Non-Verbal Feedback

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Introduction

In this chapter, we present how non-verbal features, such as gestures, play an integral role in classroom interaction, including corrective feedback. First, we discuss the benefits of corrective feedback in general and introduce some characteristics of corrective feedback that may impact its effectiveness. Then, we review some descriptive and interventionist gestural studies in the field of second language acquisition (SLA) to present how gestures have been used by teachers and students in the language classroom, as well as to show whether or not such gestures have any impact on various domains of second language (L2) learning. Next, we review some gestural studies which were conducted in relation to corrective feedback. Finally, we conclude this chapter with suggestions for future studies and pedagogical implications.

Corrective Feedback

Corrective feedback during meaning-focused L2 interaction has proven to be an effective mechanism for increasing both noticing of linguistic structures and L2 development (e.g., Li, 2010; Lyster & Saito, 2010; Lyster, Saito, & Sato, 2013; Russell & Spada, 2006). Studies of noticing have relied on a variety of measures such as online and retrospective reports to determine learners’ attentional focus. But most importantly, quasi-experimental studies have found that in general, learners who are provided with corrective feedback perform significantly better on subsequent measures of linguistic performance than do learners who have not received corrective feedback.

In addition to investigating the overall benefits of corrective feedback, researchers have also examined the characteristics of corrective feedback that may influence its effectiveness. Several corrective feedback characteristics in particular have received attention, including its input-providing or output-prompting qualities (e.g., Goo & Mackey, 2013; Lyser & Ranta, 2013), its degree of implicitness (e.g., Ellis, Loewen, & Ehrman, 2000), and its linguistic targets (e.g., Brown, 2010). A seminal study into the characteristics of corrective feedback is Lyster and Ranta’s (1997) description of corrective feedback in high school French immersion classes in Canada, in which they identified six different types of feedback, namely recasts, elicitations, explicit correction, clarification requests, metalinguistic cues, and repetition. In a recent meta-analysis, Brown (2016) found that recasts accounted for 57% of corrective feedback in descriptive studies, while prompts occurred 30% of the time.

Additionally, studies have conducted fine-grained analyses of discursive features that accompany corrective feedback. For example, Loewen and Philp (2006) investigated the prosody that teachers used when providing recasts. They found that recasts accompanied by declarative intonation were more likely to be followed by uptake, but the linguistic targets that received recasts with interrogative intonation, as in Example 1, were more likely to be produced accurately by L2 learners on a subsequent posttest.

Example 1: Recast with interrogative intonation (Loewen & Philp, 2006, p. 556)

Student: somebody stolen my paper
Teacher: someone stole your paper?

In spite of numerous previous studies, many of which are reviewed in this volume, there are still aspects of corrective feedback that remain relatively under-investigated. One such area is the issue of non-verbal feedback that either accompanies oral corrective feedback or is provided by itself without any oral component. In order to better situate the few studies that have examined non-verbal feedback, a review of several of the more general aspects of non-verbal communication and SLA is necessary.

Non-Verbal Behavior and L2 Learning

Non-verbal behavior is an overarching term which has been used to refer to various behavioral elements of communication that play an integral role in human interaction, such as facial expressions, eye movements, and body postures (e.g., Hall, Coats, & Labeau, 2005; Jungeheim, 2001). For example, during a phase of corrective feedback, an instructor may keep maintaining eye contact with a learner even after the learner responded to the feedback. This could indicate that the turn is still the learner’s because the response was still incorrect. Similarly, tilted head and pursed lips may indicate a problem with the learner’s response.
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and repetitions of learner utterances created misunderstanding of the teacher’s corrective intent.

Although Allen (2000), Lazaraton (2004), and Faraco and Kida (2008) illustrated when and how gestures were used in L2 instructional contexts, the frequency of occurrence of such gestures had not yet been investigated. However, Inceoglu (2015) added another layer to the existing studies by showing to what extent gestures were used during focus on form episodes (FFEs) targeting lexical items. She observed 10 hours of intermediate French as a foreign language classrooms and identified 110 FFEs and found that close to half of the FFEs were accompanied by gestures. Furthermore, gestures accompanied the majority of FFEs targeting verbs (15 out of 18) and collocations (14 out of 15), whereas the use of gestures was considerably less frequent for nouns (28 out of 71) and adjectives (2 out of 6). Inceoglu also found that iconic gestures were most frequently used during lexical FFEs. Another notable distinction that she observed was that when the FFEs were initiated by the learners, about 90% of the FFEs were accompanied by gestures, even though it was only about 50% when initiated by the teachers. Collectively, these studies indicate that language instructors often incorporate gestures with pedagogical purposes to facilitate learners’ L2 understandings.

In addition to teacher’s gestures, some researchers have used a sociocultural framework to examine how gestures were used between teachers and students (e.g., McCafferty & Rosborough, 2014, Smotrova & Lantolf, 2013; Smotrova, 2014). For example, Smotrova and Lantolf (2013) examined a two-hour-long video recording of an EFL classroom in Eastern Ukraine. They identified that some gestures that the instructor used to describe the meaning of a phrasal verb (e.g., [a plane] takes off) were reused when describing the same phrasal verb but in a different context (e.g., [a train] takes off). They found that these gestures were later used by the EFL learners as well and argued that the recurring images illustrated by gestures served as a reference point in verbal utterances.

These descriptive studies are rich in nature and have demonstrated how teachers and students use gestures in language classrooms. Had the studies solely relied on the oral data, we would not have known the various functions of gestures in a language classroom: (1) introduction of a culture-specific gesture, (2) facilitating learners’ understanding of important vocabulary words and phrasal verbs, and (3) impacting the student–teacher interaction negatively and positively. However, to argue for its impact on L2 learning, intervention studies, as described in the next section, are needed.

**Experimental Gesture Studies in SLA**

In addition to observational studies, some SLA researchers have conducted intervention studies in order to examine whether or not exposing to gestures and/or producing appropriate gestures may facilitate L2 learning. The studies which are introduced here are not necessarily related to corrective feedback; however, they are important studies to refer back to when we discuss the effectiveness of gestures in corrective feedback later in this chapter, because the studies illustrate whether or not exposure to gestures helps L2 learning. Specifically, studies have investigated the areas of L2 comprehension, vocabulary learning, and pronunciation learning and, as a result, researchers have identified the facilitative functions of gestures in most, but not all, pedagogical areas (e.g., Macedonia & Kliemisch, 2014; Sueyoshi & Hardison, 2005; Kelly & Lee, 2012).

When considering the effectiveness of gestures for L2 comprehension and learning, it is important to consider their compensatory nature in relation to L2 comprehension. When L2 learners’ proficiency levels are not high enough or when they are listening to a conversation in a loud setting, it is natural to rely on the interlocutor’s gestural cues to understand the interlocutor. Likewise, the existing studies suggest that seeing a speaker’s gestures is indeed helpful for some learners (e.g., Allen, 1995; Church, Ayman-Nolley, & Mahocean, 2004; Sime, 2006; Sueyoshi & Hardison, 2005). For example, Sime (2006) observed a total of five 90-minute classes and conducted a stimulated recall session with the learners about the teachers’ non-verbal behaviors. One of the major functions that the learners reported was how they actively tried to make sense of teachers’ gestures, and they reported that some gestures were helpful for meaning-making. The intervention studies seem to support this argument as well. For example, Dahl and Ludvigsen (2014) conducted a study with L1 and L2 English speaking children. Half of the children in each group were given the description of a cartoon in English in a video in which the speaker’s gestures were visible. The other half saw a video where gestures were invisible. After watching the video, the participants were asked to draw a picture that matched the given description. The researchers found that the presence of gestures did not affect the comprehension by L1 English speaking children; furthermore, the drawings by the L2 English speaking children were more like those by L1 English speaking children when gestures were visible, but the other children who did not see gestures were not as accurate as those who saw gestures. In another study, Sueyoshi and Hardison (2005) investigated whether or not low-intermediate and advanced L2 learners’ comprehension benefited from seeing a speaker's facial expressions and gestures. Learners watched a video in one of three conditions: (1) audio-visual lecture with facial expressions and co-speech gestures, (2) audio-visual lecture with facial expressions only, and (3) audio-only lecture. The results obtained from the comprehension questions showed that the low-intermediate learners performed the best under the gesture and facial expressions conditions; however, the advanced learners from the facial expressions only condition received the highest score. The study indicated that non-verbal features such as gestures and facial expressions are indeed helpful for L2 comprehension. However, their effectiveness seems to depend on learners’ level of proficiency.

In the domain of vocabulary teaching, it has been reported that teachers often incorporate gestures when describing the meaning of new vocabulary words and
Collective Feedback and Gestures

Feedback and support from the exit and incorrect feedback given and a correction.

Collective feedback plays an integral role in intuition and development.

Overall, we need to improve and understand feedback, especially in non-verbal cues and other non-verbal gestures.

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Wang and Loewen conclude that due to the pervasiveness of non-verbal behavior during feedback, it is important to gain a better understanding of how teachers use non-verbal behavior and, perhaps more importantly, its potential impact on L2 development.

To the best of our knowledge, there have not been many studies which have examined the effectiveness of gestures used during corrective feedback. Two exceptions are Wang (2009), who used individualized post hoc tests to investigate the effects of non-verbal behavior during naturally occurring classroom feedback, and Nakatsukasa (2016), who conducted a quasi-experimental study of gestures and corrective feedback.

In a non-interventionist study, Wang (2009) compared the effects of verbal and non-verbal corrective feedback on L2 development. Using the feedback episodes from the 65 hours of classroom interaction that were also analyzed in Wang and Loewen (2015), she administered tailor-made, individualized post hoc tests to the students who had been the recipients of corrective feedback. Overall, students had an accuracy rate of 59% on the immediate posttest and 47% on a delayed posttest two weeks later. When non-verbal behavior accompanied the verbal feedback, student accuracy was 73% and 61% on the immediate and delayed posttests, respectively; however, when non-verbal feedback was not included, the accuracy rates were statistically lower at 56% and 47%. Based on these results, Wang argues that non-verbal behavior can enhance the effectiveness of verbal feedback, and she calls for additional studies, both descriptive and quasi-experimental, to further explore these effects.

One study that has responded to this call is Nakatsukasa (2016), who examined whether instructors’ recasts accompanied by gestures illustrating English locative prepositions affected learners’ subsequent spontaneous oral production of the target structure. One group of ESL students received verbal recasts with gestures during 30 minutes of communicative tasks that were designed to elicit locative prepositions. The second group also received verbal recasts, but without gestures, and the third group received no feedback. Her results showed that the groups who received recasts regardless of the presence of gestures improved equally in the immediate posttest, whereas the no feedback group did not improve. However, in the delayed posttest, only the group who received the verbal and gestural recasts maintained the development which was observed in the immediate posttest. Based on these results, it seems that seeing gestures during corrective feedback improved the durability of the learners’ gains in knowledge.

These studies indicate that incorporating gestures and other non-verbal behaviors during corrective feedback is helpful for L2 development because learners are better able to understand the linguistic target of feedback and because learning is better retained. These findings call for further studies to understand what kind of linguistic structures or what types of non-verbal behavior benefit L2 development.
Pedagogical Implications

1. Development of learning strategies that facilitate the acquisition of knowledge and skills, focusing on the development of metacognitive skills and self-regulated learning. Strategies such as self-explanation, retrieval practice, and the use of analogies can help students develop a deeper understanding of the material. 

2. The integration of multimedia and interactive technologies in the classroom can enhance student engagement and facilitate the acquisition of knowledge. Tools such as interactive simulations, virtual reality, and adaptive learning systems can provide personalized learning experiences that cater to the diverse needs of students.

3. The use of formative assessment to monitor student progress and provide immediate feedback can help students identify areas of strength and weakness. This can be achieved through the use of quizzes, self-assessments, and peer evaluations. 

4. The implementation of collaborative learning strategies, such as group work and peer teaching, can enhance student learning by promoting active participation and social interaction. These strategies can be particularly effective in promoting critical thinking and problem-solving skills.

5. The use of authentic and real-world examples in teaching can help students connect the material to their everyday experiences, making it more meaningful and easier to understand. This can be achieved by incorporating case studies, simulations, and project-based learning activities.

Directions for Future Studies

The importance of incorporating non-modal aspects into the classroom is evident in the literature, and future research should focus on the development of strategies that can help students integrate these aspects into their learning processes. This could involve the use of technology, the development of new teaching methodologies, and the incorporation of research findings into classroom practice.

Upkeep and Greetings

The document concludes with a section on the importance of ongoing engagement and the need for continuous improvement. The authors encourage educators to stay updated with the latest research and teaching methods to ensure that their practices remain effective and relevant to the needs of their students.
In terms of the use of gestures during corrective feedback, language educators may find it useful to incorporate gestures, especially when providing implicit forms of feedback such as recasts. Even when the linguistic targets are not mentioned verbally during feedback, linguistic targets can be marked implicitly via gestures, which will allow learners to be aware of the source of error without being corrected explicitly in front of the class. Also, because the instructor does not necessarily need to explain the error verbally, gesture-incorporated feedback could potentially save time in class. In addition, as the studies on vocabulary learning have collectively shown, seeing gestures appears to promote long-term retention of knowledge. Thus, learners may benefit from the gestural corrective feedback compared to when it was given verbally only. In these cases, it becomes important that the learners are aware of the meaning of gestures. Thus, it may be necessary to incorporate gestures which have been frequently used in the classroom or to explicitly tell the meaning of the gestures in advance.

Related to corrective feedback, language educators may also benefit from observing learners’ gestures during and following feedback. Even if learners do not verbalize their thoughts, their gestures and other non-verbal behavior may signal what they have noticed through feedback. For example, in a situation where a student forgets to use past tense, the instructor may provide corrective feedback with a ‘point-back’ gesture to indicate the lack of past tense. Following this feedback, a learner may remain silent but repeat the point-back gesture, which could indicate that the learner became aware of the source of the error. Such awareness is a crucial initial step for L2 development, even if the learner is unable to or unwilling to verbally produce the correct utterance.

In summary, it is somewhat surprising that there has not been more research investigating non-verbal feedback even though there has been considerable research on corrective feedback and L2 gestures respectively. It is hoped that the current review will be an impetus for increasing our understanding of the role of gestures, either alone or accompanying verbal feedback, during focus on form in meaning-focused interaction.

References


