

A Consideration on Students' Preference for Correction of Classroom Conversation Error

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Preface

Teachers come across the various kinds of errors their students produce during English lessons. How can we deal with student errors effectively in their learning process? Although much has been written about correction in language classrooms, these issues continue to be debated in discussions of methodology. Recent studies have investigated the effectiveness of various feedback and correction strategies (Corder, 1973; Long, 1977). Some have reported that more appropriate and efficient than correction is expansion, an indirect way of modifying learners' deviant productions or of permitting them to express intended messages when they lack specific vocabulary and structure (Holley and King, 1974; Valdman, 1975). Other writers have investigated teacher and learner preferences regarding correction (Moskowitz, 1971; Cathcart and Olsen, 1976). Others have investigated the treatment of error in written work (Knapp, 1977; Hendrickson, 1980). Indeed, however, no standards exist on whether, when, which, or how student errors should be corrected or who should correct them. Moreover, little empirical research has been conducted to test the effectiveness of various approaches and techniques that teachers use for correcting students' oral and written errors. So, the purpose of my study is to find what students assume to be the most effective methods for correcting errors.

Student Questionnaires

A questionnaire on preference for type of corrections of oral errors was administered to a total of 215 students in five classes taken from each grade of Fukuyama junior and senior high school attached to Hiroshima University. They were adapted from Cathcart and Olsen's (Cathcart and Olsen, 1976, pp. 41-45).

student questionnaire

1. Do you want your teachers to correct your mistakes? yes/no
2. Look at the grammar corrections below (, Which were given up for want of space). Rate them as very good, not very good or bad.
Example: Teacher says, "What do you do every morning?"
Student says, "I stooey English."
3. Look at the pronunciation corrections below (, Which were given up for want of space). Rate them as very good, good or bad.

Results and Discussion

1. All students agreed that they wished to be corrected when they made oral errors.
2. The four type of grammar corrections preferred by the most students were, in order of preference:
"Go is the present tense; you need the past tense here." (grammar explanation) (67)
"Yesterday I . . ." (partial model pointing area of error) (55)

"Don't say go, say went." (comparison of error and model) (44)

"I went to the bank." (correct model) (39)

Corrections least liked by all the students were, in order of dislike:

"Really? Did you go to the bank?" (no correction) (136)

"Students?" (Teacher has another student give the answer) (104)

"When you went to the bank, what did you do?" (correct model, with request for more information) (85)

3. The types of corrections preferred for pronunciation error were as follows, in order of preference:

"We don't want a long u sound in that word. We need the sound 'ʌ' like cup." (102)

"Don't say stooody; say study." (58)

"I study English." (43)

Corrections least liked by all students were, in order of dislike:

"Really? For how long?" (150)

"What is stooody?" (93)

"Teacher has another student correct the error." (83)

(The figures or the parentheses stand for the total number of the students who chose the corrections as very good or as bad respectively.)

In the study of Cathcart and Olsen, the subjects were students in ESL classes at two community college centers and a university. But the general order of student preference in two studies was almost the same.

Further Research

There seem to be several questions to investigate about error correction as methodology from now on. The following are some of them:

What kinds of errors should be corrected? (Allwright, 1975; Bailey and Celce-Murcia, 1979; Cohen, 1975)

Should the correction be immediate or delayed? (Mackey, 1965; Ausubel, 1963)

Which approach is better, a student self-correction, peer correction or teacher correction? (Bailey and Celce-Murcia, 1979)

How often should the correction be done? (Rivers and Temperley, 1978)

At what levels of proficiency should the teacher focus on error correction? (Cathcart and Olsen, 1976)

To what degree has error correction interrelationship with the development of conscious 'learning' as Krashen (1978) and Corder (1967) have stated?

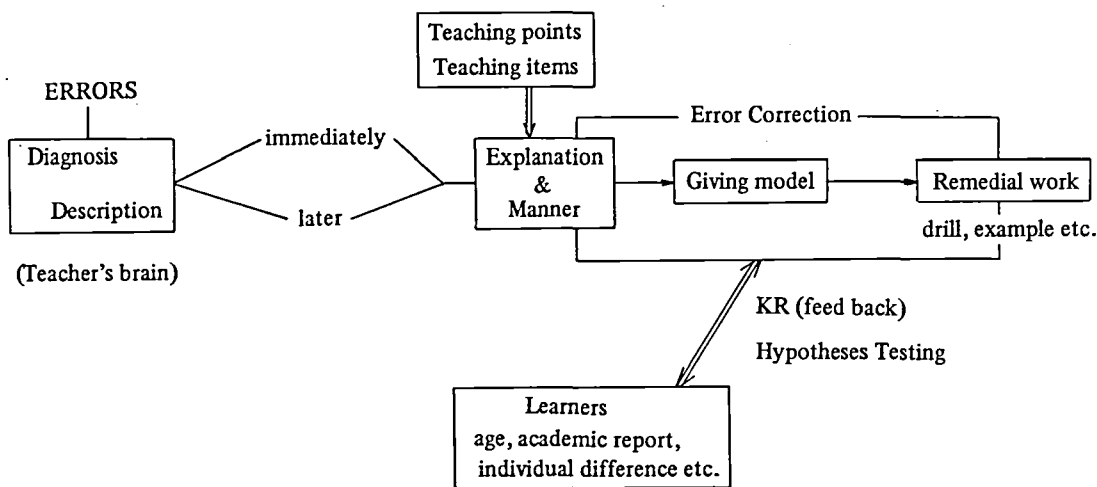
In addition, Cathcart and Olsen (1976, p. 52) have suggested the need to investigate the following topic:

1. Is praise more effective in reinforcing learning than correction of errors?
2. How much difference would there be in student attitude if they were presented the same correction several times, accompanied by different facial expressions and gestures?
3. How much are other students influenced by a correction made for one student?
4. Is one type of correction really any better than another, or does the students' learning depend much more on the general atmosphere of the class and the teacher's consistency within his or her own style?
5. How important is a teacher's consistency within his or her own style?

Summary

One step towards arriving at effective correction techniques is an examination and comparison of students' attitudes, teachers' attitudes, and teachers' behavior (Cathcart and Olsen, 1976, 0. 52). More interesting results could be gained if teachers' attitudes had been investigated. In this sense, this study might be inadequate, but this study showed some useful points for teachers' to take into consideration in the correction of errors. First, students want to be corrected whenever they make errors, however small they may be. Second, they don't like teachers' turning the job of correction over to another student, if a student is not able to self-correct. Third, there is a gap between students' stitutes and their attitudes to making errors during English lessons. They feel it more or less humiliating to make errors in front of other students. So it must be careful to have another student correct the error when a student cannot answer. Thus, as seen in the treatment of errors in recent new methodologies such as the Silent Way and Community Language Learning (Stevick, 1980), there is the need for teachers to create a healthy learning environment in which students recognize that making errors is a natural, indeed, necessary phenomenon in language learning.

Finally, let me close this study by showing a gentative schema concerning the process of error correc-tion.



Process of Error Correction

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