Pedagogic Innovation and Peer Feedback in the Foreign Language Classroom

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Using Flipgrid as a common platform, 30 students of elementary Spanish as a foreign language at Oxford College of Emory University (in the United States) undertook a virtual language exchange project together with 17 students of intermediate English as a foreign language from CETT Barcelona School of Tourism, Hospitality and Gastronomy (affiliated with the University of Barcelona, in Spain). In order to carry out the four tasks included in the project, students from both institutions recorded and shared videos in the target language. They were also asked to post feedback videos in their first language. To study the nature of peer feedback provided to learners of Spanish and English as a foreign language, a sample of comments from Spanish and American students was examined and contrasted. Content analysis and categorization were conducted based on a taxonomy which comprised six categories, namely textual aspects, language register, grammar and vocabulary aspects, phonetic aspects, fluency, and paralinguistic aspects. Textual aspects encompassed topic development and structure, speech content and length, and clarity. Language use was analyzed from a global perspective and also in terms of specific inaccuracies mentioned in the videos. On balance, the result can be considered very satisfactory, since students made positive comments and recommendations, and encouraged their peers to continue developing their communicative competence. The specific areas of improvement pointed out in their videos can be seen as indicators for instructors when focusing on learners' strengths and weaknesses. Therefore, this presentation illustrates the usefulness of Flipgrid in peer feedback provision to enhance foreign language acquisition in higher education.

Keywords: Flipgrid, oral skills, peer feedback, second language acquisition, virtual language exchange

INTRODUCTION

Digital native students require the integration of technology to meet their needs and learning habits in order to boost second language acquisition (Zhang et al., 2014). Thus, using digital communication tools in synchronous or asynchronous virtual language exchanges has been a

growing trend. An asynchronous format enables the organization of such exchanges when participants are in different time zones or have limited technological infrastructures. Virtual exchanges can be arranged in both in-class or hybrid contexts, and at least two partner language teachers must be involved in the collaborative design and implementation of activities (Dooly & Vinagre, 2022), which can be conducive to formative feedback.

Technology has had a considerable impact on feedback delivery and mediation, with the understanding that feedback goes beyond error correction (Hyland & Hyland, 2019). As regards learning English as a foreign language, Yu & Lee (2016) have reported that teacher feedback is usually considered more useful than peer feedback, even though a few studies have proved the opposite. Other research has indicated that self, peer, and teacher feedback should all be integrated in language learning environments, as they may serve different purposes (Iglesias Xamani, 2013).

Some researchers have claimed that language learners have been empowered by technology and have become more autonomous and active in terms of peer feedback (Hyland & Hyland, 2019). Peer feedback is a common strategy to develop writing skills in second and foreign language learning contexts, but some variables have been under-researched, like the moderating effect of second language proficiency in giving and using feedback (Allen & Mills, 2014). Yu and Lee (2016) have mentioned other aspects that need further investigation, such as the affordances of technology-enhanced peer feedback, the incorporation of peer feedback in online instruction, and teachers' perceptions of its value in virtual educational environments, as well as in other second or foreign languages other than English. Our study sheds light on some of these research gaps.

Peer feedback entails gains not only for students who receive it but also for feedback-givers (Yu & Lee, 2016). For Hyland and Hyland (2019), it fosters the development of second language competences, learner autonomy, self-regulation, and social skills. Scholars have examined different patterns of interaction between peers, namely collaborative, expert/novice, dominant/passive, and dominant/dominant, as well as their influence on learners' objectives and motivations for taking part in peer feedback activities. Collaborative patterns ruled by mutual engagement seem to be the most fruitful. Therefore, they should be studied in more depth and ought to be promoted. Teachers play a key role in designing peer feedback procedures and training their students (Yu & Lee, 2016).

As already mentioned, peer assessment has been mostly examined with respect to enhancing writing skills in English as a second or foreign language. Although the impact of peer feedback on building up oral skills has been scarcely explored, some evidence has been gathered to highlight its pedagogical value in boosting learners' metacognitive awareness of their own oral progress (Ahangari et al., 2013; Cheng & Warren, 2005).

This paper reports on how peer feedback took place to facilitate oral development and second language acquisition in two higher education institutions. An asynchronous virtual language exchange project was undertaken by 30 students of elementary Spanish as a foreign language at Oxford College of Emory University (in the United States) and 17 students of intermediate English as a foreign language from CETT Barcelona School of Tourism, Hospitality and Gastronomy (affiliated with the University of Barcelona, in Spain). In order to carry out the four tasks included in the project, students used Flip (formerly known as Flipgrid) as a common platform to record

and share videos in the target language. They were also asked to post feedback videos in their first language. A class blog was also used to support the provision of teacher guidelines following similar procedures to those detailed in previous studies (Iglesias-Xamaní, 2014; Iglesias, 2019, 2021).

To study the nature of peer feedback provided to learners of Spanish and English as a foreign language, a sample of comments from Spanish and American students was examined and contrasted. Bearing in mind this general objective, the following research questions were formulated:

RQ1. What aspects did students from Oxford College mostly focus on when providing peer feedback?
RQ2. What aspects did students from CETT Barcelona School of Tourism, Hospitality and Gastronomy mostly focus on when providing peer feedback?
RQ3. Were there significant differences in the peer feedback provided by students from both institutions?

METHODS

The sample of feedback videos, which we analyzed following a qualitative approach, consisted of the comments provided by all the participants in relation to the first project activity. This task was carried out in small groups of 4 or 5 students from both institutions, who had to use their target language (Spanish or English) to introduce themselves and talk about their educational and professional contexts and expectations. Next, each student was required to watch the videos recorded by their language partners and give them feedback in their first language. The data corpus consisted of two data sets:

Set #1: 60 feedback videos posted in Spanish by 17 students from CETT Barcelona School of Tourism, Hospitality and Gastronomy, henceforth referred to as CETT participants.
Set #2: 51 feedback videos posted in English by 30 students from Oxford College, henceforth referred to as OX participants. However, one of these videos was excluded for technical reasons.

Each set of feedback comments was processed by means of content analysis and categorization as indicated by Iglesias (2019) to enable the triangulation of different data and perspectives. The taxonomy used as a reference included 6 categories which were classified into subcategories, and it was structured in up to 3 levels, as depicted in Table 1.

Table 1. Taxonomy of reference.

Category	Subcategories
A. Textual aspects	A1. Topic development/structure
	A2. Speech content/length
	A3. Clarity

B. Language register		
C. Grammar & vocabulary aspects	C1. General grammar/vocabulary	
	C2. Specific grammar/vocabulary mistakes	
D. Phonetic aspects	D1. General pronunciation	
	D2. Intonation	
E. Fluency		
F. Paralinguistic aspects	F1. Voice	
	F2. Body language	
	F3. Projected image	F3.1. General impression
		F3.2. Enthusiasm
		F3.3. Friendliness
		F3.4. Self-confidence
		F3.5. Nervousness

Source: Iglesias, M. (2019). Constructivist Assessment and EFL Acquisition in a Higher Education Environment. In M. C. Ainciburu (Ed.), *4th International Conference on Applied Linguistics to Language Teaching proceedings* (pp. 174-185). Madrid: Universidad Nebrija.

The following aspects were examined in detail:

1. Number of feedback videos and amount of time spent producing them.
2. Feedback comments made according to the aforementioned taxonomy of reference.
3. Additional feedback comments, as well as recommendations and encouraging expressions.

Following Iglesias (2019), our content analysis was grounded on the understanding that feedback comments were expressed through a single word or phrase, but also through simple or complex sentences. Some comments were explicitly articulated as strengths or weaknesses, while some others were indirect, using circumlocution or minimizers, as in Iglesias-Xamaní (2014). Positive and negative comments were also made concurrently, often in order to minimize criticism.

We had to interpret some of the comments, sometimes by putting them in relation to other similar comments. For example, the need to speak louder was regarded as a paralinguistic problem connected with voice, and deficient vocalization was labelled as general pronunciation, whereas inadequate word link and rhythm were associated with a lack of fluency.

Although most comments were based on objective correctness, some derived from subjective impressions, for instance in regard to interesting speech content or the perceived projected image of self-confidence. While some comments were vague (e.g. "well done"), others were very detailed, highlighted an error, and/or offered a correction. Very few students made hypercorrections, mainly in Spanish, sometimes due to the fact that undergraduates from Oxford

College were learning a different regional variety of Spanish other than the one used in Spain. Hypercorrections were included in Subcategory C2 (Specific grammar/vocabulary mistakes) since they were seen as errors by feedback providers.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results for each data set indicate that in total OX participants spent 39 minutes and 51 seconds giving feedback to CETT participants, whereas CETT participants spent 27 minutes and 68 seconds commenting on their counterparts' videos. Consequently, the average feedback time per video was 47.82 seconds for OX participants and 28.13 seconds for CETT participants. Tables 2 and 3 show detailed time records.

Table 2. Feedback time (part 1).

	CETT P1		CETT P2		CETT P3		CETT P4		CETT P5		CETT P6		CETT P7		CETT P8	
OX P1	1'20"	0'12"	1'25"	0'28"												
OX P2	1'09"	0'22"	---	0'27"												
OX P3	1'24"	0'28"	1'10"	0'30"												
OX P4					0'41"	0'58"	0'35"	1'42"								
OX P5					0'46"	0'43"	0'52"	1'00"								
OX P6					1'20"	0'56"	1'07"	1'15"								
OX P7							1'23"	0'38"	1'03"	0'52"						
OX P8							0'30"	0'28"	0'26"	0'33"						
OX P9							1'35"	0'24"	0'47"	1'57"						
OX P10											1'13"		0'31"	0'38"		
OX P11											0'14"	0'56"		0'57"		
OX P12				0'25"							1'20"	0'43"				
OX P13					0'48"										0'20"	0'14"
OX P14					0'55"										0'54"	0'19"
OX P15					0'42"										1'20"	0'13"

Source: Own elaboration.

Table 3. Feedback time (part 2).

	CETT P9		CETT P10		CETT P11		CETT P12		CETT P13		CETT P14		CETT P15		CETT P16		CETT P17	
OX P16	0'19"	0'23"	0'17"	0'24"														
OX P17	0'25"	0'36"	0'32"	0'50"														
OX P18	0'18"	0'53"	0'25"	0'42"														
OX P19					1'23"	0'39"	1'20"	0'28"										
OX P20					0'51"	1'01"	0'52"	0'25"										
OX P21					0'43"	0'45"	0'38"	0'17"										
OX P22									0'35"	0'58"			0'41"					
OX P23									0'43"	0'43"			0'39"					
OX P24									0'31"	0'22"			0'35"					
OX P25											1'02"	0'35"	1'02"	0'30"				
OX P26											1'05"	0'35"	0'53"	0'22"				
OX P27											1'29"	0'36"	1'12"	0'33"				
OX P28															2'00"	0'17"	1'35"	0'54"

											1'36"	0'32"	1'23"	1'12"
OX P29											1'36"	0'32"	1'23"	1'12"
OX P30											1'45"	0'24"	1'25"	1'01"

Source: Own elaboration.

A detailed analysis of the feedback given by all the participants reveals that grammar and vocabulary aspects were the most commented on, followed by textual and phonetic features. Fluency and paralinguistic characteristics were far less mentioned, and references to language register were almost inexistent. All of these aspects were categorized according to the taxonomy of reference depicted in Table 1, which was adapted to the specific needs of this study. While OX participants made more text-related comments, CETT participants focused more on grammar, vocabulary, and phonetics than their counterparts. The number of comments made by participants from both institutions in relation to the remaining aspects was very similar.

Within Category A (Textual aspects), the most frequent Subcategories were A2 (Speech content and length) and A3 (Clarity), particularly among OX participants. The majority of the participants considered that their peers' speeches were interesting, clear, and intelligible, so their feedback was generally positive. Likewise, comments regarding Subcategory A1 (Topic development and structure) were rather favorable and underscored text coherence, even though a minority of CETT participants also noted the lack of connectors needed to link sentences in enhanced cohesion.

As regards Category B, references to an informal language register were barely made by OX participants. Conversely, Category C (Grammar and vocabulary aspects) was widely commented on by all the participants. OX participants formulated a similar number of comments with respect to Subcategories C1 (General grammar and vocabulary) and C2 (Specific grammar and vocabulary mistakes). Yet, CETT participants prioritized specific error correction. Their feedback identified wrong word choices and word order, lack or excess of articles, inaccurate use of gender and number, incorrect verb conjugation and tense, and problems with sentence structure, prepositions, and pronouns.

As for Category D (Phonetic aspects), the comments linked to Subcategory D1 (General pronunciation) outnumbered specific references to pronunciation mistakes, encompassed in Subcategory D2. On the whole, general feedback was significantly more positive than negative. Very few OX participants remarked smushed pronunciation or Spanish accent interference, while CETT participants pinpointed the mispronunciation of certain words and phonemes more often than OX participants. Similarly, even though the same amount of comments on Category E (Fluency) was found in both data sets, CETT participants detected more areas of improvement than OX participants, who were more inclined to praise their peers' fluent speeches and even recommended speaking more slowly.

Under Category F (Paralinguistic aspects), Subcategories F1 (Voice) and F2 (Body language) were almost empty. Yet, Subcategory F3 (Projected image) comprised a few more comments, most of which were positive and referred to self-confident, relaxed attitudes. Table 4 displays the number of comments within each category for both data sets.

Table 4. Fine-grained content analysis.

Category	Oxford Count	CETT Count	Subcategories	Oxford Count	CETT Count
A. Textual aspects	68	27	A1. Topic development/structure	8	8
			A2. Speech content/length	39	12
			A3. Clarity	21	7
B. Language register	3	0			
C. Grammar & vocabulary aspects	71	96	C1. General grammar/vocabulary	38	15
			C2. Specific grammar/vocabulary mistakes	33	81
D. Phonetic aspects	31	50	D1. General pronunciation	23	32
			D2. Specific pronunciation mistakes	8	18
E. Fluency	17	17			
F. Paralinguistic aspects	9	7	F1. Voice	1	2
			F2. Body language	1	0
			F3. Projected image	7	5

Source: Own elaboration based on Iglesias (2019).

This fine-grained analysis suggests that OX participants tended to make more content-related comments, while CETT participants' feedback focused more on form and error correction. This possibly stems from differences in foreign language levels. OX participants had an elementary level of Spanish, so they probably made more basic grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation mistakes which were easy to detect. In contrast, CETT participants' level of English was upper intermediate, which enabled them to be more communicative, fluent, and accurate. Therefore, OX participants' attention was drawn to textual aspects, even though they also pointed out a few specific inaccuracies.

In addition to these findings, other results can be reported after having analyzed both data sets from a global perspective. The students from both institutions provided each other with abundant general positive feedback, particularly in terms of overall impression, task achievement, and performance. CETT participants made more global positive comments and mentioned that OX participants had a good level of Spanish, usually before correcting a mistake. Moreover, CETT participants often articulated encouraging expressions, like "keep up the good work" or "good luck", and empathized with their peers by acknowledging that learning a foreign language is hard and takes time. This constructive feedback is likely to be due to the lower linguistic proficiency in Spanish as a foreign language displayed by OX participants, who also motivated their counterparts, albeit to a lesser extent.

A similar number of recommendations can be found in both data sets, mainly to foster sustained language practice. Other comments were related to the communicative resources used

by the participants, for example when reading their scripts or resorting to translation. Finally, OX participants made occasional references to the background noise in some of their peers' videos. The reason for this is that CETT participants recorded their speeches in their school, while OX participants produced their videos in quieter, private rooms. A recap of these features can be checked in Table 5.

Table 5. Global content analysis.

Feature	Oxford Count	CETT Count
General positive feedback	48	67
Encouraging phrases	6	38
Recommendations	9	8
Comments on communicative resources	3	4
Comments on setting	4	0

Source: Own elaboration.

To sum up, it can be concluded that feedback provision was abundant in holistic and in analytic terms with regard to both strengths and weaknesses. This shows that students were actively engaged and regarded mistakes as a learning opportunity. Previous research has indicated that sometimes students are not fully comfortable with giving peer feedback in a foreign language (Cheng and Warren, 2005; Iglesias-Xamaní, 2014; Iglesias, 2019). However, in this project feedback was provided using most participants' first language or a language they were proficient at after having conducted a shared task in their target foreign language. Therefore, there was a balance between their own second language acquisition and their contribution to their peers' second language acquisition in a relaxed atmosphere. This model has proven successful and highly supportive.

CONCLUSION

This small-scale study can be regarded as a step forward towards the understanding of formative oral peer feedback procedures. Positive comments can be used by teachers to have a clear picture of their students' communicative resources, which ought to be reinforced continuously. Nevertheless, this study has demonstrated that learners' analytical skills can also help them to identify improvement areas and empower each other. Furthermore, teachers can take advantage of this process to spot and address their students' deficiencies, as well as to motivate them. In line with the aforementioned investigations, peer assessment is an effective tool provided that students receive clear guidelines and training.

Since the data sets used in this project were not particularly extensive and had a very specific idiosyncrasy, the limited representativeness of the results must be acknowledged. However, they lay the ground for further investigations on how to carry out effective peer assessment to develop oral skills in virtual environments. Other potential research avenues may examine learners' and teachers' attitudes towards online peer assessment, as well as their perceived

affordances and limitations. Longitudinal studies of long-term benefits would also be valuable. Given the relevant role of technology-mediated feedback in developing oral communicative competences in a foreign language, new strategies and resources for its use should continue to be explored.

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