Prompting Noticing in Second Language Learning: An Open Learner Model Approach

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Abstract

Adaptive learning environments maintain a model of the learner's current knowledge, skills or beliefs, commonly constructed based on their recent responses to questions. This learner model enables the environment to adapt the educational interaction according to the immediate learning needs of the student. The learner model is usually hidden from the learner, but increasingly environments are adopting an 'open learner model' approach, in which the model is accessible for viewing by the user in an understandable format. One of the main reasons for opening the learner model to the learner it represents is to prompt reflection on knowledge, skills and difficulties - i.e. rather than presenting a performance score or general feedback related to the correctness or otherwise of answers, the learner's attention is focussed towards the current state of their interlanguage.

Allowing the language learner to inspect their learner model and to compare this to a representation of the target language rules, can help raise their awareness of gaps in their understanding. Open learner models can also help learners to recognise cases of (native and non-native) language transfer and overgeneralisation of the target language rules. Examining their learner model can prompt learners to notice features of the language, enabling them to integrate these into their developing interlanguage.

To illustrate the potential of open learner models in language learning, this paper presents an open learner model that can be displayed to the learner in four formats: alphabetical list, categorisation according to language function, ranked according to knowledge level, and example sentences representing the learner's typical use of the language. Learners can also compare their learner model with a model of the target language (here English), available in the same four formats, in order to prompt them to notice differences between their beliefs and the skills of a native speaker.