
“Whoa! Say that again!?”: a case study of multimodal feedback in two tandem learning dyads

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The present case study focuses on tandem conversations, i.e., non-formal exchanges between native speakers (NSs) and non-native speakers (NNS) to study corrective feedback (CF i.e. an indicative of what is not a correct form in the target language, Lyster & Ranta, 1997; Gass, 2003) and feedback signals. Tandem conversations are a context where authentic miscommunication issues (Varonis & Glass, 1985) may arise between tandem partners, and where feedback signals may be key in anticipating, signaling and resolving communication issues between them. Feedback signals are essential cues to signal active listening and understanding, marked by multimodal cues (Bertrand et al., 2007) both vocal and visual.

Our analyses are conducted on the SITAF corpus (Horgues & Scheuer, 2015) which contains video recordings of face-to-face interactions between undergraduate students (NSs of French and of English) who were recorded while performing collaborative reading and semi-spontaneous conversation tasks. The present work focuses on two pairs from this corpus in order to study the individual and collaborative multimodal strategies developed by the two tandem partners, with a focus on the role of feedback signals as a part of miscommunication management but also more didactic, corrective feedback.

Analyses reveal preliminary trends in the use of multimodal feedback within corrective feedback and miscommunication sequences involving frowns, shifts in body posture, as well as smiles and head nods. Our case study points to the constructive use of feedback cues by NSs for successfully signaling and collaboratively resolving miscommunication, but also for providing corrective feedback to their NNS partner, which are both essential elements in L2 acquisition.

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