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Author: Vrind, E. de

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Chapter 1

General introduction

1.1 General introduction

Communication skills in foreign languages are of great importance for our functioning in all parts of society and for our functioning in the international context. Not only because of international economic interests (see e.g. Fenedex, 2007), but also because, as a member of a multicultural and globalized society, it is important for each individual to be able to communicate in other languages. It opens the way to world citizenship and leads, together with the development of intercultural competences, to understanding and openness towards people with a different cultural background (Council of Europe, 2001; Meesterschapsteam Moderne Vreemde Talen, 2018; Onderwijsraad, 2008).

For these reasons, speaking skills¹ in foreign languages are one of the important components in curricula and examinations programmes all over the world, in both general secondary education and pre-university education. Many stakeholders consider becoming autonomous foreign language learners² to be an important goal for students so that they can continue their language development (e.g. College voor Toetsen en Examens, 2020; Council of Europe, 2001; Holec, 1981; Lee, 1998; Little, Dam & Legenhausen, 2017). Autonomous language learners are able to self-regulate their own foreign language skills and take increasing responsibility for their learning in order to continue language development (Lee, 1998). That requires the students to have insight into their own learning process and, with respect to speaking, insight into what is needed to improve their own speaking skills. Students must learn to evaluate their performances, set targets, make plans to achieve those targets, learn to execute their plans and evaluate them, after which the cycle can be completed again (e.g. the teaching-learning cycle in the autonomy classroom, Little et al., 2017).

An autonomous learner is able to fulfil all these activities independently. However, most students need to be supported in learning to self-regulate their speaking skills. This support should be adaptive to the students, which means that the students receive the help they need (no more and no less) and that support is phased out gradually until they are able to self-regulate independently (e.g. Sadler, 1998). Teachers have to tailor feedback and adjust learning activities but adapting to their students' learning needs is a very complex process.

¹ The general term 'speaking skills' as used in this dissertation includes conversation skills and monologues (giving presentations) in foreign languages.

² In this dissertation 'learner' and 'student' are used as synonyms.

The first difficulty concerns the multitude of choices regarding feedback on speaking skills. Much research on feedback in the field of language acquisition has focused on the effectiveness of specific feedback types or strategies (Lyster, Saito & Sato, 2013). However, the conclusions drawn from such research are not simply transferable to the classroom context, because this kind of research usually focuses on a certain facet of feedback whereas teachers have to make complex choices with regard to all facets of feedback. Oral skills involve many aspects (pronunciation, vocabulary, grammar, fluency, message). As a result, learners may produce a great divergence in quality of output and, therefore, the foci of feedback may be diverse. Moreover, teachers not only have to make decisions about the focus of feedback, they have to quickly make many decisions about the kind of feedback to provide: what aspect of feedback, how to formulate the feedback, when to provide the feedback, and who should provide the feedback (see Figure 1, p.20).

Second, in order to choose an adequate kind of feedback which the learner actually understands and which fosters learning, teachers need to have insight into the individual learning process of each student. Socio-cultural theory (Lantolf, Thorne & Poehner, 2015; Aljaafreh & Lantolf, 1994; Poehner & Lantolf, 2005) states that no single specific feedback strategy is universally effective. Feedback is effective if it is in line with the student's zone of proximal development (Vygotsky, 1987). Therefore, the choice of focus, type or strategy of feedback depends on the individual learner's development and aims to guide the learner towards self-repair. In this respect, Aljaafreh and Lantolf (1994) proposed a "Regulatory Scale" of feedback with 12 levels from implicit at one end to explicit feedback at the other end in order to be able to provide not only gradual but above all contingent support. They recommend starting with the most implicit form and going to more explicit feedback if the learner appears to need it in order to improve. The instructional goal is to facilitate the transition from regulation by others to self-regulation (Aljaafreh & Lantolf, 1994). However, providing such adaptive feedback requires not only insight into the learners' speaking performance itself, but also into their understanding and noticing of their own speaking performance, their ability to improve their speaking skills (regulation skills) and affective factors which may influence the learning process (see Figure 1).

Third, this insight into all these aspects and levels of the learning process of each individual learner must be gained in the complex context of a classroom setting. In a one-to-one tutoring setting this is already difficult, let alone in regular classrooms of 25-30 students

who the teacher sees for only two or three lessons a week. Because of the transient nature of speech, opportunities for feedback pass by all too quickly. Uptake by the learners depends in a large part on their capacity to remember what has been said, and on having the opportunity to correct themselves and to practise a similar speaking act. Furthermore, the learning goal is not only to learn to self-regulate their own speaking skills, but also to cover all the content of the language curriculum. Besides these learning goals, the teacher must realise other goals at the same time, such as keeping order, creating and maintaining an optimal classroom climate, motivating students, managing time and resources, etc. (Kennedy, 2005; 2016b; Janssen, Westbroek & Doyle, 2015).

No wonder secondary school teachers in modern foreign languages in the Netherlands report that classes are too big and that this, along with lack of time and student dependency, impedes their training of speaking skills (Fasoglio, 2015). They tend to experience difficulties in providing adaptive feedback on speaking skills (Corda, Koenraad & Visser, 2012). According to Kwakernaak (2009: 243), providing feedback on speaking skills appears to be one of the most serious problems in foreign language teaching in the Netherlands. According to Lyster et al. (2013: 30), teachers should have a very wide repertoire of feedback types and strategies in order to make choices that meet their students' needs and that fit the instructional context. Descriptive studies have shown, however, that teachers have a limited feedback repertoire that does not always meet the learning needs of individual students (Gass & Mackey, 2012; Lyster et al., 2013; Yoshida, 2008). Furthermore, the opportunity for students to improve their speaking performance is often lacking. In secondary education a particular speaking task is often offered only once in a lesson series without additional instruction or practice and with limited opportunity for reflection after interaction (Goh, 2017; Goh & Burns, 2012; chapter 2 of Van Batenburg, 2018).

In conclusion, an adaptive approach is needed to support students in learning to self-regulate their learning process in speaking skills. However, a new teaching approach will only be implemented in the classroom if it is not only of benefit to students' learning but is also practical for teachers (Janssen et al., 2015). Practical for teachers means that the adaptive teaching approach provides concrete principles to realize adaptation to their students' needs in regular classes of 25-30 students, in the limited time available and in congruence with other goals teachers must achieve at the same time.

1.2 Objective of this thesis, main research question and methodological approach

The objective of this thesis, therefore, was to design and evaluate an approach for self-regulated learning of speaking skills that is adaptive for secondary school students and practical for teachers in their regular teaching practice. The main research question addressed in this thesis was: What are the design principles for an approach for self-regulated learning of speaking skills in a foreign language that is adaptive for students and practical for teachers?

This research targeted both development of solutions to a practical and complex educational problem that practitioners encounter and development and evaluation of theoretical knowledge in the form of design principles. Design principles are theoretically and empirically based principles that specify what to do to realize outcomes x in context z . Because an important feature of educational design research is to contribute to both educational practice and theory, it has been chosen as the method of research (McKenney, Nieveen & Van den Akker in Gravemeijer & Cobb, 2006: 110-143). Design studies often consist of two or more iterative cycles of design, implementation and evaluation. Based on theory development and practical knowledge, initial design guidelines are drawn up. These are translated into concrete teaching that is then put into practice. Interventions in classroom settings are tested using both quantitative and qualitative data. The evaluation of the new educational practice in turn provides theoretically and empirically grounded design principles for solving the identified complex educational problem. In educational design research the perception of practitioners is often used to determine whether the intervention leads to the intended results. Given the main research question, the students' perception of the adaptivity and the teachers' perception of the practicality of the approach to be developed were chosen as the crucial types of data in this dissertation. Since the perception of practitioners is important, design research is often participatory research. This also affects the role of the researcher. The role of the researcher is not one of observer, the researcher works closely with practitioners (in this case with the teachers) and designs new forms of education in order to solve problems in practice. The author of this thesis was not only the researcher but also the facilitator of the professional development trajectory who developed and shaped the learning process with the teachers.

1.3 Overview

In order to answer the main research question *What are the design principles for an approach for self-regulated learning of speaking skills in a foreign language that is adaptive for students and practical for teachers?*, four empirical studies were carried out (see chapters 2, 3, 4 and 5 below). Chapter 2 reports on a pilot study into a possible adaptive and practical approach with self-evaluation by students as a design principle. After this pilot study, three studies were carried out from two different perspectives, the perspective of the student and the perspective of the teacher, and with different foci.

Chapter 2

In the first phase of this research, based on a literature review, we conducted a pilot study to explore a design for an adaptive and practical approach for teaching speaking in a foreign language. Chapter 2 reports on this pilot study which explored whether self-evaluation by students can help teachers to gain insight into individual students' needs regarding speaking skills and to adapt their intended feedback to meet these needs. The self-evaluation was tested on a small scale by three French teachers who taught at three different secondary schools in two year-5 pre-university classes and one year-4 pre-university class³. In each class 5 or 6 students were chosen at random (n=17). We analysed the self-evaluation forms completed by the 17 selected students and described how the students evaluated their own work. In open structured interviews held with the three teachers we investigated whether their intended feedback and evaluation had shifted as a result of seeing the self-evaluations. Finally, the teachers were asked to evaluate the potential practicality of the evaluation procedure itself.

Chapter 3

Chapter 3 reports on the research from the perspective of the teachers and its focus is on practicality for teachers. The design principle on which the students' self-evaluation of the pilot study (chapter 2) was based was further elaborated into an adaptive approach with 'adaptive feedback' and 'activities for improvement'. This chapter addresses the question of

³ The Dutch education system offers differentiated secondary schooling by ability. Pre-university education (vwo in Dutch) is the most academic stream which prepares students to go on to university. Year 4 students are aged 15-16 and year 5 students are aged 16-17.

how to make the adaptive approach to teaching speaking skills in modern foreign languages practical for teachers so that they can actively use it in their teaching while retaining the essence of the method. We investigated the extent to which teachers were actually able to apply the developed teaching approach in their teaching practice. Based on questionnaires and visual representations of lessons, we examined how 13 teachers put the approach into practice and what considerations they took into account. The practicality of the developed teaching approach was examined using a teaching impact analysis (Janssen, Westbroek & Doyle, 2014a).

Chapter 4

Chapter 4 addresses the research question from the point of view of the students. This chapter poses the question of whether a self-evaluation procedure can be an adaptive resource for students at secondary schools to learn to improve their speaking skills in foreign languages and to self-regulate their learning. In a quasi-experimental study, we investigated to what extent changes occurred in the process of self-regulation in improving secondary school students' own speaking skills after four iterations of the self-evaluation procedure and to what extent they perceived the self-evaluation procedure as motivating and the received support as adaptive. To this end, 1,024 self-evaluations by 281 students of the experimental group were examined which contained diagnoses of their speaking performances, their plans for improvement and desired working format or requests for teacher's assistance. In addition, questionnaires were administered to both the experimental and the control group (n=369) on the students' perception of adaptivity of feedback and improvement activities. Finally, questionnaires were administered to the experimental group to measure the students' motivation for the different elements of the self-evaluation procedure.

Chapter 5

Chapter 5 elaborates the perspective of individual teachers and focuses on their professional development. This chapter investigates how teachers can be supported in expanding their teaching repertoire in the context of a specific innovation (the developed teaching approach of chapters 3 and 4). An adaptive development trajectory was designed based on two interrelated design principles: modularity and self-evaluation. We investigated whether adaptive learning routes could be realized within this development trajectory in which

teachers could achieve both the goals of the innovation (the developed teaching approach) and their own objectives in a way that fitted in with and built on what they were already doing in their teaching practice. To this end, self-evaluations by the teachers ($n=11$) of their own teaching practice were used. These self-evaluations included visual representations of their regular teaching practices and intended goals. They were used to determine how teachers implemented the different principles of the new teaching approach in consecutive lesson series and to describe the teachers' learning routes. In addition, the open questions of the impact analysis (Janssen et al., 2014a) were used to collect data about advantages and disadvantages of the regular teaching practice and lesson series designed according to the new teaching approach.

Finally, in chapter 6, insights from the various studies are brought together to answer the main research question.