ERROR CORRECTION IN THE EFL CLASSROOM

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În învăţarea limbilor străine, erorile/greşelile sunt inevitabile, iar modul de abordare a acestor erori este prima problemă cu care se confruntă orice profesor de limbi străine. În acest sens, unul dintre obiectivele principale ale cadrelor didactice ar trebui să fie acela de a afla ce gândesc elevii/studenţii despre corectarea erorilor şi despre influenţa acestora asupra învăţării limbilor străine. Profesorii ar trebui să acorde atenţie atitudinilor şi opiniilor studenţilor pentru a menţine motivaţia lor şi pentru a le îmbunătăţi rezultatele, făcându-i conştienţi de erorile/greşelile lor. Profesorii şi elevii/studenţii ar trebui să comunice în mod clar pentru a afla ce fel de abordare/metodă a corectării erorilor aduce avantaje elevilor/studenţilor şi contribuie la învăţarea limbii străine. În acest sens, cercetătorii consideră erorile ca dovadă a contribuţiei pozitive a studentului la învăţarea limbilor străine, mai degrabă decât ca un semn al incapacităţii elevului/studentului de a stăpâni noua limbă, aşa cum mulţi profesori îl văd. De aceea, corectarea erorilor este considerată unul dintre cele mai importante aspecte ale învăţării şi predării limbii străine, care necesită cercetări suplimentare.

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In language learning, errors are unavoidable, and how to deal with these errors is the first issue for any language teacher to face. In this respect, one of teachers' main aims should be to find out what learners think about error correction and its influence on their language learning. Teachers should pay attention to learners' attitudes and opinions in order to sustain learners' motivation and improve their results by making them aware of their errors. Teachers and learners should communicate clearly in order to find out what kind of approach to error correction benefits learners and their language acquisition the most. In this sense, researchers view errors as evidence of the learner's positive contribution to foreign language learning rather than as a sign of learner's inability to master the new language, as many teachers view it. Therefore, error correction is considered one of the most important aspects of learning and teaching a foreign language that needs further research.

Generally, the word "error" and "mistake" are considered to be synonymous, but Penny Ur made a difference between these terms. Errors are consistent and based on "mis-learned" generalizations. On the other hand, mistakes are occasional, inconsistent slips. Language teachers perceive that both mistake and error done spontaneously by the student [13]. Again, according to H. D. Brown a mistake refers to a performance error, which is made by language learners while producing a known structure incorrectly and comes out through a slip of tongue. He also referred to it as an "unsystematic guess". Mistakes can be self corrected by native or non-native speakers, but errors cannot be done so, because the mistakes do not occur from insufficiency or incompetence, whereas, errors occur for incompetence in the language. [2]

J. Trusscott argued that error correction is of little benefit and even harmful and therefore, it should be kept aside in EFL writing classrooms [12]. On the other hand, D. Ferris claimed that error correction is widely seen by teachers and students as an important factor in improvement of the writing ability [5]. In some other studies, D. Ferris and B. Roberts also pointed to the importance of accuracy and therefore error correction in students' writing and the students' willingness to receive feedback on their errors [6].

M. Lewis states that a teacher's attitude to mistakes and correction is central to what is done, avoided and valued in the classroom on a day to day basis. He also mentions that the fact is the question of the teacher's attitude to mistakes and correction is probably the single most important issue in a language teacher's professional development. In many ways, it is also central for students. The kind of activities the teacher encourages in the classroom, and the kind which the teacher avoids or minimises, will be strongly influenced by the teacher's views of the role of mistakes and correction in learning [1].

Corrective error feedback is a vital component of writing instruction and teachers must prepare to execute it competently, carefully, and consistently in order to fully utilise its potential for improving students' writing accuracy [4].

Students make errors at various stages of their language learning. Sometimes it may occur for the interference of first language. The words which sounds same in both mother language and target language, but meaning is different may cause the mistakes. Jeremy Harmer names these types of mistakes as "false Friend". There are also some errors that may occur because of grammatical dissimilarities between students' first language and target language. For example, Japanese students learning English frequently have problems with article usage. J. Harmer also points out that errors are not only made for the interference of mother language, but there can be some 'developmental' errors as well. Students sometimes generalize rules, like students may use 'ed' for past form for all words, as in go- goed. Whatever the mistakes are, these errors and mistakes have some positive and constructive aspects and also point out that the students are actively participating in the language learning process. [7]

By repeating the error over and over, the error gets permanent in the learners speech. This is characterized by fossilization - the regular use of noticeably incorrect forms [2]. According to P. James,"the learners know they make mistakes, but, of course, they don't know where the mistakes are, they don't know the importance of their mistakes and even when this is explained, they repeat them" [8].

J. Scrivener states that a really important skill for EFL language teachers is error correction. There is a fine balance needed to maintain lesson flow and develop student's confidence. It is easy to tip this balance, and the results are disastrous for the students. Over-correction will result in students losing confidence and then always speaking hesitantly, often "stuttering" and always looking to the teacher for confirmation. Under-correction will result in students developing bad habits and not learning proper grammar, forms, usage; eventually decreasing communicative ability. The first step is learning whether to correct or not. A key to developing this skill is to understand the difference between 'errors' and 'mistakes'. A mistake is a slip up: you know the correct thing to say, but by accident said the wrong thing. Often mistakes result in fun statements and students can get a kick out of them. Mistakes are not critical to correct. If you identify that it was a simple mistake, let it go. If it is repeated too often, it has become an error. Errors are when the student does not know the correct form, term, or usage. Errors need to be corrected for students to develop their skills and to avoid developing bad habits. Once an error has been identified, teachers need to consider the type of error and how best to deal with it. The author writes:
1. Decide what kind of error has been made (grammatical? pronunciation? etc.).
2. Decide whether to deal with it (is it useful to correct it?).
3. Decide when to deal with it (now? end of the activity? later?).

4. Decide who will correct (teacher? student self-correction? other students?).
5. Decide on an appropriate technique to indicate that an error has occurred or to enable the correction [10].

To achieve the decisions above, teachers must hone their skills. The bigger their knowledge base, the easier to make these decisions, the better they can deal with decisions.

There are different types of correction techniques the students may get acquainted with throughout their learning process. The teacher should choose the one/s that best suit the specific learning situation.

Some suggested error correction techniques are explained below.

On the Spot (Selective)

On the spot can be dangerous to your students' confidence. Do so with caution and not too often, and choose an appropriate technique that doesn't slow down the pace too much. Be careful not to 'jump' on one student for making a mistake.

- **Echo the Error:** Quick and easy, be an echo to your student's error.
- **Ask for Repetition:** Just say "please repeat" or "please say that again".
- **Repeat up to the Error:** Echo up to the error; let it hang for students to finish...
- **Ask a Question:** Highlight student's error by asking a question that will expose the error.
- **Provide Options:** Without stopping the flow of the lesson, write options on the board.
- **Gestures:** Especially useful with phrasal verb and preposition mistakes.
- **Write on the Whiteboard, Underline:** The standard whiteboard technique. Highlight the error with an underline [3].

Delayed Error Correction (After)

At an appropriate stop in the lesson, do some error correction. A good place to do this is at the end of a section, practice, or activity (error correction makes a nice transition between parts of the lesson). Don't make student's feel bad about their errors; they often don't know the correct thing to say. Instead of saying "You said ~", say "I heard ~" or just simply write the error(s) on the board. When possible, change the sentence for anonymity; we don't want to embarrass students.

- **Echo the Error:** "I heard ~"
- **Ask for Reformulation (questions):** Can you change this question to get the same answer?
- **Repeat up to the Error:** good for vocabulary errors, write the sentence on the board up to the error, have students finish the sentence. This can be done with all students, thus re-enforcing the correct form to be used by hearing several variations.
- **Ask a Question:** Good for concept checks and getting students to repeat a section where they made an error, simply ask them a question that will bring up the error. The question can be directed at any student or all students.
- **Repetition of the Correct Answer:** Once the error has been corrected, have students repeat the correct answer. This technique works best with low-level students or when the error seems to have become a bad habit.
- **Provide Options:** Write the error on the board and provide several options. Have students choose the option they think is best.
- **Use a Visual Aid:** Draw a timeline, pie chart, picture or other visual aide on the board to help students to understand the error. Have them self-correct.
- **Write on the Whiteboard, Underline:** The standard whiteboard technique. Highlight the error with an underline.
- **Highlight the Issue:** Rather than bringing up a specific error, when you notice repeated errors of the same type, highlight this issue and discuss. If necessary, mark students' files and teach the appropriate curriculum item as soon as possible [3].

Other Technique Notes

Here are a few other notes to help you develop your error correction techniques.

Anonymous Error Correction: With delayed error correction, try to make the correction anonymous. For a grammar mistake, try changing the nouns so that the sentence is unidentifiable by students, but still helps them learn their mistake. For example: if a student said "Yesterday, I go to Kyoto," change it to "Last week, I go to Daimaru." Also, say "I heard…," rather than, "Mr. Suzuki said…." This anonymity will help students feel more confident by not highlighting a specific student's mistake in front of peers. All students will benefit from this consideration as all students will be curious to fix the mistake, not knowing who made it originally.

Self Correction: As much as possible try to encourage self-correction. If students can fix their own mistake, it shows that they understand and allows them to feel more confident in their knowledge. Confident self-correction habits lead to students depending less on others (i.e. their coach) and thus, speaking more freely, knowing if they make a mistake they can correct it themselves. They will become more confident speaking outside of the classroom.

Peer Correction: Above we saw numerous techniques which allow students to work together to correct errors and avoid individual error correction. Teachers should further encourage students to correct each other (peer correction). Peer correction will increase student talk time and also increase student interaction. This is particularly easy to do with homework and written work, but can be done on the spot and with delayed correction on the board [3].

According to J. Harmer, correction helps students to clarify their understanding of the meaning and construction of the language. Teachers should be concerned how to correct student as one way may be appropriate for one but may not be appropriate for another. Sometimes students can correct themselves as the error is just a slip. Again, students sometimes need the help of the teacher. He also refers that during this time teachers can ask to correct another student. If the other students help out to solve the error, the student who made the mistake may not feel humiliated. Sometimes students also prefer a gentle correction from the teacher. J. Harmer also suggests that it is important to praise students for their success and to correct them for their failure. In this way, the teacher's positive attitude can dramatically change student's performance irrespective of their level and types of errors [7].

J. C. Richards and Ch.Lockhart provide some strategies of giving feedback on content and feedback on form. *There are some strategies to give feedback on content*:
• Acknowledging the correct answer: teacher acknowledges by saying 'Good',
'Yes' or 'alright'.
• Indicating an incorrect answer: teachers indicate the incorrect answer by saying
'No, that's not quite right' or 'Mmm'.
• Praising: give complements for right answer by saying 'Yes, an excellent answer'.
• Expanding or modifying a student's answer: the teacher can provide more information or rephrasing the answer to an incomplete or vague answer.
• Repeating: teacher can repeat the same answer.
• Summarizing: the teacher can summarize what a student or group of students has answered.
• Criticizing: the teacher can criticize a student's response.
Some strategies to give feedback on form:
• Asking the student to repeat what he or she said.
• Pointing out the error and asking the students to self-correct.
• Commenting on an error and explaining why it is wrong, without having the student repeat the correct form.
• Asking another student to correct the error.
• Using a gesture to indicate that an error has been made [9].
Here are four general suggestions for teachers based on the classroom experiences.
Consider the context.
Before you plan systematic error correction practices for your classrooms, you need to consider the context in which student language use and errors occur. As immersion teachers are well

aware, students in the early stages of cognitive development and language acquisition need to be encouraged to produce language that communicates meaning; error correction techniques that require student reflection on language structures or vocabulary are not appropriate for learners in those early stages. The types of corrective feedback techniques that elicit student-generated repairs are clearly more appropriate for the more cognitively mature and proficient learners.

Become aware of your current practices.

Immersion teachers can benefit by taking time to find out how they currently address student errors. Ask a colleague or classroom aide to observe you while focusing specifically on your feedback techniques. Or, should a colleague or aide not be available, audio record a number of your lessons and reflect on the recording.

Practice a variety of feedback techniques.

Good teachers understand that one size does not fit all. Individual learners may well differ in terms of the particular error correction technique most appropriate for their unique language development needs. Choosing to learn and use a few different types of feedback that seem to produce student-generated repairs increases your chance of reaching more students.

Focus on the learner. It's important to let the learner self-correct.

Remember that your students may well be more capable than you think! As teachers we often feel an urge to rush in with the correct response before students have had enough time to process the information. If we allow time and provide appropriate cues for the learner to self-repair, more often than not the student will come through. The least effective technique for correcting a student's incorrect language use is to simply give them the answer [11].

Error correction and giving feedback are important roles of a teacher. An effective feedback or error correction can significantly reduce the number of error of a student. In our opinion, teachers can use the above mentioned techniques for effective error correction. Moreover, they should resist the temptation of correcting every error even though they might feel doing so to prevent fossilization of errors. Teachers' role is crucial in developing the skills of a student. However, excessive error correction could frustrate students and even reduce the motivation of learning the language. Therefore, it is really important for teachers to have "good timing" and use "appropriate" correction strategies during error correction. Actually, error correction and corrective feedback, which are traditionally thought to be the duty of a teacher, should not be classified as such. These should be everyone's responsibility, namely, the teachers as well as the students.

In conclusion, we would like to mention that error correction is only one of many important skills all good teachers have to develop. Giving feedback and correcting errors may serve not only to let learners know how well they have performed, but also to increase motivation and build a supportive classroom climate.

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