knife' in English, either because he was not expecting the question or because he had difficulties understanding native-English pronunciation. In turn 2, the Spanish speaker (SP9) understood the word 'pocket', so he provided the Spanish equivalent, 'bolsillo,' which the Spanish learner (CAN9) took as the proper word for pocket-knife in turn 3. Then CAN9 added the word 'cortar' (to cut) to include a lexical item closer in meaning to the target word 'knife', and a confirmation check to make sure she had the correct word in turn 5. That led to even further misunderstanding on the part of the expert speaker, SP9, who was connecting the word 'cortar' with the word 'embutido' (cold cut) in turn 6. CAN9 then understood that the word 'cortador embutido' meant 'pocket-knife' in turn 7. In order to confirm that they understood each other, SP9 asked for the equivalent of the word 'embutido' in English which could lead to the beginning of another LRE focused on the word 'embutido' in turn 8. However, similar to the misunderstanding in turn 2, CAN9 failed to understand the Spanish pronunciation of the word and the LRE concluded in turn 9, without the interlocutors having resolved the meaning of any of the words. Perhaps this episode could have been resolved had the learners resorted to the use of metalanguage to indicate the parts of the trigger word 'pocket-knife' by saying the equivalent of both words in Spanish. Then, the SP9 could have provided the proper equivalent word 'navaja,' keeping the focus on the first target word and not on associated meanings or uses (cortar, embutido).

Example 3. Dyad 9. Preemptive LRE, explicit corrections and clarification request

CAN9 Qué es la palabra en español por *pocket-knife*? ← Preemptive trigger

[What's the word in Spanish for]

SP9 *Pocket*? No? Bolsillo.

[Pocket, isn't it? Pocket.]

CAN9 Bolsillo?_ ← Comprehension check

[Pocket?]

SP9 Bolsillo es *pocket*, sí.

[‘Pocket’ is pocket, yes.]

CAN9 Ok, como cortar? Sí? Cortar de bolsillo? ← Confirmation check

[Ok, like cutting? Yes? To cut of the pocket.]

SP9 Cortar el bolsillo? Embutido?

[To cut the pocket? Cold-cut?] ← Clarification request

CAN9 Embutido, ok. Cortar embutido.

[Cold-cut, ok. To cut cold-cut.]

SP9 Cómo se dice embutido en inglés? ← Preemptive trigger

[How do you say cold-cut in English?]

CAN9 Butido? No sé. ← Unresolved LRE

[(C)old-cut? I don't know.]

It should be noted that in all LREs presented, the episode itself concluded with the last turn presented in the examples. The interlocutors moved on with their conversation without referring to the language points addressed during the given LRE and focusing on the oral task at hand.

In a previous article (Canals, 2022), the findings indicated that in preemptive LREs, more modified output could be observed than in reactive LREs, and, therefore, the second research question addresses this issue. In addition to Examples 1 and 2, Example 4 constituted another instance of a preemptive LRE initiated in turn 1, when SP2 was looking

for the English equivalent of the Spanish word 'merienda' (afternoon snack), which lead to a fully modified output instance using the target language and the target expression by the same participant in turn 5.

Example 4. Dyad 2. Preemptive LRE and modified output

SP2: It could be also a:: *merienda*? Do you have a word for merienda? ← Preemptive trigger

[Afternoon snack]

CAN2: *Merienda*? Like a snack or? ← Clarification request

SP2: It's time between lunch and dinner, do you eat?

CAN2: We would just call that an afternoon snack. ((laughter)) We don't really have a word for that.

SP2: Ok, an afternoon snack. ← Full modified output

Similarly, in Example 5 the CAN5 participant was asking for the word for 'dirty' in Spanish in turn 1, which initiated a preemptive LRE. The SP5 participant failed to understand the native pronunciation of the CAN5 participant and asked her to clarify what she was asking by writing the target word on the chat in turn 2. The SP5 participant understood the target word and provided the Spanish equivalent and the CAN5 learner repeated the word and commented on her previous knowledge of that word in turn 5.

Example 5. Dyad 5. Preemptive LRE and modified output

CAN5: Dirty, like if you are covered in mud, what would you call that, like, you get dirty. ← Preemptive trigger

SP5: Let me... Can you write it on the chat and I can translate for you?

CAN5: Writes dirty on the chat ← Clarification request

CAN5: Okay.

SP5: Ah, dirty, ah, sucio.

CAN5: Sucio, that. I.. I knew it started with an s. ((Laughter)) ← Full modified output

Regarding the use of interactional feedback in reactive LREs (research question 3), these types of LREs tend to lead to clarification requests and to explicit corrective feedback (Canals, 2022). Other types of interactional feedback are scarce in reactive LREs in the current study's data corpus. Specifically, out of 444 LREs, only five recasts could be identified and zero elicitations. An example of a recast can be observed in Example 6, where the CAN2 participant pointed out in turn 2 the right form of the ill-formed utterance that the SP2 used in turn 1. Previous studies on the relative effectiveness of recasts (Ellis et al., 2006; Sauro, 2009; Yilmaz, 2012, 2013) have indicated that their lack of effectiveness can be related to the fact that learners fail to notice them. This seems to be the case in example 6. SP2 uttered an affirmative expression in turn 3 which failed to indicate whether she understood or noticed the feedback provided.

Example 6. Dyad 2. Reactive LRE, recast

SP2: At least we can hear us. ← Reactive trigger

CAN2: Yes, at least we can hear each other, that's the main thing. ← Recast

SP2: Yeah. ← Uptake

The following Example (7) presents a typical interactional pattern of a reactive LRE. The reactive trigger is usually a non-target-like utterance by the learner (turn 1), which prompts a reaction on the part of the expert-speaker, who provides an explicit correction (turn 2). In this case, the uptake involved the learner's repaired word, including metalinguistic information about the non-target-like utterance and fully modified output, which incorporated the feedback in the original sentence (turn 3).

Example 7. Dyad 3. Reactive LRE, explicit correction, metalinguistic information, and modified output

CAN3: Cuando aprendé a leer... ← Reactive trigger

[When I learned how to read...]

SP3: Aprendí. ← Explicit correction

[Learned]

CAN3: Aprendí. Oh, right it's an e r ((second conjugation verb)) verb, ok. Cuando aprendí a leer. ← Metalinguistic information & Full modified output

[When I learned how to read.]

In Example 8, we observed another common reactive LRE in which the expert speaker (SP3) included metalinguistic information in the explicit correction (turn 2), followed by a fully modified output utterance by the learner (CAN3) in response to the correction in turn 3. It is interesting to note how the other non-target-like utterance 'frío,' instead of the plural 'fríos' that should agree with the word 'winters,' failed to catch the attention of the expert speaker and the conversation moved on.

Example 8. Dyad 3. Reactive LRE, explicit correction, metalinguistic information, and modified output

CAN3: Porque los invierno en Halifax.. ← Reactive trigger

[Because the winter in Halifax...]

SP3: Inviernos, plural. ← Explicit correction & Metalinguistic information

[Winters, plural.]

CAN3: Oh, gracias! Los inviernos en Canada y especialmente en Halifax son muy muy frío. ← Full modified output

[Oh, thanks! The winter in Canada and especially in Halifax is very cold]

SP3: Sí, claro.

[Yes, of course.]

Finally, during reactive LREs, we can observe interactional patterns in which the expert speaker does not need to provide explicit corrective feedback in order for learners to repair their utterances. For instance, see Example 9. The expert speaker used a clarification request in turn 2 because she failed to understand what CAN1 was asking. That led to a reformulation of CAN1's utterance who repaired her initial attempt and made it understandable for SP1, allowing them to resume their conversation.

Example 9. Dyad 1. Reactive LRE, clarification request and modified output

CAN1: Tú dices que haces las cosas con los deportes, am, y::, am.. qué tú haces am:: recienmente? ← Reactive trigger

[You say that you did stuff with sports, ehm, and what do you do recently?] ← Clarification request

SP1: *I don't understand what you mean.*

CAN1: Qué deportes am has organizado recientemente? ← Full modified output

[What sports uhm have you recently organized?]

SP1: Ah, sí. Bueno, pues un concurso de trineos, *mushing* creo que se llama.

[Oh, yes. Well, a sled dog race. I think it's called mushing.]

6. Discussion

The purpose of this study was to take a closer and qualitative look at learner-learner oral interactions produced during an e-tandem VE, where learners interchange the roles of expert and learner while practicing each other's target language (Spanish and English), in order to qualitatively examine the interactional patterns of the data trends observed in an earlier study (Canals, 2022).

The first research question investigated the interactional patterns that could be observed in LREs in which learners expressed metalinguistic information that lead to modified output. Several examples were presented that point out the facilitative role that metalinguistic information exerts helping scaffold the interaction (Fortune, 2005) and eventually facilitating the production of modified output. Earlier research (Canals, 2022) concluded that the presence of metalinguistic information did significantly impact the production of modified output in preemptive LREs, and the present examination of qualitative data unveils interactional patterns which illustrate this finding. The data presented in the current article comes from naturally occurring learner-learner conversations as part of an e-tandem VE. The conversational nature of the data examined is fundamentally different from other text-based forms of SCMC examined in earlier studies that mainly used text-chat SCMC (Gurzynski-Weiss & Baralt, 2014; Eslami & Kung, 2016; Lai & Zhao, 2006; Yilmaz & Yuksel, 2011). The nature of the text-based SCMC mode allows learners more reaction time (Van der Zwaard & Bannink, 2014) than in video- or audio-based SCMC, which can reduce the amount of metalinguistic information that is needed in order to resolve the LRE, and which is something that was also observed in the data presented in the current article.

The examination of an example of a preemptive LRE where no metalinguistic support was provided revealed the type of interactional patterns that emerge in such cases, which often lead to non-understandings. The example provided illustrates episodes directed to save face according to Van der Zwaard and Bannink (2014). In these episodes, learners avoid possible face-threatening interactions, often using avoidance strategies (Van der Zwaard & Bannink, 2016) until the episode ends with a non-understanding. The fact that the learners were only beginning to be acquainted with one another when they carried out the first video-call, which started after two weeks of them interacting as a group in an asynchronous discussion forum, could account for the non-understandings.

The second research question aimed to unveil the interactional patterns which contained modified output in preemptive LREs which, according to an earlier study (Canals, 2022), lead to significantly more modified output than reactive LREs. This finding was also supported by Akiyama (2014) and Ellis et al. (2001) who found more uptake in preemptive LREs than in reactive ones. A possible explanation could be that since learners initiate the episode and bring up the problematic language issue, they are more attentive to the

feedback, which consequently gets noticed more frequently. Ellis et al. (2001) indicate that preemptive LREs offer more opportunities for L2 learning because learners are anticipating feedback on an aspect of the language in which they overtly manifest they lack knowledge.

Most of the instances of modified output in the data correspond to either full modified output, which includes the use of the entire feedback provided, or full modified output which is then incorporated into a learner's complete new utterance (see Examples 1 and 2 in the results section). However, partial modified output was rarely found in the data examined. In fact, instances of full modified output incorporated into a new utterance were the ones that seemed to indicate that learners noticed and processed the feedback. This second type of modified output has not been identified as such or described in the literature before. This goes against the argument made by Gurzynski-Weiss and Baralt (2015), who indicated that learners' production of partial modified output is the best predictor of learners noticing the feedback. This could be explained by the fact that the present study presents naturally occurring data in which learners alternate between the roles of expert of their dominant language and learner, rather than teachers or trained interlocutors who might provide more pedagogically sound feedback. These types of pairings (learner-learner) lead to LREs which focus mostly on lexical items and, therefore, the feedback provided is often a phrase or even just a lexical item. In all cases examined in the current corpus, the feedback is very short, one word or phrase, and thus cannot be broken down further into smaller units, thereby limiting the potential difference between partial and full modified output put forth by Gurzynski-Weiss and Baralt (2015).

Only on two occasions the feedback was focused on pronunciation. Out of the thirteen examples presented, ten were in Spanish while only three were in English. The nature of LREs might be different depending on the language background of the speakers. In the examples presented here, Spanish learners seemed to be focusing lexical aspects, whereas English learners seemed to have more problems with pronunciation. Earlier studies such as Bueno-Alastuey (2010, 2013) have already noticed that the nature of LREs might be different depending on the language composition of the dyads.

The third research question unveiled the patterns of interactional feedback observed during reactive LREs. The results show how this type of LRE fosters the use of particularly explicit corrective feedback but also the use of clarification requests. However, these types of feedback do not seem to actually provide many opportunities for learners to produce modified output. Previous studies have already noted that corrections (Polio, Gass & Chapin, 2006; Mackey, Oliver & Leeman, 2003), particularly by expert speakers, during reactive LREs seem to inhibit rather than foster opportunities for learners to produce modified output. Therefore, the patterns of interactional feedback observed in the present research back up the findings of the aforementioned studies.

7. Conclusions

The present study examined the interactional patterns that emerge during episodes of negotiation of meaning between learners who are practicing each other's languages as part of an e-tandem virtual exchange. Learners alternated between the roles of learner and expert, depending on the language that was the focus of each episode, and the results indicate that when they take on the role of the expert, the feedback they provide to their counterparts is less teacher-like and more conversational-like, closer to real-life

conversations. This is reflected in the use of metalinguistic information, sometimes using non-specialized terminology (Ellis, 2016) and in the use of clarification requests. The fact that they interchanged these roles might have contributed to making the feedback provided less face-threatening for their partners, who at some point, would also take the expert role. This facilitated the involvement and investment of both learners in the interactions, similarly to what Fernández-García and Martínez-Arbelaiz (2014) observed.

The established camaraderie between the members of each pair could have also facilitated the emergence of preemptive LREs which seem to provide more opportunities for modified output to occur. The data examined here is in agreement with earlier studies (Akiyama, 2014; Ellis et al., 2001) which indicated higher uptake rates in preemptive LREs than in reactive LREs. As mentioned earlier, modified output can be considered a sub-category within the general uptake construct which includes all responses to corrective feedback (Gurzynski-Weiss & Baralt, 2015), and therefore these earlier findings (relating to uptake) can be related to the present research regarding the opportunities it provides for modified output to occur. The findings pertaining to the examination of reactive LREs suggest that sometimes the use of explicit corrective feedback inhibits the opportunities for learners to produce modified output as responses to the feedback provided and often ends up shutting down the conversations.

The limitations of the present study lie first with the lack of data on learners' retrospective perceptions, which could have been collected by carrying out a stimulated recall protocol that could have complemented the data presented by adding the learners' perspectives. Further follow-up studies addressing learners' perceptions are warranted and could potentially address this limitation. Second, a closer analysis of the multimodal features of the video conferencing tool, particularly the use of the written chat for clarification purposes, could shed more light on the affordances of this mode to increase the noticing and saliency of the feedback provided in these interactions.

Finally, and in regards to the possible implications of the current research for language education, it should be noted that the present study found value in learner-learner interactions where learners interchange roles as experts and learners. These types of partnerships help make these virtual exchanges an effective and safe language-learning environment where negotiation of meaning and language related episodes scaffold conversations and facilitate L2 development. These could have potential practical implications for language learning given that the covid-19 pandemic has brought to the fore language learning practices where learners interact online with teachers but also with other learners. These include virtual exchanges between learners in two or more educational institutions but also applications ([HelloTalk](#)) and websites ([Tandem](#)) that connect learners to other learners to practice oral interactive skills in the foreign language.

References

Akiyama, Y. (2014). Using *Skype* to focus on form in Japanese telecollaboration: Lexical categories as a new task variable. In P. Swanson & S. Li (Eds.), *Engaging language learners*

through technology integration: Theory, applications, and outcomes (pp. 181–209). IGI Global. DOI: 10.4018/978-1-5225-7663-1.ch029

Akiyama, Y., & Saito, K. (2016). Development of comprehensibility and its linguistic correlates: A longitudinal study of video-mediated telecollaboration. *The Modern Language Journal*, 100(3), 585–609.

Bueno-Alastuey, M. C. B. (2010). Synchronous-voice computer-mediated communication: Effects on pronunciation. *Calico Journal*, 28(1), 1–20.

Bueno-Alastuey, M. C. (2011). Perceived benefits and drawbacks of synchronous voice-based computer-mediated communication in the foreign language classroom. *Computer Assisted Language Learning*, 24(5), 419–432.

Bueno-Alastuey, M. C. (2013). Interactional feedback in synchronous voice-based computer mediated communication: Effect of dyad. *System*, 41(3), 543–559.

Canals, L. (2020). The effects of virtual exchanges on oral skills and motivation. *Language Learning & Technology*, 24(3), 103–119.

Canals, L. (2021). Multimodality and Translanguaging in Negotiating for Meaning. *Foreign Language Annals*, 54(3), 647–670. <https://doi.org/10.1111/flan.12547>

Canals, L. (2022). The interplay between metalanguage, feedback, and meaning negotiation in oral interaction. *Language Learning & Technology*, 26(1), 1–24.
<https://hdl.handle.net/10125/73486>

Dao, P., Duong, P. T., & Nguyen, M. X. N. C. (2021). Effects of SCMC mode and learner familiarity on peer feedback in L2 interaction. *Computer Assisted Language Learning*, 1–29.
DOI: [10.1080/09588221.2021.1976212](https://doi.org/10.1080/09588221.2021.1976212)

Ellis, M. (2016). Metalanguage as a component of the communicative classroom. *Accents Asia*, 8(2), 143–153.

Ellis, R., Basturkmen, H., & Loewen, S. (2001). Preemptive focus on form in the ESL classroom. *TESOL quarterly*, 35(3), 407–432.

Ellis, R., Loewen, S., & Erlam, R. (2006). Implicit and explicit corrective feedback and the acquisition of L2 grammar. *Studies in second language acquisition*, 28(2), 339–368.

Eslami, Z. R., & Kung, W. T. (2016). Focus-on-form and EFL learners' language development in synchronous computer-mediated communication: task-based interactions. *The Language Learning Journal*, 44(4), 401–417.

Fernández-García, M., & Martínez-Arbelaiz, A. (2014). Native speaker–non-native speaker study abroad conversations: Do they provide feedback and opportunities for pushed output? *System*, 42, 93–104.

Fortune, A. (2005). Learners' use of metalanguage in collaborative form-focused L2 output tasks. *Language Awareness*, 14, 21–38.

Foster, P., & Ohta, A. S. (2005). Negotiation for meaning and peer assistance in second language classrooms. *Applied linguistics*, 26(3), 402–430.

Gass, S. M., & Mackey, A. (2007). Input, interaction, and output in second language acquisition. In B. VanPatten & J. Williams (Eds.), *Theories in second language acquisition: An introduction*, (pp. 175–199). Routledge.

Gilbert, R., Barón, J., & Llanes, À. (2009). Manipulating cognitive complexity across task types and its impact on learners' interaction during oral performance. *International Review of Applied Linguistics in Language Teaching*, 47(3–4), 367–395.

Gurzynski-Weiss, L., & Baralt, M. (2014). Exploring learner perception and use of task-based interactional feedback in face-to-face and computer-mediated modes. *Studies in Second Language Acquisition*, 36, 1–37.

Gurzynski-Weiss, L., & Baralt, M. (2015). Does type of modified output correspond to learner noticing of feedback? A closer look in face-to-face and computer-mediated task-based interaction. *Applied Psycholinguistics*, 36(6), 1393–1420.

Stickler, U., & Hampel, R. (2019). Qualitative research in online language learning: What can it do? *International Journal of Computer-Assisted Language Learning and Teaching (IJCALLT)*, 9(3), 14–28.

Lai, C., & Zhao, Y. (2006). Noticing and text-based chat. *Language Learning & Technology*, 10(3), 102–120.

Loewen, S. (2005). Incidental focus on form and second language learning. *Studies in Second Language Acquisition*, 27, 361–386.

Loewen, S., & Isbell, D. R. (2017). Pronunciation in face-to-face and audio-only synchronous computer-mediated learner interactions. *Studies in Second Language Acquisition*, 39(2), 225–256.

Loewen, S., & Sato, M. (2018). Interaction and instructed second language acquisition. *Language Teaching*, 51(3), 285–329. doi:10.1017/S0261444818000125

Long, M. H. (1996). The role of the linguistic environment in second language acquisition. In W. C. Ritchie & T. K. Bhatia (Eds.), *Handbook of second language acquisition* (pp. 413–468). Academic Press.

Long, M. H. (2007). *Problems in SLA*. Routledge.

- Lyster, R., & Ranta, L. (2013). Counterpoint piece: The case for variety in corrective feedback research. *Studies in Second Language Acquisition*, 35, 167–184.
- Mackey, A., Oliver, R., & Leeman, J. (2003). Interactional input and the incorporation of feedback: An exploration of NS–NNS and NNS–NNS adult and child dyads. *Language Learning*, 53(1), 35-66.
- Monteiro, K. (2014). An experimental study of corrective feedback during video-conferencing. *Language Learning & Technology*, 18(3), 56–79.
- O'Dowd, R. (2018). From telecollaboration to virtual exchange: State-of-the-art and the role of UNICollaboration in moving forward. *Research-publishing.net*, 1, 1–23.
- O'Rourke, B. (2007). Models of telecollaboration (1): eTandem. *Languages for Intercultural Communication and Education*, 15, 41–61.
- Pica, T. (1994). Research on negotiation: What does it reveal about second-language learning conditions, processes, and outcomes? *Language Learning*, 44(3), 493–527.
- Polio, C., Gass, S., & Chapin, L. (2006). Using stimulated recall to investigate native speaker perceptions in native-nonnative speaker interaction. *Studies in Second Language Acquisition*, 28(2), 237-267.
- Saito, K., & Akiyama, Y. (2017). Video-based interaction, negotiation for comprehensibility, and second language speech learning: A longitudinal study. *Language Learning*, 67(1), 43–74.
- Sauro, S. (2009). Computer-mediated corrective feedback and the development of L2 grammar. *Language Learning & Technology*, 13(1), 96–120.
- Schmidt, R. W. (1990). The role of consciousness in second language learning. *Applied Linguistics*, 11, 129–158.

Storch, N. (2008). Metatalk in a pair work activity: Level of engagement and implications for language development. *Language Awareness*, 17, 95–114.

Strawbridge, T. (2021). Modern language: Interaction in conversational NS-NNS video SCMC eTandem exchanges. *Language Learning & Technology*, 25(2), 94–110.

Tian, J., & Wang, Y. (2010). Taking language learning outside the classroom: Learners' perspectives of eTandem learning via Skype. *Innovation in Language Learning and Teaching*, 4(3), 181–197.

Torres, J., & Yanguas, Í. (2021). Levels of Engagement in Task-based Synchronous Computer Mediated Interaction. *Canadian Journal of Applied Linguistics*, 24(2), 203–228.

Van der Zwaard, R., & Bannink, A. (2014). Video call or chat? Negotiation of meaning and issues of face in telecollaboration. *System*, 44, 137–148.

Van der Zwaard, R., & Bannink, A. (2016). Nonoccurrence of negotiation of meaning in task-based synchronous computer-mediated communication. *The Modern Language Journal*, 100(3), 625–640.

Van der Zwaard, R., & Bannink, A. (2019). Towards a Comprehensive Model of Negotiated Interaction in Computer-mediated Communication. *Language Learning & Technology*, 23(3), 116–135. <http://hdl.handle.net/10125/44699>

Varonis, E. M., & Gass, S. (1985). Non-native/non-native conversations: A model for negotiation of meaning. *Applied linguistics*, 6(1), 71–90.

Wang, Y. (2006). Negotiation of meaning in desktop videoconferencing-supported distance language learning. *ReCALL*, 18(1), 122–146.

Yanguas, Í. (2010). Oral computer-mediated interaction between L2 learners: It's about time! *Language Learning & Technology*, 14(3), 72–93.

Yanguas, Í. (2012). Task-based oral computer-mediated communication and L2 vocabulary acquisition. *CALICO Journal*, 29(3), 507–531.

Yanguas, Í., & Bergin, T. (2018). Focus on form in task-based L2 oral computer-mediated communication. *Language Learning & Technology*, 22(3), 65–81.

Yilmaz, Y., & Granena, G. (2010). The effects of task type in synchronous computer-mediated communication. *ReCALL*, 22(1), 20–38.

Yilmaz, Y., & Yuksel, D. (2011). Effects of communication mode and salience on recasts: A first exposure study. *Language Teaching Research*, 15(4), 457–477.

Ziegler, N. (2016). Synchronous computer-mediated communication and interaction. *Studies in Second Language Acquisition*, 38(3), 553–586.

Ziegler, N., & Phung, H. (2019). Technology-mediated task-based interaction: The role of modality. *International Journal of Applied Linguistics*, 170(2), 251–276.

Appendices

Appendix A: Links to the task instructions

Task 1

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1FvvKvM4VtMqyPIIpr4znStmgJo83QsTm/view>

Task 2

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1pa2HZZo1yb5JskjRqdWniKPI1fE2kSSP/view>

Task 3

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1OIQKU-hm79owSGnKP1Mfu1HSUEVCguEX/view>

Appendix B: Transcription Conventions Used adapted from Seedhouse and Richards (2007)

Meaning	Convention
Use of languages other than English	bold
Initial of speaker	L capital letter

Indicates point of overlap (onset and termination)	[]
No gap between two turns	=
Short pause	(.)
Pause marked by seconds	(3.)
Rising intonation	?
Animated/emphatic tone	!
Lengthening of the vowel	e: e::
Full stop indicating falling intonation (final)	.
Especially loud sound or stressed word	CAPITAL
Marked shift into higher or lower pitch	↑↓
Utterance noticeably quieter than surrounding talk	® ®
Smiley voice	J
Unclear unintelligible speech	()
Transcriber doubt about a word	(guess)
Non-verbal action or editor's comments	((A is looking at B))
Lapse of time	[...]
Languages	Transcription in English; Bold in Spanish

