L3-Task. A Case Study of Online Tandem Interaction Based on A2 to B1 Level (CEFR)

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Abstract

The present paper focuses on online tandem interaction in German and Spanish by students who are native speakers (NSs) of Spanish (L1), having studied English as a second language English (L2) and are acquiring German as a L3 within a university program based on a A2/B1 level according CEFR. In order to provide non-native speakers of German with opportunities to develop oral competence, online tandems were organized with students between a network of universities implied in the Project L3-Task. During their online encounter, the tandem partners carried out task-based interactions related to the formal German language course in university education. The interactions were carried out outside of the classroom and recorded and stored by the students themselves with the help of a common video-conference platform. Online tandems are carried out on the principles of autonomy, reciprocity and diversity (Brammerts 2005, Telles & Vassallo 2006). In this article we show transcribed examples of recording of students (A2/B1) describing the acquisition of discourse strategies. Special attention is paid to the categories of collaborative, competitive and corrective feedback and negotiation of meaning. We focus also on pausing and turn taking regarding cultural conventions in discourse strategies. This study includes a total of 55 native speakers of Spanish, learning German in an institutional framework and 55 native speakers of German. Recordings are carried out outside of the classroom and organized according to the CEFR. All students had learned English as a second language which was useful for the technical setting of the tandem pairs.
During this first approach of case studies within L3-Task, we focused on the following research questions:

a. Does CF and NoM occur in learner-learner interaction even at a beginner levels (A1/A2)?
b. Does the strategy of NoM indicate being on the Threshold level of an autonomous speaker (B1)?
c. Do CF and NoM differ according to levels and languages?
d. Can negotiated interaction promote grammar development in L2/L3- learners or just lexical adjustment?

1. Introduction

L3-Task is a lifelong-learning-project promoted by the European Commision, Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency. The project focuses on three languages that are often learnt as third languages: German, Spanish and Chinese. Starting with the results obtained from a prior pilot-project born from a collaboration between the universities of Vienna (Austria) and Alicante (Spain), the L3TASK-project sets up partners in tandem and carry out experimental observations about how these partnerships are working. The partnerships are formed by students from diverse universities (Vienna, Alicante, Jena in Germany, Barcelona in Spain) including also from China.
One of the main objective is the study of audio samples against the background of diverse existing theoretical approaches to the acquisition of a third language.

2. Third Language Learning and employability

The motivation behind our project is the necessity of third language learning in order to improve employability. Countries with less experience in third language learning, need to improve their L3-competence in order to integrate/reintegrate individuals in the European work market.
L3-Task focuses on the priority of third languge learning n Europe: In this case, German, and Spanish and strongly emerging markets in China oblige to enforce and to implement also Chinese as a Third language as we include in our tandem-Skype exchange interaction.
The commitment of European countries to integrate the European Framework of Reference for Language (CEFL) into the syllabus of BA-studies and the need to reach B1 level in a third language at the end of a bachelor degree, obliges a network between universities in order to exploit the possibilities of interaction with native speakers in a similar situation.

3. 1 Organization of groups

In this case study we compared 55 BA students learning German (A2) in their second university year. All students had studied English before as a L2. Students were asked to record five tasks of the A2 program as an obligatory oral activity.   We discussed suitable scenarios for interactions for the level A1, and agreed on 5 items, which students had to record over a period of 6 weeks in collaboration with their respective tandem partners. All interactions took place outside the classroom through video conference. Students were allowed to rehearse and record their interactions as often as they wanted. Each recorded interaction should last 5 to 10 minutes.

3.2. technical setting and oral tasks

Students were instructed to use a video conference application free of charge to communicate with their tandem partner. Recordings were stored in a cloud and students received instructions to share them. NNS students with NS tandem partners were asked to start their conversation in their shared L2, English.

3.3. Former research on interaction and computer mediated communication

Second Language Acquisition is based on input, interaction and output (Long 1996, Gass 2003, Swain 1995). Input provides positive evidence and interaction facilitates acquisition triggering adjustments (Gass, 2003). Interaction can be reinforced by Corrective Feedback (CF) as a form-focused instruction given by a native speaker or a more advanced learner. From the perspective of Conversationsl Analysis (CA), explicit communication feedback and implicit communication feedback triggers language awareness and negotiation of Meaning (NoM) (Oliver, 1995; Schlegloff et al. 1977).

As shown by Tudini (2005/2010) negotiation, repair and, especially, self-initiated self-repair are very common from the very beginning of language learning, and more frequent in task-based online exchanges than in open-ended ones. Several studies show that negotiation phenomena in adult interaction have high incidence (Mackey, Oliver, Leeman 2003, Varonis and Gass 1985). Many studies of learners´ interaction with native speakers have shown positive results and found that CF and NoM improve language skills of L2 learners (Oliver 1995, Pica 1994). Oral output, especially, encourages such learners to aim at more comprehensible and accurate IL and the improvement of problematic utterances during interaction. In conclusion, input, interaction and output are interrelated in SLA, and consequently task-based and open-ended video conferences offer new occasions for learning and acquisition.

Computer mediated communication reports reduced anxiety about participating, and increased motivation for using the target language (Kelm, 1992; Beauvois, 1992; Kern, 1995, Chun, 1998). Therefore online tandems allow language learners to be involved in an active learning environment, where they can experience more opportunities for the input of a target language and modify their current interlanguage capacities.

4. Learning strategies and categories

One of the objectives of the case study is to find evidence for native conversational strategies in third language discourse at the stage of A2 in German which shows evidence for progress towards an autonomous linguistic level (B1).
Student recordings where observed on the following discourse categories.

(1)   Feedback
a   Collaborative Feedback
b   Competitive Feedback
(2)   Corrective Feedback
a   Explicit CF
b   Implicit CF /
        b.1 Comprehension Check
        b.2. Clarification Request
        b.3 Negotiation of Meaning (NoM)

(3)   Repetition/Recast
(4)   Self-repair
(5)   Overlapping
a   Collobarative overlap
b   Competitive overlap

(6)   Pausing and taking turns

Data was studied in the light of the following research questions:

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5. Evidences for discourse strategies and autonomous discourse in A2-level

We found evidence for all discourse strategies to be expected in native interaction and

Feedback. Collaborative Feedback

1	00:00.0	00:05.84	M	eh sO eh MOnic↑A wie=wiel (.) sprachen kennst d↑U?
2	00:08.89	00:10.86	F	ich kann dREI sprACHen.
3	00:12.27	00:17.62	F	eine sprache kann ich se:hr g↑UT (.) es ist meine MUttersprache und dAs ist dEUtsch.
4	00:17.93	00:18.40	M	mhm
5	00:18.79	00:23.19	F	die zwEIte sprACHe ist englisch (.) ich habe sie in der schule gelernt↓.
6	00:23.42	00:27.97	F	u:nd in ↑ÖSterrEIch lernt man viele jahre Englisch in der schule↓.
7	00:28.07	00:32.49	F	das heisst ich kann? (.) <räuspert sich> ich kann sie gUT sprechen↓.
8	00:28.07	00:28.28	M	ja:
9	00:33.69	00:38.58	F	U:nd spANisch lerne ich seit dREI JAhren U:nd.
10	00:38.94	00:42.43	F	ja: es ist schwIErig für mich (.) ABer↓ es wird immer beSSer↓.
11	00:42.92	00:45.08	M	ah gut gut=gut.
12	00:45.08	00:51.45	M	so:: du hast e::hm gesagt drei jahren eh.
13	00:51.45	00:54.98	M	du hast lern span↑↑ISCH?
14	00:56.57	00:59.95	F	jA: genau seit dREI JAhren lerne ich spanisch.
15	00:56.96	00:57.51	M	[sE:it]
16	01:00.18	01:06.68	M	gut ähm so dU: du studierst span↑ISCH?

Corrective Feedback. (CF). Implicit

00:33.69	00:38.58	F	U:nd spANisch lerne ich seit dREI JAhren U:nd.
00:38.94	00:42.43	F	ja: es ist schwIErig für mich (.) ABer↓ es wird immer beSSer↓.
00:42.92	00:45.08	M	ah gut gut=gut.
00:45.08	00:51.45	M	so:: du hast e::hm gesagt drei jahren eh.
00:51.45	00:54.98	M	du hast lern span↑↑ISCH?
00:56.57	00:59.95	F	jA: genau seit dREI JAhren lerne ich spanisch.
00:56.96	00:57.51	M	[sE:it]

Corrective Feedback. (CF). Explicit/Implicit

05:38.96	05:47.08	M	a:ber ich mochte spater, später (.) mi:t studenten wohnen in anderen ↓↓haus.
05:40.11	05:40.64	F	[ja]
05:48.02	05:48.62	M	u::nd
05:48.62	05:51.79	F	okay also in einem piso compARtido oder?
05:49.08	05:49.88	M	[ich glaube (XX)]
05:51.88	05:54.96	M	ja =piso compartido ja: so::
05:54.83	05:57.01	F	also auf deutsch wg (.) mhm
05:57.08	05:59.22	M	je:h? äh (.) entschuldigung? << "je" >
05:59.06	06:04.81	F	auf deutsch WG (-) auf DEUtsch wie ich vorhin erklärt habe WG
06:01.04	06:01.79	M	[ah gut]
06:04.69	06:15.13	M	ah gut gut DAnke äh (--) ja, äh so: ich glaube das ist alles fertig.
06:07.52	06:09.20	F	[piso compartido es wg]
06:10.40	06:10.88	F	[okay]
06:15.13	06:18.56	F	so: danke monica und (.) äh TSchüss
06:16.33	06:17.02	F	[dir auch ja <lacht>]

(5) Competitive Overlap

04:49.73	04:52.81	W	jA und nEin (.) <lacht> ähm
04:52.81	04:54.10	W	(1.29)
04:54.10	04:56.57	W	es_es ist sEhr impos↑↑Ant
04:56.57	04:57.32	A	ja
04:57.32	05:01.48	W	dIE cuidad de las artes y de las ciencias anzus↑↑Ehen
05:01.48	05:08.24	W	wEIl =wEil es ist kUnst oder es ist ehm imposAnte arCHitektUr °h
05:07.32	05:08.24	A	[mhm]
05:08.24	05:11.06	W	abER (.) ich fInde
05:11.06	05:15.11	W	oder ich glaubE dass alles sEhr vIEl geld gekostet h↑At
05:15.11	05:20.03	A	ja:? und d_d_du du weisst du weisst das (.) entschuldigung
05:16.03	05:18.06	W	[und ich finde und ich will]
05:20.03	05:25.15	A	dU weisst dass (-) wIE:: (-) wIE::
05:21.14	05:21.60	W	ja
05:21.60	05:23.22	A	wIE::

Negotiation of Meaning, Clarification Request, Recast

M	und mo=mochtest du (---) kINder, kINder später haben?
F	[ähm ja, (XX) möchte (--) ↑hm?]
F	ja: spE:ter schon, ja. aber =nicht jetzt;
M	Ja und eh (XX) NA, hast äh:: und hast äh=deine familie EIn: (.) haust↑EIer?
F	ob meine Famile ein Haus h↑´AT?
M	eine, ein haustEIer? ähm hund=ä oder katz?
F	Ah ein Hausti↓!ER.
M	HaustieR
F	NEin wir hatten frü_her Haustiere. wir hatten EInen hund und fuenf katzen und manchmal, manchmal hatten wir auc
M	Gut? (.) ähm (.) eine frage. wol=hm mochtest du: spaeter mi::t (-) andere studenten wohnen?

Self-repair/repetition/recast

203	06:39.41	06:40.15		(0.74)
204	06:40.15	06:41.41	A	hAben? (.) hAst?
205	06:41.41	06:43.39	W	ja aha (.) stimmt ja

Pausing (L3)

1	00:01.65	00:05.42	M	Ä::h (.) so:; moniCA: (.) hast du: ge=schwist↑ER?
2	00:01.65	00:05.42		(3.77)
3	00:05.42	00:06.98		(---)
4	00:06.98	00:09.45	F	ja: ich habe: !DRei geschwister.
5	00:09.61	00:10.50	M	[gu:t ah:]
6	00:10.50	00:13.24	F	und zwar: zwei schwestern
7	00:13.29	00:13.64		(-)
8	00:13.64	00:14.00	M	[hm]
9	00:14.00	00:15.28	F	und EInen bruder.
10	00:15.71	00:18.52	M	Hmm, gu:t so und wie alt sind =sie?
11	00:18.62	00:20.39		(---)
12	00:20.39	00:26.53	F	meine Ältere schwester ist Ein na: <lacht> entschuldigung: sie ist zwEIundreissig
13	00:26.79	00:27.33	M	ae:h
14	00:27.33	00:32.73	F	ich bin einunddreissig <lacht>. ähm meine jüngere schwester ist neunundZWAnig: und mein BRuder ist fuenfundszwANzig
15	00:33.12	00:33.83	M	hm:
16	00:33.89	00:36.51	F	und mein BRuder ist fuenfundszwanzig

Discussion

Data of student recordings of A2 level show evidences for communication strategies, collaborative, competitive, explicit and implicit corrective feedback. Regarding research questions, we observe corrective feedback (CF) and negotiations of meaning (NoM) at A2 level. The communication strategies applied evidence a progress towards an autonomous speaker in the third language. CF and

NoM increases with learning progress. Negotiated interaction observed in online conversation promotes communication and lexical adjustment and not necessarily progress on grammar and form.

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