# ""Is it /'pr / or /'pre /"? L2 pronunciation feedback in English-French tandem conversations"

Céline Horgues, Sylwia Scheuer

# "Is it /ˈprɑːg/ or /ˈpreɪg/?" L2 pronunciation feedback in English-French tandem conversations

Céline Horgues&Sylwia Scheuer

*Department of English, University of Sorbonne Nouvelle-Paris 3*

[celine.horgues@univ-paris3.fr](mailto:celine.horgues@univ-paris3.fr)        [sylwia_scheuer@yahoo.fr](mailto:sylwia_scheuer@yahoo.fr)

## 1. Introduction

### 1.1. Research background

The paper offers further findings from the analysis of corrective feedback (CF) given to the native French speakers by their native English-speaking tandem partners as part of the SITAF corpus collected at the University of Paris 3. The corpus, described at length in Horgues& Scheuer (in press), consists of around 25 hours of video-recorded, face-to-faceinteractions held by 21 pairs of French-English tandem participants. The speakers were recorded on two occasions – in February (session 1) and May 2013 (session 2) – while performing three types of tasks. Two of them were communication activities, *Liar-Liar* (Game 1; storytelling) and *Like Minds* (Game 2; argumentation), while the last was a reading task, for which *The North Wind and the Sun* was used. Although allthe participants got to perform all three tasks in their respective L1 and L2 at least once during the recording sessions, our analysis will only be concerned with the English portion of the data. We have previously reported on the CF provided by the native speakers (NSs) during the reading task (Horgues& Scheuer, 2014), whereas the present paper expands this line of research by offering a preliminary analysis of L2 pronunciation feedback given to their native French-speaking partners during the two conversation tasks.

### 1.2. Research questions

Among the research questions addressed are the following: (1) What is the corrective strategy adopted by the native speaker: recast, explicit correction, or clarification request?(2) Is the correction solicited by the learner in some way, or is it spontaneous? (3) What gets corrected by the NS: segmental or prosodic errors? (4) What is the learner's uptake after receiving feedback? (5) How do body gestures supplement both the corrective audio input and the CF request and uptake? One of our overarching research hypotheses is that pronunciation errors are weak magnets for corrective feedback in spontaneous tandem interactions, with a vast majority of CF instances focusing on syntax and vocabulary.

## 2. Method

We use the term 'corrective feedback' to refer to the negative evidence given by the native speaker to their tandem partner during the recorded interactions. Gass (2003, p. 225)

defines negative evidence as "the type of information that is provided to learners concerning the incorrectness of an utterance". In the present analysis, we will be distinguishing three basic categories of CF: explicit comments ("you can't say X…"), clarification requests ("what do you mean by X?") and recasts[1].

We count corrective feedbackas spontaneous if no appeal, be it verbal or non-verbal, is made to the native speaker by the learner. On the other hand, the non-native participant may solicit feedback explicitly or implicitly. In the current study, the former label is applied to cases of explicit *verbal*requests – such as the one paraphrased in the title of the paper: "is it /ˈprɑːg/ or /ˈpreɪg/?" – whereas implicit requests are conceptualised as various types of non-verbal vocal or visual appeal, such as hesitation marks, unfinished sentences, rising tones, questioning gazes or gestures, etc.

Finally, learner uptake is understood following Lyster&Ranta's (1997, p. 49) definition as "a student's utterance that immediately follows the teacher's feedback and that constitutes a reaction in some way" to that feedback. We distinguish between (a) total uptake, characterised by (reasonable) conformity to the model provided by the NS expert; (b) partial uptake, where only part of the correction has been implemented by the learner; (c) failed uptake, where the NNS attempts but fails to repeat the model form (*e.g.* by repeating the initial error) and (d) no uptake, in which case there is either no reaction whatsoever to the CF and the NNS continues on the same topic, or the learner simply acknowledges the NS's contribution through minimal verbal back channeling ("yes", "okay").

## 3. Results

We analysed seven hours of video-recorded interactional speech (Game 1 and Game 2 in both recording sessions) and identified a total of 158 instances of corrective feedback.In accordance with our initial hypothesis, pronunciation did not constitute the primary target of native speakers' interventions, accounting for 28% (44) of all CF instances at best (*i.e.* when combinations of foci – such as grammar/syntax and phonetics – are taken into account), and just over 19% if we consider pronunciation alone. The favourite area targeted by the experts in our study was vocabulary with 52.5% of all cases, while pure grammatical (syntactic) errors only accounted for just under 13% of all CF occurrences, with the remainder split between the various mixed-focus categories.The occurrences of phonetic CFwere split equally between the two recording sessions (22+22), but not so between the two tasks: Game 1 (storytelling) attracted over 2.5 times more CF than Game 2 (32 and 12 instances, respectively).

### 3.1. Corrective strategy

Just like in the 'reading' study (Horgues& Scheuer, 2014), recast proved by far the predominant strategy employed in our peer-to-peer interactions. 41 of the 44 cases (93%)

---

[1]Lyster&Ranta (1997, p. 46) define recast as a corrective strategy involving "the teacher's reformulation of all or part of a student's utterance, minus the error", see also El Tatawi2002. In our context, this can be illustrated with the following exchange: *NNS* "And then I fall on my knees"; *NS* "Oh, you fell on your knees".

involved this method, although 13 of those featured recast combined with another strategy. Still, recast in its 'pure' form accounted for nearly 64% of all phonetic CF instances. The runner-up was clarification request, which was found in 13 cases (in all but 3 in combination with recast), whereas explicit correction was employed merely 3 times, always accompanied by recast.

### 3.2. Solicited or spontaneous?

Phonetic feedback was solicited roughly as often as it was not (23 vs 21 cases, respectively). When some sort of appeal to the native speaker did occur, it was predominantly implicit, usually executed through prolonged gazing at their interlocutor, hesitating tempo and rising tone. Only 13.6% (6) of CF instances followed an explicit verbal request on the part of the learner, for example "I don't know if you can say that".

### 3.3. Segmental or prosodic?

Unlike the reading task, where only a tiny minority (4.6%) of CF instances regarded suprasegmental matters, the conversation data presents a less unbalanced picture. Segmental errors appear to have acted as major triggers in 29 cases (65.9%), with the remaining 15 divided between word stress (10, or 22.7%, *e.g.'prisoners* being incorrectly stressed as *pri'soners)* and syllable count, *i.e.* the learner adding or 'losing' a syllable (5, or 11.4%, *e.g.cluedo* mispronounced with an extra medial syllable: *clu-e-do)*. Again in contrast to our reading study, vocalic errors no longer seem to be the main culprits: 38% of all segmental corrections might be attributed to vowels (*e.g.sit* pronounced *seat*),41% to consonants (*e.g.sixth* pronounced as if it was *\*thixth*),and the remaining 21% represent a mixed V+C category(*e.g.hotel* pronounced \*[o'tel]). The respective figures in our 2014 findings, as regards types of segmental CF, were 58.3%, 25.2% and 16.5%.

### 3.4. Learner uptake

Of the four options we considered, 'no uptake' turned out to be the most frequent one: it accompanied 24 (54.5%) out of the 44 CF occurrences. If uptake did occur, however, it was predominantly 'total' (12, or 27.3%), whereas only 3 cases (6.8%) were labelled as 'failed uptake'. This relative scarcity of uptake of any kind (45.4%) is perhaps less surprising than it might initially appear: after all, the majority of corrections were carried out by means of recast, which – by its very nature – is non-explicit and therefore often vague. Consequently, the corrective function of recasts is sometimes not perceived by the recipient,especially if more than one item is corrected at a time (*e.g.* the inflectional ending *and* the stressed vowel of a verb, as in a NS recasting 'he sit \*['si:t]' as 'he sits').Moreover, recasts are also minimally disruptive in this context where the tandem partners tend to focus on smooth and friendly communication and task-completion, rather than on language accuracy.

### 3.5. Multimodality

All three stages of corrective feedback (*i.e.* CF request, provision and uptake) were found to be highly multimodal in our SITAF corpus (Debras, Horgues, &Scheuer, 2015). NSs tend to provide phonetic feedback combining visual cues to support their verbal content and

learners also frequently rely on non-verbal strategies when attempting to take up phonetic CF (face movements, hand gestures and visual alignment with the expert's articulatory movements, *e.g.* stretched lips when silently mirroring the NS's model pronunciation of long /i:/ in *geese*).

## 4.    Conclusions and discussion

So far, SLA research on CF has mostly focused on feedback provided by language teachers in the field of morphosyntax and vocabulary (Lyster&Ranta, 1997 and El Tatawi, 2002) while phonetic feedback has largely been neglected. We therefore hope that our present contribution brings a new insight into the study of CF by showing how peer-to-peer tandem interactions also induce a favourable environment for L2 learners not only to be exposed to valuable phonetic feedback provided by their native-speaking counterparts, but also to be proactive in soliciting this feedback, which is essential for their L2 phonetic development. The quantity, type, form and impact of the phonetic feedback are partly dependent on factors such as the speaking task, the instructions given to the participants and the interlocutors' profiles. A more thorough investigation of which phonetic errors tend to be corrected and why would be necessary although it is often sometimes difficult to identify the corrective focus intended by a NS's correction or to have access to their reasons for deciding to intervene or not. In a further perspective, we would like to take a closer look at how the CF sequence developsin time: indeed the provision and uptake of phonetic CF is not always immediate and it might be enlightening to study its delayed effects too.

**References:**

Debras, C., Horgues, C. & Scheuer, S. (2015). The multimodality of corrective feedback in tandem interactions. Paper presented at the 33rd AESLA Conference, Madrid, Spain, 15-18 April, 2015.

El Tatawy, M. (2002). Corrective feedback in second language acquisition. *Working Papers in TESOL & Applied Linguistics.* Teachers' College, Columbia University, pp. 1-19.

Gass, S. M. (2003). Input and interaction. In: C. J. Doughty & M. H. Long (Eds.), *The Handbook of Second Language Acquisition*, pp. 224-255. Oxford: Blackwell.

Horgues, C. & Scheuer, S. (2014). "I understood you, but there was this pronunciation thing…": L2 pronunciation feedback in English/French tandem interactions. *Research in Language*, 12(2), pp. 145-161.

Horgues, C. & Scheuer, S. (in press). Why some things are better done in tandem?In: J. A. Mompeán& J. Fouz-González (Eds.), *Investigating English Pronunciation: Current Trends and Directions*. Basingstoke and New York:Palgrave Macmillan.

Lyster, R. &Ranta, L. (1997). Corrective feedback and learner uptake. *Studies in Second Language Acquisition*,19(1),pp. 37-66.