

THE ORAL ERROR CORRECTION

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ABSTRACT: *This study focuses on the oral error correction techniques applied by teachers when a student commits errors during oral activities whether speaking or reading. It also examined whether teachers' ways of error correction affected students' participation in oral activities. An observation was utilized for the data collection. Findings showed that students were affected positively or negatively by the teacher's error corrections. They also draw the attention for importance of the scientific ways of correcting errors. 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. The data yielded a number of interesting findings which showed that there were differences and similarities between male and female teachers in the ways of correcting students' oral errors. At the end of this thesis, recommendations and suggestions were given.*

KEYWORDS: Mistake, Techniques, Fluency, Oral Errors

INTRODUCTION

Modern researchers feel strongly that errors are the central part of language learning. It does not mean that the ungrammatical piece of language is better than the accurate form but it is a kind of improvement of the traditional notion that errors are 'bad habits'. The researcher strongly believes that loathing with errors affects students negatively. The researcher also believes that the basic problem is not why or when a learner commits an error, but the problem is that what techniques are needed to respond to that error. Bartram and Walton, (1991) pointed out "all students make errors, and all teachers react to them. Some teachers react by doing nothing; others react too severely. The ones who react by doing nothing maybe more or less concerned with fluency rather than accuracy. The other reason could be that they do not like to demoralize students by error correction, but they like to encourage their students to use the language". The researcher also considers that the basic element of language teaching is the knowing of how much correction do students need to correct their mistakes and what types of correction should we follow? Gass and Selinker (2001) say "corrections cannot occur with all incorrect forms". In language classroom, oral communication is the most common form which takes place. Lynch (1996) says "Teachers and students communicate and interact orally while they read, discuss topics, ask or answer questions ". When students participate orally without hesitation and without concentration on errors, they can communicate in L2 fluently. Hendrickson (1987) points out "the emphasis is on the creation of an atmosphere in which students want to talk. Such emphasis leads learners to feel free during their speech without fearing the occurrence of errors". "Those who react too severely to their students' errors, pick up every single error and correct immediately without distinguishing between major and minor errors. Major errors or global errors are those errors which involve the overall structure of a sentence and those errors hinder communication of the speaker's message while minor or local errors are those which affect a particular element but the message of the speaker may be still understood (Burt 1975).

What is error Correction?

Error correction is the process of detecting errors in transmitted messages and reconstructing the original error-free data. Error correction ensures that corrected and error-free messages are obtained at the receiver side. Gainer (1989) argues that "correction is provided in the oral language classroom to help students to identify difficult areas and reformulate rules in their minds in order to produce language more accurately" he added that "many correction techniques seem to frustrate and intimidate students rather than enlighten them". Lochtmann (2003) says that "error correction is the way to inform the learner that the language just used needs repair and helps the learner to try again to get the form right". Edge (1987) states "Correction is a way of reminding students of the forms of Standard English. It should not be a kind of criticism or punishment" James (1998) classifies correction in to:

1. Feedback which informs the learners that there is an error, and leaves them to discover it and repair it themselves.
2. Correction-proper which provides treatment or information of the specific instance of error without aiming to prevent the same error from recurring later. The corrector can give a hint but without getting to the root of the problem. This is like doing a temporary repair on your car, just to get you home.
3. Remediation which provides the learners with information that allows them to revise or reject the wrong rule.

Pronunciation Errors

Wrong pronunciation produced by the students may affect listening process negatively. Therefore, correct pronunciation, including intonation, stress and rhythm, is very important to make students practice the content of their sentences clearly (Lynch 1996). With specific reference to intonation, Rivers (1981) says, "with incorrect intonation a question in some languages may be interpreted as a statement of fact, with resultant breakdown in communication". Nevertheless, some teachers face a problem in correcting pronunciation errors because they are uncertain of their pronunciation. In this situation they may leave the student who commits such errors uncorrected.

Research Questions

This research will find answers to the following questions:

1. Who should do the correcting?
2. Should all learners' errors be corrected?
3. What time should learners' errors be corrected?
4. Which errors should be corrected?
5. How should errors be corrected?

METHODOLOGY

Subject

Observation of twenty English language classes was carried out to help the researcher observe what goes on during oral correction. The observations took place during the second term of the school year 2005-06. . Each participating teacher was observed for three or four lessons and recordings were made while they were teaching second year students. A total of 60 lessons were observed during the researcher's visits (Each lesson takes 45 minutes. Each course lasts 16 weeks.

Instrument

In order to collect the data, the following instrument was employed in this study:

Observation

Observation is an instrument which is widely used by researchers to gather data from real situations. It seemed to be suitable for the current study to observe how teachers actually correct students' oral errors in real classrooms. Edwards and Talbot (1999: 82) pointed out that a good way to find out how teachers teach is by watching them at work. Hence, observations depend on what researchers see and hear, not on what they think about their sample. The observation illuminated what actually happened in the classrooms and how teachers and students reacted and interacted during oral error correction. All observed lessons were tape-recorded. The researcher believes that direct observation gives him the opportunity to observe error correction as it appears in real situations. The researcher watched what was happening and recorded events on the spot. Primarily, he conducted direct personal observation to see what teachers actually did (correct) when a student committed an error. Additionally, the focus was also on the students' participation in the operation of oral correction.

Data Collection

The data of this study was collected in a form of observation.

Number of teachers were visited for conducting the observation. The teachers were given a clear picture about the study and the aim of classroom observations. These visits were arranged by dividing the schools into four groups related to their location.

In this study, classroom observation was considered the main data-collection instrument to show clearly how subjects act and how they behave inside their classes during English lessons. Moreover, another strategy, such as calling students and teachers by their names was adopted to allow the researcher to have informal and friendly relationships with teachers and their students in order to let them perform naturally. The classroom observations allowed me to gain live, insider views of reality. It provided evidence of what teachers did and how they behaved when students made errors.

During the data-collection I took special care of recording and keeping the data. I made an extra copy of every classroom observation for safety reasons. The transcriptions were made during and shortly after the recording when everything was still fresh in the researcher's memory. I also kept a diary in which I recorded notes related to each observation and my first impressions of what was going in the classes.

Data analysis

Observations

It is noteworthy that although teachers paid much attention to students' oral errors and correction, they used different techniques and methods of correction. Every teacher had his/her own different and individual ways of using particular techniques. These techniques are: direct correction technique, correcting errors within a sentence as a direct correction, self-correction, peer correction, and using recast technique, which emerged from analysis of observations.

a) Direct Correction Technique

Direct correction was the technique which was the most widespread among teachers in different schools. The reason for this might be to save

time. This was clearly observed during different observations. Participant number 14 in school N who was female and had two years' experience, corrected her student directly and immediately in the mixed class. She was standing in front of the girls' row and asked a student to continue reading. The teacher seemed to focus on correcting the wrong pronunciation of words within clauses or phrases during reading activities. She was observed correcting the student(s) directly by herself without waiting for self-correction or peer correction.

b) Self-Correction

Some teachers gave a chance to the student who made the error to correct him/herself. They did that in order to give the student the opportunity to think and rethink of the correction. That also gave the student self-confidence if s/he did the correction. Self-correction is the most effective technique. The teacher gave a chance to the student to correct herself. The same technique was repeated in lines five, seven and nine. This observation seemed to indicate that the teacher focused on student's self-correction more than other techniques. In this extract the teacher focused on pronunciation and grammar errors.

c) Peer Correction

Some teachers gave students the chance to correct classmates' oral errors. This might engage the whole class in the operation of error correction and encourage students to follow up what was going on in the class during oral activities (Lynch 1996). Students might feel happier about asking and checking each other rather than admitting errors in front of the class (Dairies et al., 2006). This might also change the old traditional perception that the teacher is the one who does the correction. The teacher gives chances to the students to correct each other instead of him correcting them. He does not supply the student with the answer and waits for another student to give the answer. The teacher reminds the students of the meaning of discover by comparing it with the word 'invent' in order to help students give the answer and he focuses on meaning of these words.

Feedback

Feedback is one of the methods used by teachers as an indicator for students to pay attention towards the activity that s/he has already done. It could be another chance for the learner to do the activity after he/she has finished the attempt. With regard to the observations, some teachers asked questions of students who committed errors to allow them to think of the word(s) or a phrase they had said. It was a questioning technique used by teachers in order to give the student

a chance to recheck his/performance, rather than listening to the teacher's correction (Rydahl, 2005).

What time should learners' errors be corrected?

Regarding this, most experienced participants depended to a large extent on postponing their error correction or feedback until the end of what a student wanted to say in oral activities. Moss (2000) said, "... it has been found that increasing wait-time by an extra second or two enables learners to self-correct 50-90 per cent of their mistakes". Sometimes they went beyond that and omitted to correct students' oral errors in order to encourage students to communicate in English, especially when the errors were minor ones. Experienced participants sought to use the English language and encourage students to communicate more than correct them. The male participant number 3 in school C with twenty four years' experience who was teaching second year students and their number was thirteen; nine girls and four boys said:

T. I like you `class' to participate please, don't be shy, why you are shy? Why? ... if you want to learn English please don't be shy, this is a very important step in learning English, or if you try don't worry if your answer is right or wrong you have to try, you have to try to speak something in the class, I know you are very good students, I know all of you but I don't want you not to ask, you are very good I know but you have to connect with me, like the girls. In contrast with more experienced participants, the less experienced participants seemed to correct their students directly in order to show the correct form regardless of which part of the lesson was being taught, i. e. at the beginning, in the middle, at the end, pronunciation or grammar activities. Most less experienced participants appeared not postpone or delay error correction when errors were committed, but they corrected them immediately.

Who should do the correcting?

The analysis of the classroom observations employed in this research showed that most experienced participants gave priority to self-correction technique as a first step in the process of oral correction. They gave a chance to the student who committed an error to correct him/herself. This was observed when teachers paused after a student committed an error. The second step in the sequences and processes of error correction, used by less experienced participants, was peer-correction. Experienced participants were observed asking the rest of the class to correct their classmate's errors. They gave the opportunity to the rest of the class to participate in correcting a student's error. This was another chance for all the students to correct their classmate's errors without the teacher's participation. The final step in the error correction process was the teacher's error correction. These steps regarding who corrected students' oral errors were observed within different classrooms of experienced participants.

RESULTS

The following general characteristics were noted:

1. All participants were paying attention to grammar and pronunciation errors and corrected students' errors during oral communication or reading.
2. Although most of the participants shared some correction techniques, they varied in the way they corrected students' oral errors.

3. Most participants acted differently with the opposite sex.
4. Male teachers seemed less anxious than female teachers to correct students' errors whereas female teachers faced problems while correcting male students because these students disrespected female teachers if being corrected.
5. Teachers allowed more time to girls when they were correcting them than they did to boys for the following reasons, which I drew from the analysis of observations:
 - a) Girls showed they were more sensitive than boys and seemed to feel shy when they committed.
 - b) Girls worked harder than boys.
 - c) Girls asked their teachers more questions than boys if they were corrected in front of others.
 - d) Boys did not comment on the ways of teachers' correction.

.Female teachers corrected male students with patience, softness,
6. and more leniency than with female students.
7. Participants praised boys more than girls

DISCUSSION

This classroom research has shed some light on the participating teacher's oral error correction practices during an oral activities. During the study, it is observed that teachers 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' inter-language 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?"

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