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Leadership in multimodal computer-mediated "conversation for learning"

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Abstract

The study investigates conversational leadership during Teletandem sessions, in which pairs of native and non-native speakers of different languages discuss alternately in their L1 and L2 in order to learn each other's native language. Teletandem (TT) multimodal computer mediated communication is undertaken via open-source software applications such as Skype, ooVoo, MSN. It represents an emerging learning context that is increasingly being employed in different institutions (e.g. universities) for effective L2 use and language learning.

In order to better understand the influence of context variables on salient activities for language acquisition (e.g. starting negotiation of meaning, answering clarification requests), the current study focuses on modifications of conversation structure and on the leader's role due to content choice by one speaker, which is a condition often practised for Teletandem sessions. In particular, research questions will be:

↑   What is the role of the native speaker in conversations?

↑   What is the role of the L2 speaker when she has chosen the topic for conversation?

↑   Is the speaker who leads topic development also be the one who tries to resolve communication troubles?

The data have been collected by video recording Teletandem sessions practised by two pairs of female university students (pair 1: Italian L1 and English L1 speaker; pair 2: Italian L1 and German L1 speaker).

The data comprise six hours of recorded/transcribed computer mediated conversations which constitute three different meetings, held by each pair and organized as follows:

↑   Meeting no. 1, conversation is 30 min. in Italian and 30 min. in English (pair 1) and in German (pair 2), no previous topic chosen;

↑   Meeting no. 2, language of conversation English (pair 1) and German (pair 2), topic is chosen by the Italian native speaker;

↑   Meeting no. 3, language of conversation is Italian, topic is selected by the English native speaker (pair 1) and by the German native speaker (pair 2).

Following Leone (submitted paper) and partly Itakura (2001; see also Linell and Luckman 1991), the model adopted measures conversational traits such as:

- sequential dominance, i.e. the interaction direction, resulting from the qualitative analysis and measure of controlling topic moves. Topic moves such as those for eliciting relevant information will be counted separately from metacommunicative controlling moves such as confirmation check and request for repetition;

- the interaction space, i.e. the average turn length.