Language Learning Outside the Classroom: Evaluating the Efficacy of Instructional Repair Techniques in One-on-one Tutoring Sessions between University Students and Immigrant Employees

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Language Learning Outside the Classroom:
Evaluating the Efficacy of Instructional Repair Techniques in One-on-one Tutoring Sessions between University Students and Immigrant Employees

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Abstract

In this thesis, I systematically examine instructional practices of repair in a university program which pairs university students (referred to as instructors in this study) with immigrant employees (referred to as students in this study) for one-on-one English lessons. With a focus on less-educated individuals in non-academic (non-classroom) settings, this research is aimed at addressing a gap in the second language acquisition (SLA) literature. Specifically, I explore instances of breakdown in interaction wherein the learner makes an incorrect semantic association to a presented word based on its phonological similarities with a word they are more familiar with, which warrants resolution by the instructor. The thesis proceeds in three parts. First, I give an overview of different types of repair and the different work that achieving resolution requires from participants in the interaction. Second, using data that I collected from the university program, I use conversation analysis (CA) to compare two different repair strategies employed by the instructors. Third and finally, I present avenues for future research that may be taken to further explore these techniques, to help fill this gap in the literature, and more practically, to contribute to better practices of second language instruction. The ultimate goal of this research is to contribute to an improved set of protocols related to language acquisition among adult non-native speakers and those that would seek to teach them.

Keywords: second language acquisition, conversation analysis, English language learners
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Introduction

Second language acquisition (SLA) is a linguistic concept that considers how individuals learn language. SLA differs from foreign language acquisition in the assumption that the learned language “plays an institutional and social role in the community” (i.e. learning English in the United States) for purposes of further social integration (Ellis, 1994). This concept may apply to a diverse group of individuals, including high school students, college students, and adult language learners, all of whom may experience SLA in different ways. For example, one may learn in the classroom, in groups, or in one-on-one sessions. Examination of these SLA environments may inform future teaching practices thereby benefitting the students as they learn new languages.

SLA research does not often focus on the education level in populations studied; however, this variable deserves greater attention in analyses. Oftentimes, participants in SLA studies are educated students with high levels of literacy (Bigelow & Tarone, 2004). Therefore, existing theories of SLA ignore a very important subset of the population of second language learners: individuals with low literacy levels (Bigelow & Tarone, 2004). According to Bigelow and Tarone (2004), “…all the information available on sequences of L2 [second language] development is derived from observing and studying literate adult L2 learners, child L2 learners, or learners with unverified L1 [first language] literacy skills” (695). This failure to account for literacy levels of students has resulted in a gap in the literature; very little is known about the learning experiences and practices of individuals who are illiterate or have low literacy levels.
Mathews-Aydinli (2008) claims there is a need for more research of English Language Learners (ELLs) in informal (non-academic) classroom settings. Her survey of the existing research, which included 23 ethnographic studies, 12 teacher-based studies, and four SLA studies highlights the current gap in literature. Mathews-Aydinli convincingly illustrates that, “the adult ELL population presents a still-under-tapped resource for research on culture and second-language learning” (208). My study falls at the intersection of ELLs and their instructors and thus considers prior research on instructional practices of English as a second language in a non-academic setting. This specific topic is also understudied, especially for ELLs with limited literacy, like many of the participants in my study (Burt et al., 2008).

The present study examines the interactional practices that take place during SLA in informal (non-academic) one-on-one English language tutoring sessions between university students (the instructors) and university employees (the students) who have low levels of literacy or are illiterate in their L1. Using CA, I analyze the efficacy of collaborative efforts performed by instructors during one-on-one English language lessons to repair ‘breakdowns’. These breakdowns arise due to an incorrect semantic association made by the employee to a word that they are more familiar with and that is phonologically similar to the ‘target’ word. I will compare and contrast two interactions, examining the different repair techniques used by the instructors in order to resolve these breakdowns.

**Methods**

I drew participants from a campus-based organization (the “Switch” Program) that facilitates English lessons between immigrant employees on campus and students at the university. The employees who participate in this program come from a variety of countries, and Latin America and Nepal were the two most prevalent regions of origin for employees. The goal
of the Switch Program is to teach employees English skills to improve self-advocacy in their work environment. The employees that participate in this program comprise a diverse group of individuals. They come from a variety of educational backgrounds, ranging from illiterate in their native language to college-educated. Importantly, employees fall along a spectrum of English skills, ranging from no English to fluent spoken English. Due to the variation in employee participants in the Switch Program, the one-on-one lessons take different forms for each pair of instructors and employees.

The specific employee population that I have chosen to study comprises individuals who have lower levels of literacy skills. While I do not focus on literacy in this particular study, it is important to consider these populations in order to create a more holistic representation of the experiences of students in SLA contexts. Additionally, the context in which these instructional interactions take place is outside of a traditional classroom, which allows this study to contribute to the rather limited literature about instructional practices in informal (non-academic) classroom settings.

The data for this study draw from nine hour-long, video-recorded one-on-one lessons between four university student-employee pairs. Video recording is an important technique, as there are extralinguistic features of conversations (such as eye gaze and gesture) that are important to consider in the analysis of naturally occurring interactions (Clift, 2016). After recording, the videos were transcribed using the transcription conventions developed by Gail Jefferson (Jefferson, 2004; Hepburn & Bolden, 2013). Data was then subsequently analyzed using the conversation analysis methodology.

Conversation analysis (CA), or the microanalysis of linguistic interactions and practices, is one of many methodologies that has been used to examine the efficacy of SLA practices.
Typically, CA is used to examine interactions between people in naturally-occurring situations (Clift, 2016). This unique methodological approach allows for the observation of the moment-by-moment constructions of interactions, providing the ability to observe the “micro-details of communicative practice” in the context of SLA (Doehler, 2010: 2). CA adopts a bottom-up approach; researchers collect the set of interactional data and subsequently analyze observed phenomena. In this manner, this method “puts participants’ own displayed orientations at the centre of the analysis” (Clift, 2016: 29). CA has been employed to many facets of SLA in a variety of settings including, writing workshops (Young & Miller, 2004), classroom interactions (Lee, 2007; Hellermann, 2003; Mondada & Doehler, 2005; McHoul, 1990; Mori, 2004), group work (Olsher, 2004; Markee, 1995; Markee, 2005), and one-on-one tutoring sessions (Belhiah, 2013).

Current research adopts two primary approaches to study language acquisition via the methodology of conversation analysis. The first of these approaches is observing and targeting learning in SLA contexts. As CA allows for the examination of the “micro-details of communicative practice”, it allows for the targeting of learning at the most micro level of the conversation. An example of this utilization of CA can be seen in Doehler’s research (2010), which primarily focuses on how social interactions can provide insight into the learning mechanisms of language learning. She claims that, “learning a language involves a continuous process of adaptation of patterns of language-use-for-action in response to locally emergent communicative needs, and the routinization of these patterns through repeated participation in social activities” (Doehler, 2010: 2).

The second approach of CA as applied to SLA considers the interactional practices that take place between instructors and learners in contexts of language acquisition. In fact, CA
literature has utilized findings that have come out of SLA contexts pertaining to the concept of turn design (Gardner, 2012). Turn design refers to the process of conversation “tailoring” that participants undertake based on their interlocuter’s prior action and assumed knowledge. Ultimately, turn design holds that the speaker acts in order to achieve his or her interactional goals (Sacks, Schegloff, & Jefferson, 1974; Drew, 2005). In Gardner’s survey of CA research applied to classrooms, he found that nearly all research on turn design in classroom interactions outside SLA contexts has stemmed from language classes (Gardner, 2012). Gardner claims this is the case because, “language learners have…a restricted set of linguistic resources for constructing their turns” and “teachers modify their turns both to make their questions more accessible to learners, but also to facilitate their teaching strategies” (Gardner, 2012: 602).

**Repair**

Repair in conversations consists of adjustments that are made in order to target problems with hearing, speaking, or understanding (Schegloff, Jefferson & Sacks, 1977; Gardner, 2012; Clift, 2016). Repair is typically broken into four different categories based on who initiates the repair (other or self) and who provides the solution (other or self) (Schegloff, Jefferson & Sacks, 1977). The location within the interaction where the initiation of repair occurs may be classified as “same turn”, “next turn”, or “after next turn” (Schegloff, Jefferson, & Sacks, 1977; Dingemanse & Enfield, 2015). Self-repair occurs when the speaker resolves their own ‘error’ while other-repair occurs when other members in the conversation do repair (Clift, 2016). For the purposes of this paper, I will primarily be focusing on other-initiated repair (OIR); however, it is important to acknowledge the other types that exist.

The different types of initiators require different amounts of work from the person completing the repair. Other-initiated repair is considered “cooperative” behavior, as it
demonstrates, through contributions from each party, how people work together in order to reach a mutual understanding (Dingemanse & Enfield, 2015; Schegloff, 2000; Clark & Schaefer, 1987). OIR “involves asymmetries in knowledge states that cannot be navigated without a high degree of social intelligence and sensitivity” (Dingemanse & Enfield, 2015: 97). “Other-initiated repair is a system for maintaining mutual understanding” (Dingemanse & Enfield, 2015: 97).

The use of OIR can be done using different “formats”, which are “ways to indicate problems in prior talk” (Dingemanse & Enfield, 2015: 101). These formats of repair indicators have been broken down into five (Schegloff, Jefferson, & Sacks, 1977; Dingemanse & Enfield, 2015). According to Schegloff, Jefferson, & Sacks (1977: 367-8) these five formats are:

1. *Huh? And What?*
2. question words *Who?*, *Where?*, and *When?*
3. partial repeat of the trouble-source turn plus a question word
4. partial repeat of the trouble-source turn
5. *Y’mean* plus a candidate understanding of the prior turn

Each of these formats require different amounts of work in the solution of the repair (Clift, 2016). Additionally, they each demonstrate different amounts of understanding of the prior turn that was the reason for initiating the repair. OIR requests can be broken into “open” repair initiators and “restricted” repair initiators (Drew, 1997; Dingemanse & Enfield, 2015). “Open” repair initiators signal that there was a trouble-source in prior talk, but it does not specify wherein lies the problem. Conversely, “restricted” repair initiators target the trouble-source more specifically (Drew, 1997). Additionally, other repair initiators can be broken into “request” and “offer” types. “Request” initiators ask for specific clarification from a prior turn, while “offer” initiators put forward a candidate understanding that can either be confirmed or rejected (Dingemanse & Enfield, 2015; Schegloff, 2004). These different categories of other-initiated repair require different amounts of work from the participant “doing” the repair in order to reach
a solution. Open request initiators, such as “what?” or “huh?” require the most work from the person completing the repair. They target the initial trouble-source as a whole, and repetition or clarification becomes relevant in order for a solution to be reached (Dingemanse & Enfield, 2015). Restricted request initiators, such as “who?” target a specific aspect of the initial trouble-source turn and require less work from the person “doing” repair to reach a solution than the open request initiators, as the specific trouble-source can be more easily identified. Restricted offer initiators, such as partial repeats of the trouble source turn, provide a candidate understanding of the trouble-source turn that can simply be confirmed or corrected in the solution (Dingemanse & Enfield, 2015). Therefore, different repair initiators require different amounts work from the participant in the interaction who is completing the repair in order for a mutual understanding to be reached.

**Terminology & Pronouns**

Because both participants in the lesson are ‘students’ (either in their daily lives or in the lessons themselves), I seek to avoid any confusion about which ‘student’ I refer to by excluding that term from my analysis altogether. Instead, I use the term ‘employee’ (‘EMP’ in the transcripts) to refer to the university employee who takes the role of student in these interactions and the term ‘instructor’ (‘INS’ in the transcripts) to refer to the university student who takes the role of instructor in these interactions.

Additionally, in order to protect the anonymity of my participants due to the small sample size of my data, I use feminine pronouns to refer to all of the members of the interactions in this study irrespective of their true gender.

**Data: The Breakdown**
The two examples presented in this study demonstrate a breakdown wherein an initial word is presented in the lesson, and the employee makes an incorrect semantic connection to the original word based on its phonological similarities with a word they are more familiar with. Research on spoken language processing and word recognition has resulted in the concept of ‘neighborhood density’, which refers to “the number of words that sound similar to a given word” (Vitevich, 2007: 166). The errors which occur in both of these excerpts are the result of an incorrect semantic association that has been made, connecting the target word to a phonological neighbor of that word. In this section, I focus on the breakdown, and will get to the resolution thereof in the next section.

In Excerpt 1, the instructor-employee pair are doing an activity where they name body parts as a part of a ‘Going to the Doctor’s Office’ lesson. The instructor begins by saying the target word in Spanish and sees if the employee can guess (or knows) the word in English. The target word in the activity in Excerpt 1 is *legs*.

**Excerpt 1: Leggings**

001 INS: ( ) y piernas::?
   and leg.PL
002 (3.5)
003 EMP: °No sé.°
   NEG know.1SG
   *I don’t know*

004 (1.3)
005 INS: Legs.
006 (1.1)
007 EMP: °Legs.°
008 INS: Legs.
009 INS: Legs °okay°.
010 (2.8)
011 EMP: -> Legs no es algo: (. ) pantalón?
   NEG be.3SG something pants
   isn’t that something pants?

012 EMP: °Legs?°
013 (3.7)
014 INS: Ah: cómo?
   What
The instructor begins by saying the word for legs (piernas) in Spanish. After 3.5 seconds, the employee responds with “no sé” (I don’t know). Then the student provides the word “legs” in English, which is repeated by the employee in line 7. In line 11 the employee asks a clarifying
question, “Legs no es algo: pantalón?” (“Legs isn’t that something pants”), repeating the target word legs one more time almost inaudibly. This is the point where the breakdown occurs. The employee demonstrates with her statement “no es algo: pantalón?” (isn’t that something pants?) that she has a semantic representation of ‘legs’ in her mind that pertains to pants, more specifically, leggings. ‘Leggings’ is a word that is a phonological neighbor to ‘legs’ (/lɛgz/ vs. /lɛŋɡz/, they only differ in the /ɪŋ/ component) but holds a different semantic meaning. The /ɪŋ/ component is a morpheme added onto the stem “leg”, therefore, there is a morphological and phonological relationship between the two words. The breakdown in this interaction occurs as the employee tries to connect the word legs with a word that she knows and which sounds similar – leggings.

In Excerpt 2, the instructor and employee are doing an activity that requires them to find different locations on a map (in the provided workbook) and match them with the corresponding directions. In the workbook, this is a matching activity that requires drawing a line from the location to the correct directions to that location. For our purposes, we are not interested in the written component, only the verbal portion of the activity. At the point in the activity that we have extracted Excerpt 2, the instructor is helping the employee check their work on this matching activity.

Excerpt 2: Wayne’s Drugstore

001 INS: Perfect. Okay, let’s do number two.
002 EMP: The drug store?
003 INS: Good. ((following line on paper with pen)) “Choo choo choo choo choo.”
004 EMP: Is it’s good or no.
005 INS: Yep- well let’s read it. Let’s see.
007 EMP: Is next to the- the law office.
008 INS: The law__
009 EMP: The law__
010 INS: Offices.
011 EMP: Offices.
INS: Good. Okay, so: let’s find- "where did we go"? The law offices?
(2.5)
INS: Where are they.
(4.3)
EMP: "Where the drug store."
INS: Yeah find either one.
((both laugh))
INS: I’ll give you a hint it’s in the top half. (2.5) Of the map.
(3.2)
INS: Does that make sense, the top half?
(3.8)
EMP: (Parking lot), parking,
INS: So close, the law office.
EMP: The law office [but the drug- I looking the drug store.
INS: [Perfect.
INS: O:ha ha ha ha I was looking for the law office, good well- so it
says [it’s next to it so if you found the law office, it’s next
to- what does next to mean.
((Look at this.))
EMP: Cerca?
INS: Cerca o al lado (. ) de
EMP: Next to: cerca o al lado?
INS: Mnmm, so then boom. There it is.
EMP: -> Wa- Wayne- wine- wine?
INS: Wayne.
EMP: Wayne drug store.
INS: Wayne’s.
EMP: Wayne’s [the- it’s the vino? Tequila?
Wine Tequila
Wine? Tequila?
[Good it belong-
INS: U:m it’s an- wine_
EMP: Wine.
INS: Wine would be:
EMP: De borrachos.
For drunk.PL
For drunks.
INS: Vino. ((laughs)) O:uh sí, okay, so Wayne is a name.
Wine yes
Wine. Yes,
INS: Es un nombre.
be.3SG DET name
It’s a name.
EMP: O:uh es un nombre.
Be.3SG DET name
It’s a name.
048 INS: And then drug store no es como drogas_
NEG be.3SG like drug.PL
It’s not like drugs_

049 EMP: Mhmhm.

050 INS: It’s like Rite Aid or a:h Walgreens.

051 EMP: O:h yo pensaba algo de vino.
1SG think.IMP.1SG something with wine
O:h I thought something with wine.

052 INS: ((laughs)) Yeah, that would be a liquor store.

053 EMP: Is the name Wayne’s.

054 INS: Wayne- [yeah so wine W I N E_

055 EMP: [Wayne’s drug store.

056 EMP: O:hkay.

057 INS: Would be vino. Good, yeah that’s an important thing to (.)

058 clear up. O:ka:y, number three, so that was perfect.

059 EMP: The mechanic_

In the beginning of this example, the matching activity that they are checking says, “the drugstore is next to the law offices”. The instructor begins by having the employee find either one of those locations in order to check her work. Once the employee finds the law office in line 25, she finds that it is next to “Wayne’s drugstore”. This is the point where the breakdown occurs, when the employee says “Wa- Wayne- wine- wine?” in line 35. The employee, when presented with the unfamiliar word Wayne, tries to connect it to a word that she does know and that is a phonological neighbor – wine (in fact, they are minimal pairs – /wen/ vs. /wan/). The breakdown occurs at this point in the interaction, as the employee has made this (incorrect) semantic association in an attempt to understand the target word, Wayne. We will see in the next section how the instructor deals with this breakdown.

Resolving the Breakdown

Once the breakdown has occurred, it must be resolved in the interactions so that the lessons may progress. The manner in which similar breakdowns are resolved differs in the amount of interactional work performed by the forms used by the instructor which consequently require different amounts of interactional work from the employees. Recall from the
aforementioned Excerpt 1, in this interaction the instructor and the employee are going through a
“Going to the Doctor’s Office” lesson. They are going over different body parts, and the
breakdown has occurred at the word *legs*, which the employee has made an incorrect semantic
association with the word *leggings*.

Excerpt 1.1

011 EMP: → Legs no es algo: (. ) pantalón?
      NEG be.3SG something pants
      *isn’t that something pants?*

012 EMP: "Legs?°
013 (3.7)
014 INS: Ah: cómo?
      What
      What?

015 EMP: No son (leggy) pants.
      NEG be.3PL
      *They aren’t (leggy) pants*

016 (2.4)
017 EMP: "Legs.°
018 (0.6)
019 EMP: (Leggy) pants?=no.
020 INS: [Leg pants šhešheš qué estás diciendo?]
      What be.2SG say.PRESPPL
      *What are you saying?*

021 EMP: [(node))= "no".
022 EMP: Que es: (. ) leg- como no es un pantalón, (. ) pants.
      That be.3SG that NEG be.3SG DET pant
      *That is: (. ) leg- that it’s not pant, (. ) pants.*

023 INS: Uh: m you could say:: (0.4) <leGGings>=
024 EMP: =Leggings "oh".
025 INS: [Leggings, has oído leggings] es un tipo de:: a:h
026 INS: pantalones.
      Have.2SG hear.PPL be.3SG DET type of a:h pants
      *Have you heard leggings it’s a type of:: a:h pants.*

027 EMP: [(node)]
028 EMP: Maya. (1.2)
029 INS: Uh- (0.6) #yeah#.
030 INS: Um but yeah normally you say like <pants>.
031 (2.7)
032 EMP: Estos son l:egs.
      DET.PL be.3PL
      *These are l:egs.*

033 INS: Legs. (. ) Legs.
034 (.)
In this example, approximately 3.7 seconds after the initial breakdown, the instructor asks the employee, “A:h cómo?” (“what?”) in line 14. ‘Cómo’, translated in this instance as ‘what’, falls into the category of ‘what/qué’ responses (Raymond, 2015). The response we see in line 14 can be categorized as an open-class other initiated response. This type of response “claim[s] no grasp beyond the fact that something was produced in prior talk” (Clift, 2016: 258, Drew, 1997).

In the case of Excerpt 1, the phrase “cómo?” (what?) demonstrates that the instructor did not understand any of that previous statement by the employee in line 11. At this moment, the burden of explaining in the lesson shifts from the instructor to the employee. Here, the instructor uses the open-class other-initiated response, which takes on less interactional labor for the instructor. This form shifts the bulk of the interactional labor to the employee, who must now start over in her explanation of where she is finding difficulty in this interaction.

As the responsibility is now on the employee to make the instructor understand where the breakdown occurred, she begins again, asking, “No son (leggy) pants” (“They aren’t (leggy) pants”) in line 15. After 2.4 seconds of receiving no reply, she produces “legs” again very softly. Still receiving no answer, she produces “(leggy) pants” again in line 19, which she immediately follows with “no”, potentially having concluded from the lack of response from her instructor that this was not the correct word to say in this context.

At this point in the interaction, the employee has attempted to explain her misunderstanding. In line 20, the instructor produces the sentence “qué estás diciendo?” (what are you saying?), again demonstrating that she has not understood what the employee’s difficulty was in this situation. Using this phrase, the instructor acknowledges that the previous sequence was not working, again initiating a ‘start over’ of the explanation. The responsibility for this
‘start over’ again rests on the employee, as the instructor uses an open-class repair initiator in an attempt to resolve this misunderstanding, which requires more work from the employee to answer that question.

The employee then tries again in her explanation, saying, “Que es: (.) leg- como no es un pantalón, (.) pants.” (That is: (.) leg- that it’s not pant, (.) pants.) in line 22. The employee is again trying to explain the association with the target word. At this point, the instructor makes no explicit indication that she understood where the employee’s confusion was; however, she presents new information that “U::m you could say (0.4) <leGGings>=” in line 23, to which the employee immediately responds, “=Leggings oh°.” The immediacy of this response indicates that “leggings” is the word she was looking for originally when the breakdown occurred in the interaction. This moment in the interaction provides an opportunity for the instructor to make a morphological connection between legs and leggings. This was a teachable opportunity that was not utilized, leaving the employee’s initial guess unconnected to the instructor’s subsequent explanation.

The instructor then proceeds to explain what leggings are in line 25, “[Leggings, has oído leggings] es un tipo de: a:h pantalones.” (Leggings, have you heard leggings is a type of a:h pants). At no point thus far has the instructor acknowledged the employee’s original misunderstanding. She does not connect ‘(leggy) pants’ to the concept of ‘leggings’ at any point in the interaction. This connection would have legitimized the employee’s guess, in addition to potentially resolving the ‘confusion,’ so that it would be less likely to happen again. On top of resolving her confusion, this would also have legitimized her having confusion in the first place.

In response to the instructor’s question, the employee nods in assent, and offers the word, “Maya” in line 28. Google searching shows that “Maya” is a brand of leggings that the employee
is referring to in the interaction, demonstrating that she understands the concept that has just been put forth by the instructor.

The instructor responds with “U:h (0.6) #yeah#.”, using creaky voice (marked with the ‘#’ symbol). It is possible that ‘leggings’ is a gendered term (Lakoff, 1975) that certain instructors may be more inclined to flag, while others may not. She follows that response with, “Um but yeah normally you say like <pants>.” in line 30, shutting down the student-authored contribution, rather than embracing it. The instructor has not drawn the connection between the employee’s initial ‘guess’, her explanation of ‘leggings’, and the target word, ‘legs’. The instructor never indicates why and how those two words are connected, leading the employee to try and make those connections herself. The employee brings the interaction back to the initial target word, ‘legs’, in line 32 saying, “Estos son legs.”, while pointing to her legs, again performing more interactional labor. The instructor repeats the word ‘legs’ two times, and then moves on to the next word in the lesson.

During this interaction, the employee must perform more interactional labor to make her instructor understand wherein lay her confusion and also to make connections for herself between her initial guess and the target word. The forms used by the instructor in this example assume a role of doing less work towards the resolution of the breakdown, as the other-initiated repair strategies place the burden of repair on her employee.

Let us now contrast this case with the other interaction in order to compare the different techniques used by the instructors. Recall from the previous section, that in Excerpt 2 the instructor and employee are doing an activity that requires them to find different locations on a map. The breakdown in this interaction has occurred as the employee makes an incorrect
semantic connection from the location they are looking for, Wayne’s Drugstore, to the word wine.

Excerpt 2.1

035 EMP: -> Wa- Wayne- wine- wine?
036 INS: Wayne.
037 EMP: Wayne drug store.
038 INS: Wayne’s.
039 EMP: Wayne’s [the- it’s the vino? Tequila?
  Wine Tequila
  Wine? Tequila?

040 INS: [Good it belong-
041 INS: U:m it’s an- wine_
042 EMP: Wine.
043 INS: Wine would be:_
044 EMP: De borrachos.
  For drunk.PL
  For drunks.

045 INS: Vino. ((laughs)) O:h sí, okay, so Wayne is a name.
  Wine yes
  Wine.
  Yes,

046 INS: Es un nombre.
  be.3SG DET name
  It’s a name.

047 EMP: O:h es un nombre.
  Be.3SG DET name
  It’s a name.

048 INS: And then drug store no es como drogas_
  NEG be.3SG like drug.PL
  It’s not like drugs_

049 EMP: Mmhmm.
050 INS: It’s like Rite Aid or a:h Walgreens.
051 EMP: O:h yo pensaba algo de vino.
  1SG think.IMP.1SG something with wine
  O:h I thought something with wine.

052 INS: ((laughs)) £Yeah,£ that would be a liquor store.
053 EMP: Is the name Wayne’s.
054 INS: Wayne- [yeah so wine W I N E_
055 EMP: [Wayne’s drug store.
056 EMP: O:hkay.

In Excerpt 2, the employee reads, “Wa- Wayne- wine- wine?” when the breakdown occurs. She takes an unfamiliar word, “Wayne”, and instead substitutes a word she is more familiar with and that is phonetically similar – “wine”. “Wayne” and “wine” are not quite
homophones, but they are minimal pairs. At this point in the sequence, the instructor is unaware that this ‘incorrect’ association has occurred. The instructor understands this breakdown to be related to pronunciation, as she repeats the pronunciation of “Wayne” in line 36. The employee then produces, “Wayne drug store” in her next turn in line 37, to which the instructor responds, “Wayne’s”, emphasizing the possessive morpheme. At this point in the interaction, the instructor has moved from targeting pronunciation to morphology in two turns as she attempts to locate the breakdown that has happened in this interaction.

In the employee’s next turn in line 39, she asks the instructor questions to try and connect wine – the association she has made during this sequence – to the target word, Wayne. She asks, “Wayne’s the- it’s the vino? Tequila?” (Wayne’s the- it’s the wine? Tequila?). After the employee produces “Wayne’s” in this utterance, the instructor begins to commend the employee for her use of the possession-marking morpheme, beginning “Good it belong-” at the same time the employee begins asking about wine and tequila. It is likely that the instructor was about to explain that “it”, referring to the drugstore, belongs to Wayne – connecting the possessive morpheme to the semantic meaning. However, the employee produces “vino? Tequila?”, which do not relate to the possessive-marking morpheme. The instructor stops mid-turn in line 40 after hearing the employee’s turn, because at this point in the interaction she was focusing on the possessive-marking morpheme. The instructor is moving on the first production by the employee, stating “Good it belong-” and shifts, not completing that turn, and moves to act on the next words produced by the employee, “vino? Tequila?”.

In lines 41 and 43, the instructor uses the guess made by the employee and acts on it. This can be contrasted with the instructor in Excerpt 1, who, when the employee says “como no es un pantalón” (that it’s not pant) is presented with information from the employee, yet the instructor
does not use the information to design her other-initiated repair the way the instructor in Excerpt 2 does. In Excerpt 2, the instructor responds to the employee’s turn of “vino? Tequila?” in a manner which sets the stage for a collaborative completion (Lerner, 2004) beginning, “wine would be” in line 43, which the employee finishes with “de borrachos” (for drunks). This demonstrates her action taken in the interaction to resolve the breakdown, using the employee’s utterances and productions to do so.

After all of this information is provided to the instructor, she finally understands the breakdown is semantically-based. She demonstrates this with the change of state token (Heritage 1984), “Oh” in line 45.

Once the instructor understands that the breakdown in this interaction was semantically-based, she resolves it quite quickly. She uses the shift implicative (Beach 1993), “okay”, to signal a change in trajectory before explaining, “so Wayne is a name. Es un nombre.” in line 45, to which the employee responds “Oh es un nombre.” (“Oh it’s a name.”). The use of the shift implicative (okay) demonstrates that, now that she realizes where the breakdown occurred, the instructor is starting over in her explanation.

In order to reach this point, the employee and instructor have worked together to reach a mutual understanding. The employee produced her turns, and the instructor used those turns to attempt to understand the source of trouble for the employee, moving from pronunciation to morphology and finally to the semantic breakdown.

After this short interaction, the word “Wayne” was explained to, and understood by, the employee. In the following turn, the instructor explains, “And then drug store no es como drogas” (“And the drugstore it’s not like drugs”) to which she receives an assenting “mmhmm” from the employee. The instructor explains further, “It’s like Rite Aid or a:h Walgreens.” in line
50. In the next turn, the employee states her understanding and explains where she had been confused saying, “O:h yo pensaba algo de vino.” (O:h I thought something with wine.) At this point, the employee illustrates her understanding of the difference between Wayne and wine, and the pair move on with their lesson.

Mutual understanding may not have been reached had the instructor moved on with her explanation of the possessive morpheme and not constructed her turns in a way that helped her to understand where it was that the employee was having trouble. This example demonstrates how the instructor used forms that took on more interactional labor for herself, which allowed her to work collaboratively with the employee to locate the source of the employee’s misunderstanding (trying pronunciation, morphology, and ultimately reaching the semantic misunderstanding). The instructor did not use forms that placed the burden on the employee to explain where the misunderstanding occurred, instead she worked with the employee throughout the sequence in order to locate and then resolve that misunderstanding.

Discussion

The excerpts above demonstrate two practices used to resolve a breakdown during the lessons that pertained to an incorrect semantic association made to a phonological neighbor when the employee was presented with an unfamiliar word. In the first excerpt, the instructor used forms that perform less interactional work towards resolving the breakdown. This resulted in the burden being placed on the employee to make her instructor understand where she was having difficulty. This can be seen in the instructor’s use of an open-class other-initiated repair initiator, “cómo?” (what?), and in her follow up question, “qué estás diciendo?” (what are you saying?). Both of these forms signal a lack of understanding, in addition to signaling the need for a ‘start over’ by her interlocutor. In this case, that interlocutor is the employee, working with limited
linguistic resources in English, who reformulates her statement in an attempt to demonstrate the source of her confusion. This shifts the burden of explaining from the instructor to the employee in this interaction.

Conversely, in Excerpt 2, the instructor uses forms which perform more interactional labor in order to resolve the breakdown. She collaborates with the employee, actively trying to figure out where the breakdown occurred. She tries targeting different potential sources of the breakdown as she moves from trying pronunciation to morphology, finally discovering the breakdown was semantically-based. The interactional work she does can be observed in this interaction in the number of turns between her and the employee and in the different areas she attempted to target.

In SLA interactions such as these, instructors must be aware that different repair initiators place different burdens on students, and they should use them appropriately for their learner’s level. Using open-class repair should not be omitted from these types of interactions altogether. For beginner-level learners, like the ones in this study, this may not be the best strategy (as demonstrated by Excerpt 1), as the learners may not have the sufficient linguistic resources to ‘start over’ in their turns. However, open-class other-initiated repair may be a good strategy for a more advanced learner, as it could require more speaking from the learner which would allow them to practice their language skills. Therefore, instructors should have an awareness of how the forms that they use impact learners of different levels.

At first glance, these two interactions appear as opposites, differing greatly in the manner in which the instructors resolve the breakdowns. However, how much can we really hold these instructors accountable for during these interactions? In analyzing both of these interactions, I encountered difficulty as there are so many variables that go into resolving interactions such as
these. Some concepts are difficult. For example, in the case of “leggings” in Excerpt 1, it is possible that “leggings” is a gendered term (Lakoff, 1975), which might not be as readily available to some instructors as to others. How can we expect the instructor to make that connection when “leggings” may not be as salient a term to them as to another instructor? Such ambiguity makes it difficult to say that one instructor handles it “better” than the other because they are operating on different linguistic resources and drawing on different backgrounds that may make them more readily able to work through these breakdowns.

This invites the question as to how we can train instructors to target breakdowns in a way that is more similar to the way the instructor does so in Excerpt 2. Perhaps there is a way to “prime” instructors to look for where the student has difficulty in the interaction, providing them with common “errors” that students may make in the interactions. Additionally, we could instruct them to entertain their student’s guesses, searching for a way that they are connected to the lesson in which they find themselves. For example, we could give them common error sources to look out for during their lessons – is the error related to pronunciation? To morphology? To semantics? It is difficult for native speakers to think this way, as they are not as aware of these types of errors in the speech of others (Wong, 2005). Perhaps in training these teachers we should encourage a more diagnosis-based mindset for situations when a breakdown occurs. This would require explicit teaching, as native speakers do not look to diagnose errors in their interactions with other native speakers; however, if we were to teach this to our instructors, perhaps the interactions could be more productive for both the instructors and learners.

**Future Research**
This study examines one-on-one educational interactions for less-educated individuals in a non-academic setting; however, future research in this topic area may take many different directions.

As mentioned briefly above, gender may play a role in these interactional situations. Considering the gender of the learners, as well as the instructors, may provide interesting insights into SLA (particularly in these non-academic settings). Peirce (1994) provided insights on the factors and variables that impact immigrant women in language learning situations. Further examination of the (potentially) differing experiences of women and men in these non-academic SLA environments could add to the existing body of SLA research. Additionally, this investigation may inform the creation of instructional materials for instructors in these non-academic settings.

The employees in the present study hail from a variety of backgrounds, most commonly immigrating from Latin American countries and Nepal. While language acquisition is an important factor to consider (as it is the topic of the present study), the motivations for learning English may be examined in greater detail to paint a more comprehensive picture of this population and their motivations for learning language in specific non-academic settings. For example, if the employees primarily speak Spanish or a language of Nepal, their motivation may lie in the ability to communicate with their co-workers. Or, perhaps English language skills may provide opportunities to advance in the workplace hierarchy. These topics and more may be explored in a study focusing on the motivations for this population to initially seek out English language lessons.

Previous studies have examined the role of the instructor’s use of the learner’s L1 as they instruct L2, and the current trend has been to encourage this phenomenon rather than discourage
it (Liebscher & Dailey-O’Cain, 2004; Mori, 2004; Üstünel & Seedhouse, 2005). Many of these studies have examined the use of L1 in instruction in academic settings. Further research examining the use of L1 in non-academic settings may contribute important information towards the literature about best practices in SLA. This future direction may be particularly interesting to explore in cases such as the ones presented in this study, where the instructor has limited skills in the learner’s L1.

The subjects of this current study come from an organization that comprises a range of literacy skills, including those who are illiterate in their L1. According to UNESCO’s database on world literacy, there are about 750 million illiterate adults in the world, about two thirds of which are female (Literacy, 2018). Despite this high rate of illiteracy worldwide, “research on second language acquisition (SLA) has virtually ignored the impact of L1 literacy level on a learner’s acquisition process and ultimate success in acquiring L2 oral skills” (Bigelow & Tarone, 2004:689). This prevalence of illiteracy in the world should be taken into consideration for future SLA studies, especially those that examine SLA in non-academic settings. In order to systematize the literacy variable, the implementation of a pre-/post-test in the learner’s L1 may be used to establish initial literacy levels and to examine how they impact the learner’s acquisition of L2 oral skills.

The instructors in the current study are students at a university who pay tuition in exchange for credentials that will allow them to enter the workplace with a distinct advantage over those without a college education. Conversely, the employees in the current study are generally less educated, less literate individuals, whose jobs involve custodial and low-level service work. This unequal power dynamic between instructor and employee, while unexamined in the present study, provides opportunity for future researchers to explore. CA might be combined with
another method to examine this imbalance; therefore, other social research frameworks should be employed.

The instructors themselves also provide a possible topic for future studies. In the current study, instructors engage in lessons with only two to four hours of training, after which they are allowed to teach. The instructors’ training and experience provide another avenue through which SLA can be explored in non-academic settings.

As this study takes place within an organization that facilitates English language lessons across a population of campus employees, the social implications of this program may be explored as they relate to social empowerment resulting from access to linguistic resources. Second language acquisition may be a form of personal empowerment; when taught across a community, it may serve as a means of social empowerment of the said community or population.

While this paper presents preliminary data on the efficacy of instructional practices in non-academic SLA settings, there is still much more research to be done in these contexts, and particular focus should be placed on less-literate and less-educated individuals.

Conclusion

This honors thesis examined different instructional techniques employed by English instructors to resolve a ‘breakdown’ in an interaction during their lesson. Using the CA methodology, I examined these interactions on a moment-by-moment basis in order to address the efficacy of the forms used by each instructor.

I found that the use of open-class repair initiators placed more of an interactional burden on the learner than a more collaborative approach. I found that the collaborative approach demonstrates more work performed by the instructor towards resolution of the breakdown.
Additionally, I offered some suggestions as to how we can train instructors to improve these interactions.

Future research on this topic should attempt to quantify the literacy variable in interactions such as the ones explored in this thesis. Additionally, more research should focus on examining language acquisition in non-academic settings. Many variables go into language acquisition and second language acquisition. When instructional and learning materials are created, there should be more literature considering learner education and literacy levels that can be drawn upon so that materials can be most effective for the populations they intend to target.

In an increasingly global world, it is becoming more and more important for adults to learn new languages as they move to new countries. Many countries do not have the high literacy levels among adults that the United States have; therefore, literacy should be considered when designing instructional materials for adult language learners. With more effective instructional materials, we can better maximize the instructional time for these individuals, providing them with effective training so that they can go out into the world and start using their new language.
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