

A Four-Dimensional Evaluation of Teacher-Student Attitudes towards Spoken Error Treatment

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Abstract

Whether negative evidence should be incorporated in or excluded from an SLA or FLA setting has long been a major concern for practitioners and researchers in the SLA and FLA domains. Some (Bowen, Madsen & Hilferty, 1985; Lightbown & Spada, 1990; Fathman & Whalley, 1990; Ferris & Roberts, 2001; Lyster & Ranta, 1997; Askew & Lodge, 2000; and Ashwell, 2000) endorse the use of corrective feedback while others do not (Krashen, 1982; VanPatten, 1988; Dekeyser, 1993; and Truscott, 1996). What these researchers; however, fail to take under advisement in this realm is learners and teachers' Attitudes towards Error Correction (ATEC). The present experiment wishes to address the issue from this angle, i.e., how teachers and learners' attitude converge and/or diverge as far as their attitude towards error correction is concerned. Some 410 students and 34 teachers were invited to fill out the questionnaires. Additionally, 45 students and 13 teachers were interviewed to delve into the versatile facets of error treatment qualitatively. The results showed which error treatment techniques the students and the teachers most and/or least favored. Not only does the analysis of the data support Vahdani and Mirsaidi's (2007) claim on students' ATEC, but also data analysis suggests common grounds can be detected between students' attitudes and those of their teachers. It can, therefore, be concluded that corrective feedback has won the favor of learners and teachers and that in their now statistically tenable estimation it should be factored in FLA settings.

Key Words: Attitude, error correction, corrective feedback

Introduction

By studying the different works on teaching of modern languages, one notices that there is not enough room for learners' errors and their corrections (Corder, 1981). It's very true that the application of linguistics and psychological theory to the study of language learning, has added new dimension to the issue of errors and error correction.

In the methodology zone, there have been two schools of thought in respect to the students' errors: both in written and spoken form. The advocates of the first school believe that presence of errors is due to inadequacy of our teaching techniques. The philosophy of the second school is that errors are inevitable since we are living in an imperfect world (Corder, 1981). No matter what causes errors, we should find solutions and ways to treat these errors. How are teachers supposed to correct their students' errors in the classroom context?

Teachers are often afraid of their students' making errors. They feel that students might "learn their mistakes," so this will lead to fossilization. Therefore, they must make sure that everything they say or write is correct (Doff, 1990). This idea derives from views of language learning which were popular in the 1950s and 1960s. It was believed that language was learned by repetition of correct forms until they became automatic (Doff, 1990). They also believed that language learning is a process of verbal habit formation. Errors were to be predicted and prohibited (Richards & Rogers, 2003).

It is now widely agreed that language is not learnt in this way. Language is a system of rules that the learner has to learn or acquire. Learners should try out the language so errors are inevitable. In other words, errors are signs of learning (Doff, 1990). Students' errors are very useful. They indicate whether they have learnt the taught materials or not. We can see them positively as an indication of what we still need to re-teach or review.

There is a dynamic relationship between learning and teaching rather than a one-way transmission of knowledge. Learning is supported by specific range of processes, one of which is feedback. Gipps (1995) argues that feedback is an important aspect of teaching and learning processes.

It is very crucial to know how, when, and what type of feedback students should receive. Teachers should be cautious about the affective domain of the given feedback. Teachers should make this fact clear to their students that the feedback they are receiving aims to help them improve their knowledge. Teachers should emphasize that making mistakes is very normal and is needed to learn properly.

Many scholars agree that the type of feedback one provides to students should vary according to the purposes of the activity in which they are engaged (Hadley, 2003). When learners are focused on the mastery of a particular feature of the language, they will probably benefit most from fairly direct and immediate feedback on the correctness of their responses. On the other hand, if they are attempting to communicate ideas in an open-ended or creative task, the most beneficial feedback may be a positive response to the message that is being conveyed.

How can one determine what feedback strategies are most useful for students involved in particular kinds of practice activities? Review of the related literature gives us a variety of feedback strategies which make decision-making much easier. Lyster and Ranta (1997) categorized and defined several feedback techniques on spoken errors. *Explicit treatment* refers to the activities through which the teacher points out a student's incorrect utterance and provides a correct form. *Recast* means that without a direct acknowledgement of students' errors the teacher implicitly reformulates the student's error or provides the correction. *Clarification request* is expressed by phrases like "excuse me?" or "I don't understand." In *metalinguistic feedback* the teacher poses questions or provides comments or information related to the formation of the student's utterance without providing the correct form. Finally, *repetition* means that the teacher repeats the students' error and adjusts intonation to draw student's attention to it.

There are many scholars either commenting or conducting investigations on the effectiveness of each oral correction technique. While some support one or some of the techniques (Carroll & Swain, 1993; Long, Inagaki & Ortega, 1998; Lyster, 1998), others reject the importance of feedback (Truscott, 1996; Zobl, 1995; DeKeyser, 1993; Chaudron, 1988; Fanselow, 1977). Nevertheless, what seem to be merely neglected are teachers' and students' Attitudes toward Error Correction (ATEC).

Students and Teachers' Attitudes toward Error Correction (ATEC)

As Leki and Carson (1994) state, it is needed to take into account students' views on learning since their ideas affect their learning. Unfortunately, there are few studies on the students and teachers' preferences on "spoken" error correction techniques. The much neglected area of research seems to be on the students' attitudes and preferences in many previous error correction studies (Ferris, Chaney, Komura, Roberts & McKee, 2000; Reid, 1998).

In a study, Cathcart and Olsen (1976) found that students felt the need to be corrected and preferred consistent corrective feedback. Courchêne (1980) reported similar results in a study with ESL students. On the other hand, Walker's (1973) study indicates that students' frequent correction destroys their confidence and the students themselves prefer to be allowed to communicate freely.

Zacharias (2007) investigated university students' and teachers' attitude toward *written* feedback. He found that students mostly prefer to be corrected by their teachers since teachers have higher linguistic competence, control the grades, their feedback provides security for the poor students, and culturally speaking teachers are the source of knowledge.

A similar study was conducted by Vahdani and Mirsaidi (2007) at some universities. Their study was limited to *students'* ATEC. They report that the majority of the students *strongly agree* or *agree* (on a Likert Scale) with the idea of correction. They highly prefer to be corrected after a sentence is uttered rather than receive immediate correction. Among the correction techniques the learners were believed to lean toward repetition and clarification request. In the present study, as opposed to Vahdani and Mirsaidi's research the goal is to seek common grounds between teachers and students' ATEC. The researchers intend to find answers to the following questions.

1. Do teachers and students share the same attitude toward the format of error correction?
2. In what techniques of error correction do students and teachers are in the same boat and in what techniques do they differ?

Methodology

Student Participants

A total number of 410 male and female students filled an attitudinal questionnaire and expressed their ideas about their error correction preferences. Among these students, 45 were interviewed and discussed their ideas with the researchers. Their opinions were carefully written down to be a base for qualitative analysis. Students were studying American Conversation Courses (ACC) in an English School located in southern part of Tehran, Iran. They were either high school or university students aging from 16 to 30. These participants leveled from beginners to advanced learners.

Teacher Participants

34 teachers filled the same attitudinal questionnaire whose questions were focused on the teachers' attitude rather than students' attitudes. Furthermore, 13 teachers were interviewed in order to delve into the issue of correction. Teachers were both female and male with maximum teaching experience of 15 and minimum experience of 5 years.

Instruments

The main instrument of this study was a questionnaire designed by Fukuda (2003; as cited in McKay, 2006). Due to probable misunderstanding or hardship in understanding the questionnaire, the very questionnaire was translated by the researchers into the participants' first language (Persian). Five post-graduate students majoring in TEFL and one post-graduate student majoring in translation checked the translated version and their suggested amendments were taken into account. A face-to-face interview was another tool for data collection. 45 students and 13 teachers were interviewed by the researchers. The interviews were recorded by the participants' consent and then were carefully transcribed. The interview aimed to investigate the details of the participants' idea about their attitudes toward various aspects of error correction.

Procedure

The questionnaire Fukuda (2003) used for her data collection was translated by the researcher and reviewed by five post-graduates majoring in EFL and a post-graduate majoring in translation. Students in Zabansara English School located in Rey City, Tehran, filled the questionnaire. Almost all of the students filled the questionnaire. The process of data collection lasted 9 morning-to-afternoon days. The researchers went into almost all of the classes (113 classes!) and distributed the questionnaires. Students were given some Persian explanations where needed.

The same questionnaire, focusing on teachers' attitudes, was prepared and distributed among the teachers of the same English School. This was aimed at collecting quantitative data. Afterwards, some students and teachers were selected to be interviewed. The purpose of the interviews was having a base for qualitative data.

Results

Quantitative Analysis of the Data

An SPSS analysis was contributed for quantitative data analysis. The first step was data insertion into SPSS. The collected data was put into SPSS in a back-bone breaking process of 34 hours! Then the data on the questionnaires were checked with those of SPSS entered ones.

The first question was whether students liked to be corrected while speaking or not. A standard deviation (SD) of 0.62 and mean (M) of 4.60 indicates that the majority of the students *highly agreed* with the idea of correction while they are speaking (strongly agree=5, agree=4, neutral=3, disagree=2, and strongly disagree=1). The very same question in the questionnaire distributed among the teachers was if they like to correct their students' errors while they are speaking. The SPSS analysis revealed that teachers are not as enthusiastic as their students (SD= 0.96, and M= 3.82). This is illustrated in Table 1.

Table 1

Students and teachers' ideas about correction while they/students are speaking

	I'd like to be corrected / correct		
	N	SD	Mean
Students	418	0.62	4.60
Teachers	37	0.96	3.82

Students and teachers had almost similar ideas about time of correction. Students with a mean score of 4.4 (agree) and teachers with 3.91 (leaning toward agree) like to be corrected and correct respectively "*after a sentence is finished*" rather than *immediate feedback*. This is shown in Table 2.

Table 2

Students and teachers' ideas on time of correction

<i>Job</i>		<i>Immediate feedback</i>	<i>After the sentence is finished</i>	<i>After the task is over</i>	<i>After the class is over</i>
Teacher	M	2.53	3.91	3.35	2.97
	N	37	37	37	37
	SD	1.23	1.026	1.07	1.38
Student	M	3.30	4.04	3.06	2.31
	N	410	410	410	410
	SD	1.39	1.06	1.25	1.33

Whether students preferred to be corrected by their teacher, classmates, or themselves was a very controversial question. Students replied variously. Even what males think about correction differs with that of females. Table 3 discloses the students' correction-presenter preferences.

Table 3

Students' preferences on feedback presenters

<i>Gender</i>		<i>peer-correction</i>	<i>teacher correction</i>	<i>self-correction</i>
Male	M	3.09	4.60	4.04
	N	169	169	169
	SD	1.23	0.6	0.88
Female	M	2.64	4.57	4.20
	N	241	241	241
	SD	1.16	0.64	0.99
Total	M	2.82	4.58	4.14
	N	410	410	410
	SD	1.21	0.62	0.95

As Table 3 illustrates, students prefer to be corrected by their teachers with a total mean of 4.58 (leaning toward strongly agree). The analysis of the data reveals that students do not like to be corrected by their classmates. Based on the outcome of data analysis, students showed disinclination to be corrected by their peers. To seek the probable reasons for this, the students were interviewed the results of which will be discussed later on in the "qualitative analysis" part of the very study.

The main part of this study was to identify the attitudes of students and teachers toward each type of feedback typology categorized by Lyster and Ranta (1997) and Fukuda (2003): clarification request, repetition, implicit treatment, explicit treatment, confirmation check, elicitation, recast, metalinguistic feedback, and no correction. Astonishingly, students and teachers do NOT have the same attitudes for the type of correction. SPSS analysis of the data declares that teachers with the mean of 3.50 and SD of 1.18 select *elicitation* as their preferable method of correction and *confirmation check* came second (M=3.32,

SD= 1.31). On the other hand, students prefer to be corrected via *clarification request* (M= 3.89, SD= 1.24) and *repetition* (M= 3.89, SD= 1.15). This is illustrated in Table 4.

Table 4

Teachers' attitudes toward various feedback types

Job	Feedback type	N	M	SD
Teacher	elicitation	34	3.50	1.18
	confirmation check	34	3.32	1.31
	recast	34	3.09	1.24
	clarification request	34	3.09	1.28
	implicit correction	34	3.06	1.14
	repetition	34	3.03	1.35
	explicit correction	34	2.71	1.38
	metalinguistic feedback	34	2.12	1.22
	no correction	34	1.24	0.55

Teachers' attitudes toward spoken error correction techniques are ranked hierarchically in Table 4. As one can notice, teachers prefer to correct their students via elicitation (M=3.50) and confirmation check (M= 3.32). Other feedback types are ranked respectably. On the other hands, we have students' attitudes toward diverse spoken error treatments. Are students' preferences in line with those of the teachers? This is depicted in Table 5.

Table 5

Students' attitudes toward various feedback types

Job	Feedback type	N	M	SD
Student	clarification request	410	3.89	1.28
	repetition	410	3.89	1.15
	elicitation	410	3.53	1.28
	explicit correction	410	3.48	1.38
	recast	410	3.34	1.33
	confirmation check	410	3.32	1.22
	implicit correction	410	3.30	1.30
	metalinguistic feedback	410	3.01	1.36
	no correction	410	1.57	1.14

Students with the mean of 3.89 (which is close to agree) prefer to be corrected by *clarification request*. *Repetition* (M= 3.89, SD= 1.15) and *elicitation* (M=3.53, SD=1.28) are ranked next. Students do not like to be given the correct answer. Neither in *clarification request*, nor in *repetition* and *elicitation* does the teacher provide the corrected form. The teacher just signals about the presence of an erroneous segment.

Although teachers and students do not share commonalities on one side of the continuum, they seem to have a common idea on the other side of it. On the eye of the students *no correction* (M=1.57, SD= 1.14) and *metalinguistic feedback* (M= 3.01, SD= 1.36) are the least preferable items. Teachers have the same idea on *no correction* (M= 1.24, SD= 0.55) and *metalinguistic feedback* (M= 2.12, SD= 1.22). This can be interpreted as both teachers and students agree with the concept of correction.

Qualitative Analysis of the Data

To delve into the issue of spoken error correction techniques and for the sake of more clarification of the responses obtained from the questionnaires, 58 participants (45 students and 13 teachers) were interviewed. The interview questions resemble those of the questionnaire; however, based on the elicited responses some additional

questions were added, too. Table 6 shows the number of the participants in the research procedure.

Table 6

Number of the participants in the research procedure

Participants	Questionnaire	Interview
Student	410	45
Teacher	34	13

When the teachers were asked whether they corrected students' spoken errors or not, they unanimously said they did. However, the response was more of an intellectual it-depends one rather than a categorical "Yes." "It depends on the students' level of language proficiency," was what teachers number 5 (T5), T8, T12, and T13 came up with. For instance (T3), who prefers to teach beginners or pre-intermediate students said:

(The ideas put forward by the teachers and the students are reported verbatim.)

"It depends on the level of the student. If he is a beginner I rarely correct him. I let him talk. We should encourage him to talk. Correction stops him... so.... We should not demotivate the students."

Another teacher (T9) who mostly teaches upper-intermediate or advanced courses due to his teaching experience and English knowledge believes:

"Advanced students must be harshly corrected [at the time of error occurrence]....Sooner or later, they will be our colleagues.... They will teach.... They have to speak accurately."

T9, T2, T5 agreed on the immediate correction of advanced students. T4 was an MA student majoring at TEFL:

"Well, you know... it depends on the level of the students.... Also.... hmmm,.... What type of errors?... global or local? Though it's hard to recognize which is which but if the correction doesn't hurt the student's feeling, I will carefully treat the error.... Recast is the technique I use mostly."

T1 claimed that he was a teacher who learned English through his ears! That he had listened to a lot of VOA and believes that the only way to learn English is listening and listening. He said that no one had corrected him. So he does not like to correct his students mostly.

There seems to be something common among the teachers: they consider students' level of proficiency for error treatment. On the other hand, students agreed on the idea of correction but they had their own criticisms. Student 1 (S1), S3, S7, S23, S34, S35, S40, S42, and S45 criticized some teachers' way of correction. For instance, T35 said:

"Why do some teachers laugh at us? Well, we have mistakes; everybody has mistakes.....even the teachers have mistakes.... Why do they make fun of our mistakes? They should just correct our errors."

Some students were dissatisfied about the time of correction (S2, S4, S5, S10, S11, S27, and S39). In this respect S11 said:

"As soon as I start talking, the teacher cuts me and corrects me. I feel shy in the class...I lose my self confidence. I say to me: I know nothing.... So I don't like to talk in the class.... Teachers should correct us at the end of the class."

While some students expressed their dissatisfaction on the immediate correction, others strongly liked to be corrected on the spot (S5, S11, S14, 18, S21, S24, S26, S33, and S39). Student number 11 said:

"We are here to learn. My teacher should correct....not at the end of the class, at the same place of mistake.... even if she cuts me....we are not kids to cry because my teacher corrects us...."

Student 33 believes:

"When the teacher corrects us while we are speaking.... He cuts us.... So it sticks in our mind... we never forget it.... It's good to be corrected on the spot...."

Students preferred to be corrected by their teachers rather than their classmates. The reason for this was investigated qualitatively, too. When students were asked about who they preferred to correct their errors, they mostly answered "the teacher". Students (S1), S3, S5, S10, S14, S18, S23, S30, S31, S34, and S40 believe that the teacher has the correct answer and their classmates are unable to correct their mistakes. In this regard, S14 said:

"How can my classmate correct me when she is a student? She is here to learn... the teacher knows better... how to correct..."

While some students emphasized on teacher-correction since teacher has the correct answer, some others (S2, S8, S15, S13, S9, S12, S24, S28, and S45) do not like to be corrected by their classmates since they feel shy and uncomfortable! For instance, S13 states:

"My classmate here is my friend at school... she sees me and she always looks at me.... hey... "I" corrected you.... I am better... indirectly she says she is better.... I don't like.... I feel uncomfortable...."

The data collected from the interview revealed that both students and teachers agree with the idea of correction but there are factors to consider which will be discussed below.

Discussion

In this study we tried to find out the students and teachers' attitudes toward spoken errors. To fulfill the goals, 410 students and 34 teachers filled an attitudinal questionnaire to be a base for numerical (quantitative) analysis. Besides, 45 students and 13 teachers were interviewed with whom various aspects of correction were discussed.

The quantitative analysis of the data reported the common grounds between teachers and students attitudes on the issue of existence and time of correction. The majority of the students *strongly agree* about

being corrected while they are speaking and teachers almost *agree* to correct their students while they are speaking. This is in line with students' attitude toward error correction reported by Cathcart and Olsen (1976), Courchêne (1980), Vahdani and Mirsaidi (2007), and Zacharias (2007).

Teachers' attitudes toward time of correction leans toward *agree* (M=3.91) to correct their students *after the erroneous sentence* rather than harsh and immediate correction. Similarly, students like (*agree*) to be corrected after the sentence is finished (M=4.04).

Students and teachers have diverse attitudes for type of correction. While teachers tend to correct their students via *elicitation* (M=3.50) and *confirmation check* (M= 3.32), students, on the other hand, like to be corrected by *repetition* (M=3.89, SD=1.15) and *clarification request* (M=3.89, SD= 1.24) techniques. This is an acceptable justification for the claim that there are some mismatches between the feedback the students want or expect to receive and the teacher feedback which is presented in the classroom (Ping, Pin, Wee & Hwee Nah, 2003).

Besides, in an analysis of 18 non-native English lessons on teacher feedback and learner uptake at secondary levels in Hong Kong, Tsnag (2004) found that recast and explicit correction were the most frequent types of feedback. Tsnag's (2004) findings contradicts those of this very study in that teacher participants of this study did not show any intention to correct their students' mistake via recast and explicit correction.

The qualitative analysis revealed that students and teachers look at error correction from their own perspectives. Although some students believe that immediate, or on the spot correction leads to better learning, others reject harsh correction since it causes embarrassment and makes them lose their self-confidence. This resembles Walker's (1973) report that constant error correction destroys students' confidence. Therefore, students like to have the opportunity to express themselves freely while speaking.

On the other hand, students' level of proficiency is important for teachers. They believe, advanced students should be corrected on the spot, while we should motivate beginners to talk and ignore their mistakes.

Conclusion

Correction and feedback strategies may differ not only in terms of learners' capabilities or level of performance, but also in terms of students' attitudes toward feedback variations. Tsang (2004) boiled down the six categories posed by Lyster and Ranta (1997) into two major correction moves, namely a) correction (recast and explicit correction) and b) negotiation (elicitation, clarification request, metalinguistic feedback, and repetition). He named the first group "correction" since the teacher provides correction and the second type "negotiation" due to the fact that teachers do not provide the target form.

As Morris (2005) reports, *negotiations* (i.e., clarification requests, metalinguistic clues, elicitation, and repetition) are more likely to promote repairs because in contrast to recast, they may incite learners notice that they have produced a non-target-like utterance.

As the results of the present study declare, the most three favorite types of correction according to students' points of view are clarification request, repetition, and elicitation which are among the *negotiation* type of feedback in Tsang's (2004) typology. That the majority of the students *agree* or *strongly agree* to be corrected by the teacher is in line with the findings of Zacharias (2007) in this respect. Therefore, we can conclude that although students tend to be corrected by their teachers ($M=4.60$). However, correction, in their estimation is the negotiation over the erroneous part.

We believe teachers should sense their students' reactions to feedback and adjust their feedback strategies according to learners' capabilities. Teachers can simply ask their students' directly about their preferences for feedback. Students' desires can be taken into account as teachers consider how they are going to react to students' misuse of language elements.

Since individuals differ in learning strategies, we suggest English teachers (language teachers in general) discuss the issues of correction strategies with their students and adjust their techniques to students' desires. Correction should be performed in a positive and motivating manner. Corrections should not demotivate students from self-expression. Certainly, better results could be achieved if the teachers start negotiating how their students wish to be corrected. By appealing to the

students' needs and interests, we can create a better, safer, and more learner-friendly atmosphere in the learning context.

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