

A Classroom Research Study on Oral Error Correction

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Abstract

This study has the main objective to present the findings of a small-scale classroom research carried out to collect data about my spoken error correction behaviors by means of self-observation. With this study, I aimed to analyze how and which spoken errors I corrected during a specific activity in a beginner's class. I used Lyster and Ranta's (1997) model to categorize the types of spoken error correction as explicit correction, recast, clarification request, metalinguistic clues, elicitation and repetition. I realized that almost all errors were immediately treated by me and I used explicit correction more than other types of error correction. This study concludes with the idea that English teacher should get involved in such self-observation studies in order to realize their current practices in the classroom, which will help them gain the awareness that each class is a small world requiring special attention with its unique dynamics.

Introduction

In order to set a theoretical framework for the study, a definition of "error" should be made. There are many definitions of error made so far and there seems to be no consensus on a single definition. Researchers like Allwright and Bailey (1996) have rightly become aware of the importance of speaking context, the intention of the teacher and student and the prior learning of the students in the process of deciding what an error is. Therefore, researchers dealing with error treatment have chosen the definition applying to their own research context. For this study, an oral error is broadly defined as a form unwanted by the teacher in the given teaching/learning context (Mosbah, 2007). Also, the term "corrective feedback" needs to be defined. It is the teacher reaction that transforms, disapproves or demands improvement of the learner utterance (Chaudron, 1977). Another term in need of clarification is "uptake" that refers to different types of student responses following the feedback, including responses with repair of the non-target items as well as utterances still in need of repair (Lyster & Ranta, *ibid*). The correction may come from the student, a peer or the teacher.

After some key definitions, the issue of oral error correction should be approached from a historical perspective to see the progress made so far. Traditionally, when the audio-lingual approach to teaching foreign languages was popular among English teaching professionals, errors were seen as something to be avoided. However, today the contemporary research seems to agree on the fact that rather than expecting students to produce error-free sentences, students were encouraged to communicate in the target language and making errors is a natural part of second language acquisition.

Background

The model proposed by Lyster and Ranta (ibid) were used for this study. As they suggest that their research on teacher feedback and student uptake does not yield conclusive results related to language, more research in different settings is believed to bring more insights into the issue of spoken error correction. As language learning input comes mainly from teachers, teaching materials and students in EFL contexts, such studies will help practicing teachers realize their correction behaviors in the classroom and shape the way they approach to spoken error correction. In their study that was conducted in an ESL setting, they made a categorization of error, feedback, and uptake to investigate the relationship between error types and types of feedback, and learner uptake. They focused on phonological, grammatical, and lexical errors and came up with a model of corrective feedback types such as recasts, explicit correction, elicitation, clarification, repetition of error, and metalinguistic feedback. Another focus of their study was on uptake that can be grouped as “self-” or “peer-repair” and “teacher-repair”. Corrective feedback types as suggested by them can be further explained and illustrated with the transcribed data of the videotaped classroom as follows (for transcription conventions, see Appendix A):

1. Explicit correction: Clearly indicating that the student's utterance was incorrect, the teacher provides the correct form.

S: there is a little milk in fridge.

*T: + in **the** fridge*

2. Recast: The teacher implicitly reformulates the student's error, or provides the correction without directly pointing out that the student's utterance was incorrect.

S: he like pop-music.

*T: yes, he **likes** pop-music*

3. Clarification request: The teacher indicates that the message has not been understood or that the student's utterance included some kind of mistake and that a repetition or a reformulation is needed by using phrases like "Excuse me?".

S: there aren't many /hotels/ in this town.

T: again? ♪

4. Metalinguistic clues: The teacher poses questions like "Do we say it like that?" or provides comments or information related to the formation of the student's utterance without providing the correct form.

S: there isn't any books.

T: + there isn't görünce uncountable, yani sayılamayan bir şey kullanmamız gerekiyormuş.

Ds: there isn't any money

5. Elicitation: The teacher directly elicits the correct form from the student by asking questions (e.g., "How do I ask somebody to clean the board?"), by pausing to allow the student to complete the teacher's utterance (e.g., "He is a good...") or by asking students to reformulate the utterance (e.g., "Can you say that again?").

S: there are a few books in my /librari/

T: in my...? ♪

6. Repetition: The teacher repeats the student's error and changes intonation to draw student's attention to it.

S: How much money do you have in your /pakıt/?

T: /pakıt/? ♪

DS: /pokıt/

T: yes

As Lyster and Ranta's model was followed for the study, a further review of their work is needed. The participants in their study were young learners in a French immersion program. Teacher-student interactions were recorded and the results yielded the percentage distribution of the six feedback types as: recasts 55%, elicitation 14%, clarification requests 11%, metalinguistic clues 8%, explicit correction 7%, and repetition of error 5%. Recasts were by far the most widely used technique, accounting for over half of all feedback moves.

They also found that while recasts were the most commonly used corrective feedback, they were the least likely to lead to successful uptake. Moreover, the most successful type of feedback resulting in students' repair was elicitation. Lyster (1998), in another study, finds that phonological errors like mispronunciation and grammatical errors such as tenses often make the teacher use the recast technique. However, the teacher seems to "negotiate the form" using elicitation, clarification request, repetition and metalinguistic feedback when a lexical error occurs. Lyster and Ranta (ibid) argued that feedback types of form negotiation are ways of negotiating the form by creating opportunities to negotiate the form by encouraging more active learner involvement in the error feedback process.

Data collection

This classroom research has been conducted in an EFL setting consisting of 30 beginner students in a general English program with special emphasis on grammar teaching. To make students get used to the video camera and behave as naturally as possible, the classroom had been videotaped for more than 10 periods before the transcribed lesson (Appendix B). The data was collected during the production stage of a lesson including a "sentence making" game about quantifiers, indefinite pronouns and there is/are. The activity that took about 12 minutes was likely to lead students to some kind of spoken error because they need to listen to their friends' words, remember all the words to combine them in order and utter the complete sentence. In this activity, students are asked to make up a meaningful sentence contextualizing any of the target structures. The teacher and sometimes students initiate a sentence and then, the teacher calls on another student to continue by adding a word to the previous one. Another student is called on to continue the sentence by saying the third word that may follow the earlier two words. When a proper sentence is made, a student tries to remember what his/her friends have said in order and produce the final sentence combining their words.

As far as the self-observation techniques used for the study, Richards (1990:119) suggests that this technique has a lot to offer to teachers' continuing growth and professional development. Furthermore, he focuses on the following list of advantages of this type of observation:

1. It enables teachers to move from a level where their actions are guided largely by impulse, intuition, or routine to a level where their actions are guided by reflection and critical thinking;
2. It can help narrow the gap between teacher's imagined view of their own teaching and reality – a gap that is often considerable;
3. It shifts responsibility for initiating improvement in teaching practices from an outsider, such as supervisors, to teachers themselves. It enables teachers to arrive at their own judgments as to what works and what does not work in their classrooms.

Research questions

The research questions for this study are stated as follows:

1. What different errors are corrected by the teacher?
2. What are the different types of corrective feedback and their distribution among all correction types?
3. What type of learner errors lead to what types of corrective feedback?
4. What is the distribution of uptake following different types of corrective feedback?

Data analysis

During the videotaped activity, students committed 15 errors, 10 of which were grammar and the rest 5 were pronunciation errors. The dominance of grammatical errors must have arisen from the fact that the activity focused accuracy about target structures. All of the errors were

immediately treated by the teacher and corrected by either the student him/herself, the teacher or a peer.

As far as the error correction techniques are concerned (Table 1), it was found out that the most common type of correction was repetition applied six times during the activity. It is followed by metalinguistic clues used three times. Explicit correction and elicitation were utilized only twice and clarification request only once.

As for the focus of these corrections, out of five pronunciation errors, three were corrected by means of repetition, one of them by elicitation and the other by clarification request. Out of ten structural errors, three were corrected by repetition and two were by metalinguistic clues. Two were treated explicitly, one by elicitation, one by recast and one by clarification request.

Table 1: Distribution of feedback types and focus

	Recast	Elicitation	Clarification Request	Metalinguistic clues	Explicit correction	Repetition
Grammar error	1	1	1	2	2	3
Pronunciation error	---	1	1	---	---	3

In terms of feedback leading to repair (Table 2), it was found out that out of six repetitions, two were self-corrected, two teacher-corrected and two were peer-corrected. As the term “explicit” implies, the teacher explicitly treated two of the errors. Metalinguistic clues led to peer-correction and one of the clarification requests was self-corrected while the other was peer-corrected. Elicitation was also handled in two ways. One of the elicitations was self-corrected and the other was teacher-corrected. Finally, the only recast occurred during the transcription was teacher-corrected.

Table 2: Distribution of uptake following different types of corrective feedback

	Recast	Elicitation	Clarification Request	Metalinguistic clues	Explicit correction	Repetition
Teacher-corrected	1	1	1	2	2	2
Self-corrected	---	1	1	---	---	2
Peer-corrected	---	---	1	2	---	2

Discussion of findings

Although the time of data collected through observation is too limited to come to sound conclusions, this classroom research has shed some light on the participating teacher's oral error correction practices during an activity. It would be fair to suggest that the teacher did not neglect any of the errors and treated errors immediately using different techniques by means of which errors were corrected explicitly or self- and peer-corrected. As for the error correction types, it would be true to suggest that contrary to Lyster and Ranta's findings mentioned earlier, recast was the least preferred type used to correct both grammar and pronunciation errors while repetition was the most common for both errors. Repetition also seems to lead to successful uptake with two self- and two peer-corrections.

The teacher repeated students' utterances without changing anything but by emphasizing the error. By this way, the teacher encouraged the learners to self-correct the erroneous utterance by repeating the error in a rising intonation as if it was a question posed to the student. Bot (1996) underlines the importance of pushing learners to produce correct forms themselves after some kind of corrective clue so that they can make meaningful connections in their brains. By doing so, remembering the self-corrected form will be much easier. Pushing learners in their output instead of directly correcting them is believed to be beneficial for learners' interlanguage development (Vigil and Oller, 1976) as learners' production promotes the development of cognitive connections. Allwright and Bailey (1991) also recommended that learners should be provided with ample time and opportunities for self-repair.

The teacher spent at least one minute to get the error self- or peer-corrected before explicitly correcting the error. He tried different types of error correction to elicit correction from the student and finally corrected himself if students fail. Whenever he used explicit correction, he got a student to repeat the corrected utterance to make sure that the correct form was understood.

While the teacher was providing metalinguistic clues, it was realized that code-switching (e.g. "A little pozitif olacak. This sentence is negative") was used to facilitate understanding of the erroneous utterance by students. Switching from English to the native language, Turkish

seems to be an effective way of saving time both while teaching grammar and correcting grammar errors.

The teacher's use of body language is also noteworthy. For example, to facilitate self- and peer-correction in response to the faulty sentence "she has got a blue shoes", the teacher changed the mood of his face and pretended to be surprised by pointing out his shoes. Then, he asked "a blue shoes or blue shoes?"

Conclusion

To conclude, teachers of English should get involved in classroom research and take the role of a pedagogic explorer in order to become aware of their current practices in the classroom. As Tedick and de Gortari (1998) suggest, teachers should take the teaching context into account and get to know what kind of classroom behaviors they display. They also point out that teachers should practice a variety of feedback techniques as different techniques might appeal to different students in terms of their needs, proficiency level, age and classroom objectives. Because these factors have an influence on whether to correct, which errors to correct and how to correct, studies done in some other settings can yield different results and thus there is a need for further research conducted with different classrooms and learners. Classroom research will help teachers gain the awareness that each class is a small world requiring special attention with its unique dynamics.

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Appendix A

Transcription Conventions

T: teacher
S: the same student
Ds: a different student
Ss: students
+: pause
<< >>: extra-lingual information (e.g. laughing)
♫: auditory cue
Underlined student errors
Italics: peer correction
Bold: teacher correction
Bold-italics: self correction
...: continuing sentence

Adapted from Hawkes(2003)

Appendix B

Transcription for Each Error

Error 1

S: she have

T: + she have? 🎵

S: she **has**...

Error 2

S: **she has** got a flower in her /vazou/

T: + /vazou/? 🎵

Ss: <<>>

T: /vazou/ Turkish, English?

S: +++

T: **/va:z/**

Error 3

S: he like pop-music.

T: yes, he **likes** pop-music

Error 4

S: she is very beautiful woman.

T: she is very beautiful woman? +++ No! She is **a** very beautiful woman.

Error 5

S: there is a lot of apples.

T: there is? 🎵 +++

Ds: there are.

Error 6

S: she has got a blue shoes.

T: (calling on another student) Repeat!

Ds: she has got a blue shoes

T: (pointing out his shoes) a blue shoes or blue shoes?

Ds: *blue shoes*

Error 7

S: there is not a little chair in my room.

T: (writing the sentence on the board) A little pozitif olacak. This is negatif. Who can make the sentence correct?

Ds: there is a little chair in my room

T: Still, there is a problem.

Ds: *There are a lot of chairs in my room.*

Error 8

S: there are a few books in my /librari/

T: in my? 🎵

S: /librari/

T: /librari/? 🎵

S: +/librari/

T: No! **/laibireri/**

Error 9

S: there are a little...

T: there are a little?

Ss: <<>>

S: **there is.**

Error 10

S: there is a little milk in fridge.

T: + in **the** fridge

Error 11

S: how many books are there in your /librari/?

T: in your...? 🎵

S: /librari/

T: **/laibireri/**

Error 12

S: how much money do you have in your /pakıt/?

T: /pakıt/? 🎵

Ds: /pokıt/

T: yes

Error 13

S: there isn't any books.

T: + there isn't görünce uncountable, yani sayılamayan bir şey kullanmamız gerekiyormuş.

Ds: there isn't any *money*

Error 14

S: how much money is there pocket?

T: how much money is there...?

S: ***how much money is there in you pocket?***

Error 15

S: there aren't many /hotıls/ in this town.

T: again? 🎵

S: there aren't many /hotıls/ in this town.

T: /hotıl/? 🎵

S: ***/heutel/***