

How interactions prompt the acquisition of phrasal verbs in different modalities: Computer-mediated and face-to-face EFL classrooms

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Abstract

This paper investigates whether the benefits of interactions for L2 learning vary in different learning modalities. A computer-mediated classroom in which students communicate using computer (CMC) and face-to-face (FTF) classroom in which students work on a pen-and-paper basis while directly talking with each other are compared. The acquisition of phrasal verbs (PVs) whose meaning is opaque to many EFL learners in spite of the compound of familiar verbs has been investigated to find out whether they were prompted by the interactions taking place in each different modality. For the investigation of interactions, dictogloss was utilized in which learners were required to reconstruct a short text collaboratively for the task completion. Small groups were made to work for each task in Japanese university classrooms where nine to fourteen L2 learners, aged 17-20, participated. A pre-task as input was conducted in ways of getting learners to focus their attention on meaning not language as an object. The dictogloss tasks, audio-recorded in each lesson and classroom, were coded and transcribed to analyze the process of interactions. To measure the acquisition of PVs, both production task and semiotic judgment tests were provided.

Keywords

interactions the acquisition of phrasal verbs
computer-mediated communication (CMC)
face-to-face communication dictogloss

Introduction

The benefits of classroom interactions on L2 learning have been widely supported in terms of learners' attentional process led by negotiation and output (Mackey, 2007), or of socialcultural theoretical perspectives which explain the learners' co-construction of linguistic knowledge (Ohta, 2001; Storch, 2002). However, in the light of second language acquisition (SLA), there is a need

to investigate how and to what extent L2 acquisition is prompted by peer interactions in different modalities such as the growing use of computer-mediated communication (CMC) in addition to conventional face-to-face (FTF) communication. As for the study which compared CMC and FTF environment, it was revealed the effect of the computers on the use of L2 and engagement with tasks (composition, editing, and translation) in pair interactions (Tan, Wigglesworth, and Storch, 2010) and was suggested that CMC seemed to promote greater learner engagement, yet some factors such as online experience, attitudes towards the use of CMC for language learning, and participants' preferences, and task differences might affect the nature of interaction.

Meanwhile, this study explores in more details on the process of L2 acquisition of phrasal verbs (PVs) via either CMC or FTF communication. The reason why the acquisition of PVs is focused is that since PVs fit in an effective cognitive linguistic teaching technique with attention to usage-based approaches and the concept of meaning motivation, it is a suitable case to test theories of language processing and language acquisition (Gonzalez, 2010). In addition, to make meaning-making and any meta language talks happen, dictogloss tasks, in which students are encouraged to focus some of their attention on form while working on four language skills (Jacobs & Small, 2003) were utilized to examine the process.

Finally, to measure the acquisition of PVs, two different tasks as post-tests, a semiotic judgment test in which old and new learning items had been included and a production task, were analyzed.

1 The present study

1.1 Research questions

1. Is the acquisition of phrasal verbs affected by the different learning modality between CMC and FTF communication?
2. Does the acquisition of phrasal verbs in CMC

and FTF settings differ in a judgment task and/or a production task?

3. Is there any difference in the acquisition of old and new items of phrasal verbs in CMC and FTF settings?

1.2 Method

The study employed an experimental research design with a pre-test, treatment, post-test structure, and to further investigate the process of learning through interactions, the transcription of audio-recorded data was coded as well. However, this paper, due to the delayed schedule of data collection, excludes the sections of results and discussion which will be presented at the PAAL 2012 conference.

1.2.1 Participants

The participants were Japanese speaking L2 learners of English at a university aged 17-21 enrolled in the faculty of business administration and were all false beginners. A week prior to the experiment, they took a semiotic judgment pre-test and showed that there was no difference in the level of their knowledge of PVs between the CMC and FTF groups. Classes were conducted once a week each of which consisted of nine to fourteen students.

1.2.2 Tasks

To optimize chances of collaborative work and meta-language talk, dictogloss tasks including a few PVs were employed in each lesson. Prior to the task, the participants engaged in a pre-task in which they received input of PVs, guessing the meaning of PVs in the provided contexts. After the pre-tasks, the participants worked on dictogloss and received feedback. Five times of dictogloss over five weeks were operated.

1.2.3 Procedures

In two different classrooms, one in the CMC group working on screen and the other in FTF group using pen and pencil, the same procedures were operated. First, the pre-tasks as input were implemented before engaging in the dictogloss tasks. The participants were shown six fill-in-the-blank questions of PVs with example sentences and images of each action. Then, they were asked to choose an appropriate answer for each blank from the given options. After the feedback on the questions and verbatim repetitions of the provided sentences in a whole class, the participants were shown word cloud pictures based and were asked to guess what the task story might be. To begin with the dictogloss tasks, each participant received a note-taking sheet to fill in the grids with

information they heard after listening several times. Subsequently, the participants worked on reconstructing sentences individually and was given time to compare their texts and look for any differences with each other in small groups. After the conversational interactions, they were given feedback to compare the reconstructed texts with the original texts.

1.2.4 Analysis

To measure the development in the course of the acquisition of PVs, the semiotic judgment pre-/post-tests of PVs and the post-test of production task were analyzed for each learner and the correlation of outcomes of the three tests were analyzed. The audio-recorded data during the conversational interactions were coded into transcriptions and were analyzed to investigate in more details the process of learning PVs through the interactions.

1.3 Results/ Discussion/ limitations

All the results, discussion, and limitations of this study will be presented at the PAAL2012 conference.

2. References

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