

An Evaluation of Oral Correction Techniques

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Introduction

As practising teachers we know only too well that students make errors. Until recently, theorists and methodologists seemed chiefly concerned with who should accept responsibility; some regarding the student as mainly responsible, and others the teacher, depending on their standpoint (*Hubbard, 1986*).

Those who blame teachers see that careless teaching or planning may be the cause of student errors. On the other hand, students are blamed, usually by their teachers, because of their lack of mativation, self-discipline and general intelligence. But however much truth there may be on either side, we must agree that even the most intelligent and motivated students do make errors (*ibid. P 131*).

In our Egyptian secondary schools little care is given to oral correction unlike written errors which are corrected regularly in the students' notebooks. As a result, oral errors become habits and it is difficult to correct these errors afterwards.

Correction is provided in the oral language classroom to help learners identify problematic areas, reformulate rules in their minds, and thus, speak more accurately. (*T. Gainer, 1989*).

The researcher observed that teachers frequently respond to errors by shaking their heads or making responses such as "again". These responses neither locate errors nor do they clearly indicate that errors were made. If the students do not know the location of the errors, and also which parts of an utterance are correct, then selfcorrection is difficult, if not impossible.

This research reviews the literature on correction and discusses some of the shortcomings of commonly used correction techniques :

The Problem :

- 1- What are the deficiencies of the present correction techniques ?
- 2- In what way could oral correction be improved ?

Procedure :

To answer the above research questions, the following steps will be taken :

1- Review of literature :

This part includes the following :

- A- Previous studies.
- B- Causes of error.
- C- Kinds of oral error.
- D- Techniques of oral correction.

2- In order to determine the shortcomings of the common correction techniques, a questionnaire will be designed and administered to the English language teachers to see how teachers estimate oral correction. It is also hoped that subjects' suggestions may help improve the situation generally.

3- Inspired by the findings of the questionnaire, the researcher will suggest a technique that may be used effectively in the language classes room.

Review of Literature :

In this section the researcher gives an account of his readings about the topic under investigation. This account includes the following :

- A- Previous studies.
- B- Causes of errors.
- C- Kinds of oral errors.
- D- Techniques of oral correction.

First : Previous studies :

(1) Fanselow (1977)

The study investigates the treatment of error in work. Fanselow has observed that many commonly used correction techniques often interrupt, intimidate, or confuse rather than enlighten. He claims that many correction techniques fail to locate errors precisely for the students.

(2) Krashan (1982)

Krashan in his book "Principles and Practice in Second Language Acquisition" had discussed the inhibiting effect of correction on communication in the classroom. He has indicated that correction did not significantly decrease the number of student errors.

The researcher noticed that the above two studies deal with some problems of correcting oral errors, i.e. There are some shortcomings regarding these techniques.

(3) Kathcart and Olsen (1976)

In their study, Kathcart and Olsen reported that all of their subjects (188 E S L, students in the San Francisco) responded in a questionnaire that they wanted to have their oral mistakes corrected. Approximately 59 percent of the subjects indicated that they wished to be corrected all the time.

(4) Holley and King (1971)

In their study entitled "Imitation and correction in foreign language learning", Holley and King observed that graduate students teaching a course in German responded to hesitation from the students by providing correct answers.

This means that there is a tendency among teachers to provide correct responses without giving the students adequate time to formulate their utterances. This is what Allwright (1975) called "error-creating" to describe this type of teacher behaviour.

Causes of Error:

Pit Corder (1974) claims that there are three causes of error, which he labels "transfer errors", "analogical errors", and "teaching - induced errors".

P. Hubbard et al. (1986) claims the following to be the causes of error :

(A) Mother - tongue interference :

The sound system (phonology) and the grammar of the first language impose themselves on the new language and this leads to a "foreign" pronunciation, faulty grammatical patterns and, occasionally, to the wrong choice of vocabulary.

(B) Overgeneralization :

The mentalist theory claims that errors are inevitable because they neglect various stages in the language development of the learner. It claims that the learner processes new language data in his mind and produces rules ??? production, based on the evidence where the data are inadequate, or the evidence only partial, such rules may well produce the following patterns:

- Where you went yesterday ?
- Where you did go yesterday ?
- She dranked all the lemonde.

(C) Errors encouraged by teaching material or method:

The behaviourist theory claims that error is evidence of failure, of ineffective teaching or lack of control. If material is well chosen, graded and presented with meticulous care, there should never be any error. It is fairly easy to accept this in the early stages of language learning, but more difficult at later stages. We should also bear in mind the possibility of some of our students' errors being due to our own teaching. Unfortunately, these errors are much more difficult to classify.

Pit Corder (op. cit) claims that it is not easy to identify such errors except in conjunction with a close study of the materials and teaching techniques to which the learner has been exposed.

Kinds of oral mistakes :

According to Lewis, M, (1985) Language teachers have concentrated on certain types of mistakes. These types include poor pronunciation, wrong

choice of vocabulary, and most importantly of all, structural errors.

On the other hand, there are other kinds of mistake, which may be more important. Here are some of the most important.

Stress :

It is frequently more difficult to listen to and understand someone whose stress patterns are non- standard than somebody who produces individual sounds in a non-standard way.

Intonation :

Intonation is important in English, particularly to express emotion and attitude, both of which are frequently very important in oral communication. The student who is more advanced - has good vocabulary, structure and pronunciation but who uses flat, uninteresting intonation will frequently be misunderstood - not in terms of the factual content of the message, but more importantly, in terms of attitude.

Techniques of Correction

1- Self Correction

It is usually sufficient if the student makes a mistake and the teacher decides it is worth correcting immediately to stop the student either by a facial expression or a hand gesture such as shaking a finger. Before doing anything else, the teacher should pause and wait. If the student can correct him- or herself, nothing more needs to be said (Lewis, 1985).

2- Peer - Correction (Involving the class)

If the student is not able to provide self-correction, the teacher should invite other students in the class to comment before providing the correct language. This is because :

- a) It helps to keep all the class involved while an individual is answering a question.
- b) It makes clear that language learning for them is a corporate activity, and however, competitive their examinations may be, their actual language lessons do not need to be competitive in that way.
- c) Finally, it reduces the element of teacher domination which is inevitable with over-zealous teacher correction.

3- Isolating the mistake :

If the student or his colleagues have failed to provide self-correction, it is still not necessary for the teacher to give the correction.

The teacher can repeat the incorrect utterance and, by pausing immediately before or after the mistake, highlight it in the hope that this will be sufficient help to encourage a student to produce the correct answer.

Also, the teacher can name the mistake precisely : Peter and Jill is in the garden-Not "is". Only as a last resort does the teacher give the correct answer (ibid. p. 133).

4- Using the correct language :

- a) If the student corrects himself, he inevitably does repeat the correct form.
- b) If some other member of the class provides the correct answer, the teacher must invite the student who made the mistake to say the complete correct form.
- c) If the teacher corrects, it is essential that the student repeats the full correct form.

Correct repetition helps to fix collocational features in the student's memory and it ensures that the last thing the student has said is the correct version and it is this which is likely to stay in the student's memory. (Ibid. P. 94).

Method :

Sample : A total of 35 English language teachers served as subjects in this study. They were chosen from different general secondary schools in Zagazig. All of them graduated from faculty of Education. English department. Their ages ranged from 25 to forty.

Instruments :

12 - item questionnaire was developed and administered to English language teachers immediately after the mid-year holiday in the academic year 1990/1991. It was administered in class in the presence of the researcher. It consists of two parts; Part (A) deals with teachers' perceptions of oral correction. Part (B) deals with teachers' evaluation of oral correction techniques.

Some of the questionnaire's items were devised by the researcher, others were inspired by similar researches.

Analysis and Discussion :

The findings of this study will be reported according to teachers' responses to the questionnaire. The following table shows the percentage distribution of teachers' perception of oral correction.

Table "A"
Percentage distribution of teachers'
Perception of oral correction

Item	No	%
1- I think that correction decreases the number of student errors.		
agree	26	75
disagree	5	13
undecided	4	12
2- I think that correction has inhibiting effect on communication in the classroom		
to a great extent	1	9
to some extent	16	45
not at all	18	51
3- I think that students are willing to have their oral mistake corrected.		
agree	20	58
disagree	11	31
undecided	4	11

Item	No	%
4- I think too much correction is too bas as too little.		
agree	14	39
disagree	18	51
undecided	3	10
5- I think that mistakes are best corrected as much as the student makes them.		
agree	16	47
disagree	17	49
undecided	2	4
6- I think it is useful to encourage students to correct each other.		
agree	12	34
disagree	19	55
undecided	4	11
7- I think it is best to correct all the mistakes students make.		
agree	28	81
disagree	4	12
undecided	3	8

- (1) As seen from table (A), the majority of language teachers, 73%, agree that correction really decreases the number of oral mistakes students make.
- (2) Concerning the item No 2, it was found that correction has not an inhibiting effect on communication in the classroom. On the contrary, a great number of teachers maintain that correction may improve the communication in the classromm especially when students drill the correct form.

- (3) The majority of language teachers, 58%, maintain that students are not only willing to have their oral mistakes corrected, but also they ask their teachers for correcting their unutterances or pronouncing difficult words for them.
- (4) Item No. 4 was rejected by the majority of language teachers, 51%. This may be due to the fact that our students learn through grammatical translation method which emphasizes accuracy more than fluency.
- (5) As for item No. 5, it was found that English language teachers see that it is not necessary to correct students mistakes as much as the student makes them. They prefer gathering errors and deal with them at the end of the period.
- (6) English language teachers think that it is not useful to encourage students to correct each other because they may make more mistakes. This is indicated by the 55% of the sample.
- (7) The majority of the language teachers agreed to item No. 7, 81%. This may be due to the fact that if mistakes are not corrected at the very beginning, they become habits on the part of the students.

(B) Teachers' Evaluation of Oral Correction Techniques :

The following table shows the percentage distribution of teachers' evaluation of oral correction techniques.

Item	No	%
8- Which technique do you frequently use in oral correction?		
a - self - correction.	24	69
b- peer-correction.	20	58
c- teacher - correction.	27	77
d- all of the above.	11	31
e- None of the above.	0	0
9- Do you follow the same technique in correcting controlled practice errors and communicative practice errors?		
Yes	29	83
No	4	12
do not know	2	5
10- Which of the following problems hinder you in correcting students, oral mistakes?		
a- lack of time.	23	65
b- mistakes are so many	25	74
c- students are not willing to be corrected.	13	38
d- lack of pre-service training.	28	81
e- mother-tongue interference	27	77
f- mother-tongue interference	19	55
g- lack of knowledge about correction techniques.	12	35

Item	No	%
11- Which of the following errors are very difficult to correct?		
a- pronunciation errors.	24	71
b- structural errors.	28	82
c- intonation errors.	26	75
d- stress errors.	25	73
e- vocabulary errors.	23	65
12- In what way, in your opinion, could oral correction be improved?*		
a- training teachers in oral correction techniques.	30	87
b- part of the lesson preparation should focus on errors.	29	83
c- oral exams are needed.	27	77

- (1) When asking the teachers about the technique they prefer in correcting oral mistakes, they said that they use teacher-correction technique (77%), then peer-correction (69%) and at last, self-correction (58%). It is clear from their responses that they do not give the process of correction enough time or effort.
- (2) The majority of language teachers follow the same technique when correcting oral errors in controlled practice or in communicative practice. This is indicated by 83% of the sample.

These are teachers' suggestions.

(3) Regarding the difficulties that hinder English language teachers in correcting oral mistakes, teachers' responses are ranked as follows :

1- lack of pre-service training	81%
2- Lack of in- service training in correction techniques.	77%
3- Mistakes are so many	74%
4- Lack of time.	65%
5- Mother-tomque interfer	55%
6- Students are not willing to be corrected.	38%
7- Lack of knowledge about correction	35%

(4) Item 11 in the table reveal some findings concerning teachers opinions regrading the most difficult errors facing our students. These findings can be ranked as follows :

1- Structural errors.	82%
2- Intonation errors.	75%
3- Stress errors.	73%
4- Pronunciation errors.	71%
5- Vocabulary errors.	65%

(5) The open - ended question was also given to elicit teachers' opinions regarding the possible ways for improving oral correction techniques used in the general secondary school.

The results are as follows :

a- Trining teachers in oral correction techniques.	87%
b- Part of the lesson preporation should focus on errors, oral or written. 83%.	83%
c- Oral exams are needed.	77%

Conclusions :

- a) It is clear from previous studies and teachers' responses to the questionnaire that present oral correction techniques has the following shortcomings:
- 1- They increase the amount of teacher-correction and reduce the amount of self-correction and peer-correction. Moreover, as Fanselow (1977) has noted, teachers provide correct models after both correct and incorrect student utterances.
 - 2- Many correction techniques fail to locate errors precisely for the students.
 - 3- Teachers use the same correction technique in correcting controlled practice errors and communicative practice errors.
- b) Unlike previous studies, especially those of Hindrickson (1977), and Krashan (1982), language teachers see that correction does decrease the number of student errors and it does not have any inhibiting effect on communication.
- c) The major problems facing English language teachers in correcting student oral errors are lack of training whether pre-service or in service training, the great number of errors students make lack of time and mother-tongue interference.
- d) Strangely enough do structural errors come first among the most difficult errors, then come intonation, stress and pronunciation. then come intonation, stress and pronunciation errors.

e- Teachers' suggestions should be taken into consideration when devising any training programme. Our final exams should include oral questions. This may make our students concentrate on correct utterances and consequently minimizes their oral errors.

Now, the following section of the research will deal with the suggested technique that may be used effectively in the classroom.

A- Suggested technique for correcting Oral Errors :

The proposed technique depends on the idea that providing correction in the written form makes correction more " explicit, 1977). My additional suggestion deals with locating errors graphically with blanks such as those used in the cloze procedure. By writing correctly produced portions of an utterance on the blackboard, and drawing cloze-type blanks at the trouble spots, the teacher can indicate the location spots, the teacher can indicate the location of errors precisely to the students. In addition to locating errors precisely, this form of correction has several other advantages :

- a) It gives the students more time to think because oral time constraints are no longer in effect.
- b) Errors written on the blackboard can be thought of as problems for solving.
- c) The attention of the entire class is focused on the error or errors, and all of the students can participate in the correction process.
- d) This technique also demonstrates to the students that their attempts are not completely wrong.

- e) It increases the amount of self-correction and peer-correction and reduces the amount of teacher - correction.

Future Research :

The following points need further investigation :

- 1- Experimental research needed to determine if the proposed technique is more effective in eliciting corrections from the students.
- 2- The extent to which teachers are accountable for their students' errors.

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Teachers " Questionnaire

(A) Teachers' Perceptions of Oral Correction :

- 1- I think that correction decreases the number of student errors?
agree disagree undecided
- 2- I think that correction has inhibiting effect on communication in the classroom?
to a great extent to some extent not at all
- 3- I think that students are willing to have their oral mistakes corrected?
agree disagree undecided
- 4- I think too much correction is too bad as too little.
agree disagree undecided
- 5- I think that mistakes are best corrected as much as the student makes them.
agree disagree undecided
- 6- I think it is useful to encourage students to correct each other.
agree disagree undecided
- 7- I think it is best to correct all the mistakes students make.
agree disagree undecided

(B) Teachers Evaluation of Oral correction Techniques :

- 8- Which technique do you frequently use in oral correction?
a) Self-correction
b) Teacher - correction
c) Teacher - correction
d) All of the above
e) None of the above
- 9- Do you follow the same technique in correcting controlled practice errors and communicative practice errors?
Yes No do not know
- 10- Which of the following problems hinder you in correcting students, oral mistakes?
a- Lack of time

- b- Mistakes are so many
- c- Students are not willing to be corrected
- d- Lack of pre - service training
- e- Lack of in - service training
- f- Mother tongue interference
- g- Lack of knowledge about correction techniques
- others, please specify.

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11- Which of the following errors are very difficult to correct?

- a- Pronunciation errors
- b- Structural errors
- c- Intonation errors
- d- Stress errors
- e- Vocabulary errors

Others, please specify

12- In what way, in your opinion, could oral correction be improved?

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