Research Paper

Corrective Educational Feedback on Second Language Teaching and Subsequent Problems

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Abstract

Debate about the value of providing corrective feedback on L2 learning has been prominent in recent years. Although a number of studies have investigated the effects of CF on L2 learners, little is understood about how CF assists both teachers' and learners' development. The present study examines various types of feedback such as recast, clarification request, elicitation, repetition, etc. used by the teacher and the relationship to learner uptake and immediate repair of errors. In addition, it deals with how, when, where the errors should be corrected, and also who should do the correction. It is assumed that drawing students' attention to their errors not only causes awareness in learners but also assists teachers to become aware of themselves both as a teacher and as an individual; hence, all these must be taken into account.

Keywords: Corrective Feedback; Second Language Acquisition; English Language Teaching

1. Introduction

The role of feedback has a place in most theories of second language (L2) learning and language pedagogy (Aljaafreh & Lantolf, 1994). During the history, different schools of thought somehow dealt with feedback either positively or negatively. This article will draw on research in second language acquisition and language pedagogy in order to fill the gaps regarding to one type of feedback-corrective feedback (CF).

As mentioned before, some consider positive feedback to be effective. Positive feedback affirms that a learner's response to an activity is correct. In pedagogical theory, researchers have paid significant attention to positive feedback as it motivates the learners to continue learning [1]. On the other hand, in SLA, positive feedback attracts a few theorists because the studies have shown that teachers' positive feedback is quite ambiguous (e.g., when a teacher says "good", "yeah", "yes", "go on" or even when she/he smiles or nods head, they may not signal that the learner's utterance is correct. They may be used to encourage the learner). Negative feedback signals that the learner's utterance lacks correctness. The negative feedback is viewed important both in SLA and pedagogy. Although methodologists share ideas about the effectiveness of CF, they disagree about some controversial issues like, when/how/where the correction or whether the errors should be ignored [2]. The present article elaborates on these controversies and some future implications in this regard.

2. Controversies

- ➤ Effectiveness of corrective feedback
- ➤ Which errors to correct
- ➤ Who should do the correction
- ➤ Different types of feedback
- ➤ How should the correction take place

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➤ Uptake and CF
➤ Sociocultural theory (SCT) and CF

3. Effectiveness of CF

For decades, questions about error correction in SLA have been hotly debated. We have seen a number of pendulum swings in what the teacher should do with learner errors. In the 1950s and 1960s, the behaviorist teaching models such as the Audiolingual Method stressed error correction at all cost (Loewen, 2004). They emphasized habit formation; therefore, errors were considered to be damaging and thus had to be eradicated immediately. In the 1970s and 1980s under the influence of nativist views about language learning, positive evidence was considered sufficient, i.e. error correction was not only unnecessary but also harmful [3] . However, interactionism scholars [3] devote a pivotal role to negative evidence. In interactionist theories of learning (Long, 1991), errors were seen as treatable through the feedback that arises naturally in interaction. Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) advocates also created a balance between what audio-lingualists and cognitivists do and suggested that an error must be viewed as evidence of learner's linguistic development, not as a sin to be avoided [4] .

4. Dealing with Oral Corrective Feedback

CLT scholars believe that the goal of instruction is the development of fluency and acceptable language use [5-7] . Since it focuses on meaning over form, the correction should not be overemphasized. However, when learner's accuracy is asset, it is always done within the context. Another methodologist who distinguished between accuracy and fluency was Schulz [1] . He argued that CF has a place in accuracy not fluency. For example, when learner is active in the process of communication, the teacher should not interrupt the learner by pointing to his/her mistake, insisting on accuracy and asking for repetition. This is a view that is reflected in teachers' own opinions about CF. However, some SLA researchers take a different view, arguing that CF works both for accuracy and fluency [5, 8] .

Concerning written CF, there are similar difference as is evident in the debate between Truscott and Ferris. Truscott (2009) claimed that error correction should be abandoned because it is both ineffective and harmful. He pointed out the fact that when students are able to revise their papers, it does not constitute evidence that they will be able to transfer this skill to a new piece of writing. In the process theories of writing, learners may be able to eliminate the errors in a subsequent draft but has no effect on grammatical accuracy in a new piece of writing) [9] . Ferris (1995) disputed his claim, arguing that the effectiveness of WCF depends on the quality of feedback. In other words, if it was clear and consistent, it would work for acquisition. There might not be sufficient evidence to prove whether WCF can result in acquisition or not and the issue seems still to be open because the area is too broad [10] .

SLA researchers also disagree about the role of CF in acquisition. Perhaps the most well-known proponent of the 'hands off' approach to error correction is Krashen (1981) as he called error correction as "a serious mistake'" (p.74). He refuted correction because first, "it puts the learner on the defensive" (p.75), i.e. the learner eliminates the mistakes by avoiding the use of complex constructions; and second, it only assists the development of 'learned knowledge' not 'acquired knowledge'. However, he claimed that error correction on simple treatable errors (like third person-s) would enable learners to monitor their production, thus it can be valuable [11] .

However, other SLA researchers like Williams, who worked within the interactionist framework, have viewed CF as facilitative of acquisition but if it happens in the form of negotiating for meaning. The evidence related to recent research shows that CF is helpful [12, 13] .

5. Which Errors to Correct?

Two issues are considered here:

1. Which errors should be corrected?
2. Whether CF should be unfocused or focused?

In order to understand which errors, need correction, Dekeyser stated that the errors and mistakes should be distinguished. An error takes place as a lack of knowledge. A mistake is a performance knowledge. Dekeyser suggested that teachers should focus on 'global' rather than 'local' errors. Communicative errors or global errors are those which affect and impede communication like wrong order, inadequate lexical knowledge, misuse of prepositions and wrong connectors [8, 14, 15] .

Local errors refer to errors in pronouns, nouns, articles, lack of subject-verb agreement, and auxiliaries that do not prevent communication. Pawlak (2014) believes that in foreign or second language education generally is in favor of tolerating some oral and written errors, which helps learners communicate with more self-confidence in the classroom. Pawlak further argues that focus should be on fossilized errors based on their incomprehensibility and unacceptability as judged by native speakers and he also talked about high-frequency errors, i.e. marked grammatical features or features that learners have shown they have difficulty with. Krashen (1981) and Ferris (1995) have the same idea. They both state CF should be directed at treatable errors. Regarding

the second issue, focused CF are those that address just one or two types. Unfocused CF are those that deal with all or most of the errors learners commit. Methodologists advice teachers to focus on a few error types. SLA researchers have also shown the same view. Recent studies, have shown that unfocused written CF leads to acquisition. Likewise, in the realm of oral CF, focused correction is stressed rather than unfocused CF.

It is important to note that not every error needs to be corrected in the classroom because the learners learn better in a supportive environment which gives them self-confidence without any threat.

6. Who should do the Correction?

Who has the responsibility of correcting errors? It might be a 'teacher', 'a helpful native speaker', 'a fellow learner', or even the learner himself or herself (i.e. self-correction). Hendrickson believes (1978) that "although teacher correction is helpful to many students, it may not necessarily be an effective instructional strategy for every student or in all language classrooms" (p.396). Peer correction and self-correction have drawn lots of attention. Cohen (1975) states that "such as approach might also improve the students' ability to recognize error" (p.419). According to him, peer correction aids students to the accuracy in their production. James (1998) argues, "self-correction is an intriguing phenomenon in that for some inexplicable reason we seem to be more capable of spotting other people's errors than our own, as anyone who has done some proof reading will testify" (p.236) [1-3, 16, 17] .

There are, however, some problems with peer and self-correction according to Ferris. First, learners prefer the teacher do the correction. Second, learners can only do self-correction if they have knowledge. In other words, they can only correct mistakes not errors.

7. Different Types of Feedback

In order to know how the errors should be corrected, different types of feedback need to be distinguished. Methodologists and SLA researchers have identified different ways in which errors can be corrected. In case of written corrective feedback (WCF), direct, indirect, and metalinguistic forms of correction should be distinguished. Regarding oral CF, two forms of correction need to be distinguished including 1) Explicit vs. implicit CF; and 2) input-providing vs. output-prompting CF. Explicit forms of correction include explicit correction, metalinguistic explanation, elicitation, and paralinguistic signal which explicit correction is input-providing while others are output-prompting. Recast, repetition and clarification request are regarded as implicit kind of feedback that recast is input-providing and the other two are

output-prompting. The following section will elaborate on these different CF techniques [18-21] .

7.1. Recast

The term recast was initially used in the literature of L1 acquisition to refer to responses by adults to children's utterances. Then it emerged into the domain of L2 acquisition. It has been defined by Long (1991) as discourse that "rephrases a learner's utterance by changing one or more sentence components while still referring to its central meaning and as well as other interactional feedback, often occur in reaction to communication breakdowns in L2 interaction" (p. 42).

7.2. Explicit Feedback

As the name suggests, this kind of correction is an overt indication of the existence of an error. In explicit correction, the teacher provides both positive and negative evidence by indicating that an error has been committed, identifying the error and providing the correction.

7.3. Clarification Request

This kind of correction involves learners to 'self-repair'. Here the corrector indicates that he/she has not understood what the learner said by saying for example what.

7.4. Metalinguistic Feedback

This kind of correction diverts the focus of conversation towards rules of the target language and it falls at the explicit end of CF spectrum. There are three forms of metalinguistic feedback: comments, information, or questions related to the well-formedness of the student's utterance, without explicitly providing the correct form.

7.5. Elicitation

It is a technique that the corrector repeats or reformulates all part of a student's utterance, minus the error by using rising intonation to signal the learner should complete it.

7.6. Repetition

This technique is defined as simply the "teachers or interlocutors' repetition of the ill-formed part of the student's utterance, usually with a change in intonation" (P. 575).

7.7. Paralinguistic Signal

Another approach to provide CF is paralinguistic signal, which the corrector uses a gesture or facial expression to indicate that the learner has made an error.

8. How should Errors be Corrected?

There has been a noticed increased in the studies which examined the effect of different feedback types. This includes research ' examining a wide range of variables'. (e.g., type and amount of feedback, made of feedback, learners' proficiency level, attitudes toward feedback). Some researchers like Long argue that explicit feedback types are not effective because they interrupt the flow of communication and they treat the language as an object so they don't promote acquisition. While some other researchers like Ellis (2002) claimed that explicit correction is more effective than recasts because it raises the student's attention and they contribute in a direct or indirect way to the development of interlanguage system [7, 18, 22] .

James (1998) argued that "the effectiveness of different feedback types will depend on individual differences and on some group factors such as the learner's level of attainment in the FL" (p. 159). While doing the correction, the correctors need to take into account the characteristic of the learner. Various factors can affect the treatment of correction. Personality type, first language culture, cognitive style, intelligence aptitude' are the first key elements in individual differences. The second factor is the past history of the student. For example, the student's academic records. Moreover, Gass points out that "in looking at feedback and in conversational structures in general, a number of variables will be considered, among them task type status, ethnicity, proficiency level, gender, and knowledge" (p. 63). The current state of the student is the third factor and it contains the learner's motivation anxiety level and fatigue. According to Cohen, learners need to follow a discovery approach in which students make inferences about production and compare their production with the target language. By using this approach students would fix this information and teachers can help them to reach the correct answer. As Cohen states "in this way, the learner will be using the process of discovering whereby he makes inferences formulate concepts and alters his hypotheses". James states that one of the most important elements in error treatment is that teachers should make sure that correction matches the student's preference. For example, in a study by Ellis, Loewen and Erlam, it was concluded that both types of implicit and explicit CF assist acquisition, and they claimed that explicit CF is generally more effective than implicit especially in classroom learning settings. Moreover, regarding WCF, there is yet no clear evidence which of three major types of strategies (direct, indirect, or metalinguistic) is the most effective.

9. When to Correct?

One of the most difficult matters that teachers face in the classroom is to determine when to correct student's errors and when to ignore them since, according to Hendrickson, there appears no general consensus among language methodologists or teachers on when to correct students' errors. Oral corrective feedback is typically immediate whereas written corrective feedback is almost always delayed. In order to give teachers some time to collect written work and respond, Nassaji noted that the course books instruct teacher to leave correction until the end of fluency activities. Regarding his claim, there are different techniques one of which is using a tape recording of student conversation. Then, each student edits his own type for errors. Research done by Ellis, Basturkmen and Loewen has shown that frequent immediate feedback did not disrupt the flow of communication. Therefore, one of the main arguments for delaying correction would seem to be invalid. However, there is general agreement that in accuracy-oriented activities, correction should provide immediately [18, 23-26] .

Daughty argued that oral corrective feedback is effective in promoting interlanguage restructuring precisely because it is immediate. He states that correction needs to take place in a 'window of opportunity' in which focal attention remains on meaning while roving attention stays on form. In contrast, Daughty claimed that delayed corrective feedback leads to focal attention on form resulting in explicit rather than implicit L2 knowledge. However, no oral corrective feedback is immediate; teachers sometimes elect to delay providing feedback on oral errors, until the learner has completed an oral activity. Corrective feedback whether oral or written, immediate or delayed is an integral part of teaching. It occurs frequently in classroom settings but not in natural learning context [1-3] .

10. CF and Uptake

Lyster and Ranta (1997) define uptake as "a student's utterance that immediately follows the teacher's feedback and that constitutes a reaction in some way to the teacher's intention to draw the learner's attention to some aspect of the student's initial utterance" (p. 40). They borrowed the term uptake from speech act theory [27] . Uptake can be with a repair or uptake can indicate the need for a repair. Tedick stated uptakes with a repair are types of repairs that students produced in direct responses to the feedback provided by the teacher. The effectiveness of uptake depends on a number of characteristics of feedback including: complexity, timing, and types of feedback [7] . Care should be taken that a lack of immediate uptake does not mean that learner has not learned the TL correct

form. The learner needs a wait time in order to help him/her produce the correct answer as James points out.

11. Sociocultural Theory and Correct Feedback

Sociocultural theory views language learning as interactionally driven but as occurring in rather than as a result of interaction [28, 29] . Thus, correction is not something done to learners but rather something carried out with learners. Sociocultural theory rejects the view that there is a single type of CF that is best for learning; instead, it proposes that learners benefit most when teachers prompt the learner to self-correct and scaffold his/her attempts by fine-tuning their choice of corrective strategy to the learner's developmental level. A key set construct for explaining CF is the zone of proximal development (ZPD). Vygotsky distinguished three levels of development including the actual development level that is the child's mental functions, the level of potential development which is reached by the assistance of an adult or through interaction, and the third level is the one beyond the learner that learner is unable to perform the task even if assistance is provided. In order to make the error correction work in away leading to acquisition the teacher must be able to fine-tune the feedback to the second level of development which is called ZPD. Marshall undertook detailed analyses of selected CF protocols drawn from the tutor-learner interaction to show how the degree of assistance provided for a particular learner diminished over time (i.e. it became increasingly less explicit and more implicit) [30] .

12. Implications

It is important to notice error correction not only learners' awareness but also helps teachers to pay attention to their developments both as a teacher and an individual. The teachers need to know basics information about the error. They need to know what was said or done and by whom. So, a teacher needs to know what was meant by the error and perhaps what the native language equivalent is in order to choose the appropriate error treatment. Teachers should lead students toward self or peer-correction because in this way they notice their errors and as it is assumed noticing can lead to acquisition.

13. Conclusion

Teachers need to be sensitive when correcting students' errors in classroom because as Nassaji (2009) suggests errors must be seen not as signs of failure, but as signs of learning itself. Despite the numerous research studies that have been conducted on CF in the last decade, the questions regarding when, how, which errors should be corrected and by whom, remain largely unanswered today. However, it must be emphasized that CF triggers learners to notice the gap that exist between their non-target like speech and the target forms, and it can be stated that leaving students' errors untouched might lead to the fossilization of ill-formed structures. Therefore, CF works as an effective way to eliminate possible non-target like utterances in the learners' interlanguage.

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