

The Impact of Feedback and Correction of Students' Speech Errors on Their Oral Production

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Received 24 May 2012

Revised 10 November 2013; Accepted 12 December 2013

Abstract: The study aims to investigate how teachers' feedback and correction of students' speech errors affect their attempts at speaking. Students of the University of Science, VNU from classes of lower-intermediate (A2), intermediate (B1) and upper-intermediate (B2) participated in this study. Two methods of obtaining the needed information were used: class observations and in-depth interviews with key informants as to why they discontinued speaking. The results show that positive feedback from the affective dimension encouraged students to go on speaking. From the cognitive dimension, selective corrections have a positive influence on students' desires for oral communication. Negative feedback from the affective channel and vigorous corrections result in students shutting off their attempts at speaking.

Keywords: Error, feedback, correction.

1. Introduction

Within the framework of communicative language teaching, teachers are expected to adopt classroom management strategies that engage the student in oral interactions. One of the key components of this teaching role is giving feedback on students' errors and correcting them. Like children learning their first language, second or foreign language learners, in an attempt to speak, make numerous mistakes. However, they can learn from making mistakes through interactions in which their

errors are given corrective feedback. In the Vietnamese context of English as a foreign language instruction, feedback on and correction of speech errors (FCE hereafter) occurs in every language classroom; but little research has been carried out. The need to deal with FCE is, therefore, obvious.

The aim of the study is to explore how teachers' feedback and correction of students' speech errors affect their attempts to continue speaking.

With the obvious purpose, it is also expected that some empirical evidence obtained will be added to validate and illuminate certain theoretical assumptions underpinning FCE.

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Moreover, teachers of English in Vietnam will be more likely to benefit from this study in two ways: to become fuller aware of both positive and negative influences on learners' attempts to produce oral language and to have more insights into FCE both theoretically and pedagogically through consciously raising this matter for further investigations.

2. Literature review

Definitions of key terms

An *error* is defined by Hendrickson [1:169] as "an utterance, form, or structure that a particular language teacher deems unacceptable because of its inappropriate use or its absence in real-life discourse". In this light, an error could be a deviation from a phonological or grammatical rule, an incorrect form or expression in a particular situation. Meanwhile, *mistake* refers to "a performance error that is either a random guess or a 'slip' in that it is a failure to utilize a known system correctly" (Brown) [2: 205]. Referring to these definitions, this paper uses the two terms *error* and *mistake* alternatively.

According to Hornby [3: 487], *feedback* is

understood as "advice, criticism or information about how good or useful something or somebody's work is". Feedback can be positive or negative and can be shown through verbal or non-verbal communication. The term *correction*, as is used by Chaudron [4: 66], means "any reaction by the teacher which transforms, disapprovingly refers to, or demands improvement of a student's behaviour or utterance". The act of correction, on the other hand, indicates that the teacher, "in response to what is perceived to be an error ... supplied an appropriate item" (Chun et al) [5: 538]. In supplying an appropriate item, the teacher has to do more than just giving modelling/remodelling. He/she indeed needs to make explicit to the student how the right form of language should be produced.

Feedback modes and feedback conditions

Vigil and Oller [6: 287-288] propose modes of feedback with three feedback conditions that learners get from the audience. The two modes of feedback - affective (shown through non-verbal communication) and cognitive (conveyed by means of linguistic devices) - transmitted to the senders can be positive, negative, or neutral.

Table 1. Modes of feedback and feedback conditions

affective feedback	cognitive feedback
Positive: "I like it" (more of the same)	"I understand" (message and direction are clear)
Neutral: "Waiting..." (reaction undecided)	"Still processing..." (undecided)
Negative: "I don't like it" (try something else)	"I don't understand" (message and/or direction are not clear)

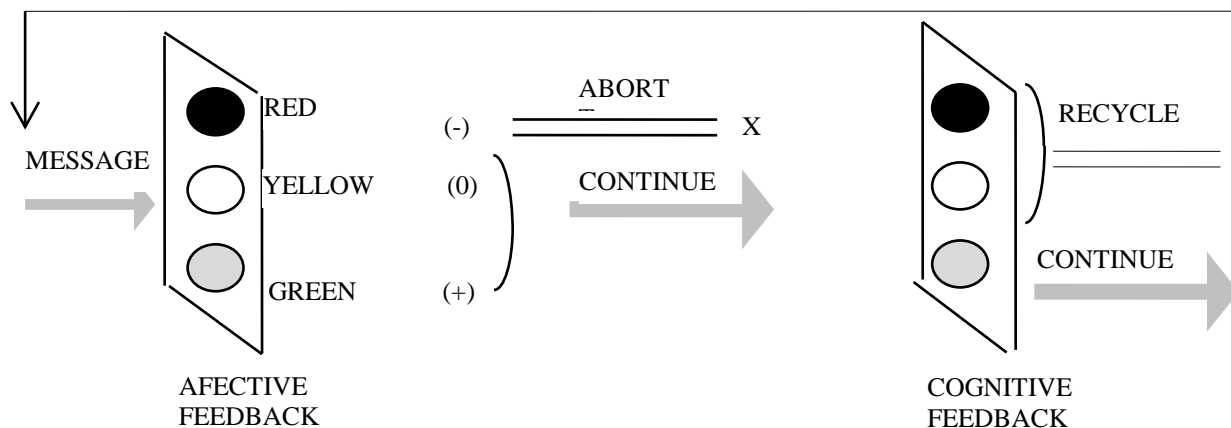
The two feedback modes can take place simultaneously. For example, a listener can give positive affective feedback ("I affirm you and appreciate your effort to communicate") but show negative cognitive feedback indicating that the message is not clear.

Vigil and Oller further state that if the two modes of feedback are positive, learners are apt to make further attempts to communicate. However, if they make substantial errors, this sort of feedback will be likely to produce fossilization of such errors. On the other hand,

regardless of the cognitive feedback conditions (positive, negative, or neutral) the negative feedback from the affective channel is most likely to result in the abortion of future attempts to communicate. This is very important as it highlights the affective domain of human interactions. If a message sender is not affirmed and his/her communication is not valued, he/she finds almost no reason and is not motivated to communicate. Hence, positive affective feedback, as is explained by Brown [2: 218], is imperative to learners' desire to go on communicating, whereas feedback in the

cognitive mode determines the degrees of internalization. When affective response is positive, negative or neutral responses in the cognitive dimension will have an encouraging effect on the learners to retry, restate, reformulate, or reform the hypotheses about a certain rule. On the contrary, positive cognitive response reinforces forms used by learners and makes them believe that they perform well (in fact, they do not).

Brown [2: 220] depicts Vigil and Oller's model metaphorically in the form of the traffic light as shown in the following figure.



The “green light” of the affective feedback mode allows the sender to continue sending a message; in contrast, the “red light” causes the sender to abort such attempts. The traffic signal of the cognitive feedback mode is the point at which error correction occurs. A green light implies non-corrective feedback while a red light symbolizes corrective feedback and causes the learner to make some alterations in production. A yellow light makes the learner adjust, alter, recycle, and try again in some way.

Here, the model implies that correction must be optimal in order to be effective. At one extreme, too much negative cognitive feedback

and correction (too many ‘red lights’) result in the shutting off of the learner’s efforts at speaking. At another extreme, too much tolerance of errors (too many ‘green lights’) often reinforces errors; consequently, these errors would become persistent known as fossilization (Vigil & Oller) [6: 288]. In either case, negative impact is seen. To create positive influence on learners’ attempts to go on communicating, but at the same time, to improve their oral production, feedback from the affective channel must be positive (green) while that from the cognitive dimension should be neutral (yellow) or negative (red).

When to correct errors

The “when to correct an error” question takes into consideration the decision made by language teachers on two perspectives: (1) if correction has a positive effects on learners and (2) which errors receive some sort of remedy.

Perspective (1) gives rise to a challenge for teachers to decide whether or not to correct student errors at all. Crichton [7: 59] argues that if a teacher ignores an error, he/she may fail to provide appropriate feedback; but if he/she decides to treat an error, he/she might fail to encourage the student to elicit a correct response. He even pinpoints the ‘crisis point’ (breakdown of communication between student(s) and teacher) in error correction. If treatment of error leads to a crisis point, it is called ‘problematic correction’. If treatment of error does not lead to a crisis point, it is called ‘unproblematic correction’. Remedial work must be considered whether it would improve learners’ performance and result in a feeling of success in students (George) [8: 73] or whenever it seems appropriate (Burt & Kiparsky) [9: 4]; (Allwright) [10: 2].

A study by Crichton [7], who examined a series of factors attributable to problematic correction, revealed that teacher’s attempts to provide corrective feedback can sometimes lead to confusion and ambiguity when the students are not aware of the teacher’s intention in trying to elicit correct responses from them, and that the teacher’s correction behaviour is influenced by a range of contextual, social, and individual factors which at times may be in conflict with each other. This requires the teachers to make explicit to learners what and why they are doing that (Burt, [11]; Cohen & Robbins, [12]; Hendrickson, [1]; Lightbown & Spada, [13]).

A survey study conducted by Walker [14] to investigate how students reacted to having their errors corrected revealed that minor errors in speaking ... should not be marked down because this “destroys their confidence and forces them to expend so much effort on details that they lose the overall ability to use language” [14: 103].

Obviously, corrective feedback must be done in a way that can eliminate breakdown in communication for the sake of promoting a speaking atmosphere and help instil confidence in language learners.

Perspective (2) considers the types of errors for treatment. Burt [11: 61] discerns the difference between two types of errors: ‘global’ and ‘local’ errors. Global errors are those which affect the overall organization of the sentence and hinder successful communication, whereas ‘local’ errors are those which affect a single element of the sentence, but do not prevent a message from being heard. Corder [15: 166] introduced two terms: ‘overt’ and ‘covert’ errors. While overt errors are ungrammatical at sentence level, covert errors are grammatically well-formed at sentence level, but not interpretable within the context of communication. To use these terms more straightforward, Brown [2: 208] calls them ‘sentence level’ and ‘discourse level’ errors.

There is a general consensus that ‘global’ or ‘covert’ or ‘discourse level’ errors should receive priority for correction since they affect communication in such aspects as intelligibility, acceptability, and irritation (George, [8]; Burt, [11]). Other studies have validated this claim (Burt & kiparsky, [16]; Murphy, [17]; Edge, [18]). Two research works by Vietnamese teachers of English have also illuminated those types of errors that merit treatment (Nguyen Nguyet Minh, [19]; Nguyen Quynh Trang,

[20]). Furthermore, an emphasis is even placed on correcting errors which occur frequently in a student's speech (George, [8]; Allwright, [10]; Lee, [21]). In addition, common errors (ones which affect a large group of students) should be given due attention as well (Nguyen Nguyet Minh) [19].

In short, there appear to be four types of errors which deserve more focused attention; ones that impair communication significantly, ones that create stigmatizing effects on the listener, ones that occur repeatedly on the part of an individual student, and ones which are common to a number of students.

How to correct errors

The "how to correct errors" question deals with the manners in which correction is done. Correction must be done in a way of showing learners the forms of standard language, not of criticizing or punishing (Edge) [18: 20].

Fanselow [22] investigated how experienced teachers treated speech errors in their classes. Analysis of data collected through videotaping indicated that they appeared to be more concerned with errors of meaning than those of grammar and the popular treatment being giving the right answer. Nguyen Nguyet Minh [19], in her observations of correction techniques used by both Australian and Vietnamese teachers, stressed the use of facial expressions and gestures (affective feedback) in correcting students' errors. She also reminds the teacher to be cautious when applying those devices.

In summarizing the teacher's role at the point an error is made in classroom verbal interactions, Allwright (in Bailey's) [23: 111] states that "The key task for the teacher, then, is firstly to sum up the whole situation on the spot, and then to react appropriately, in public,

conscious of the need to treat the problems of the individual without misleading or confusing the other learners." Moreover, seen from the learner's perspective, the effectiveness of error treatment will "depend on how it is perceived rather than on what it is intended to be".

Cathcart and Olsen [24: 50], in considering student reaction to oral correction, found out that vigorous correction interrupts student's flow of thought. Because of this, they can hardly think coherently or produce more than fragmented sentences. Their study is valuable as it is a consciousness raising tool because both teachers and students who participated in the study became "more interested in the subject of error correction, and in so doing, took the first step towards understanding and improving correction techniques" [p. 52-53].

Chaudron [25: 30] proposes "a descriptive model of discourse in the corrective treatment of learners' errors." He describes three functions of feedback: "(1) incentive - stimulating increased effort (motivating), (2) reinforcement - promoting maintenance of the learner's responses, and (3) information - contributing to changes in responses".

In sum, the techniques to be used for correction and the teacher's feedback manners can have either encouraging or discouraging effects on students themselves. When FCE is motivating, reinforcing, and informative, it can encourage students' participation in oral production.

3. The study

This study was aimed at investigating how students' attempts to orally communicate in a language class were affected by the teacher's

feedback on and correction of their speech errors. The effect is considered positive if FCE encourages the learner to continue speaking; on the contrary, it is considered negative if FCE makes students abort their attempts at speaking.

This study was undertaken at the University of Science, Vietnam National University, Hanoi. Students participating in this study came from three classes: one being the first-year class, at lower-intermediate level (A2); one being the second-year class, at intermediate level (B1); and one being the high quality class, at upper-intermediate level (B2). Class A2 met two days a week (three classroom hours each). Class B1 met two days a week (three classroom hours each). Class B2 met three days a week (three classroom hours each).

The study combined two methods of obtaining the needed information: class observations and in-depth interviews with key informants as to why they aborted their attempts to continue speaking. Six observations were done within a semester. Each observation lasts for one classroom hour (50 minutes). During class observations both positive and

negative effects were of primary focus. If students made some attempts to speak in any forms, for example, retrying, restating, repeating, adjusting, and making change(s) in their speech, positive influence was achieved. Conversely, if they aborted their attempts at speaking, negative impact resulted.

After class observations, interviews were conducted with the students who had aborted their efforts at oral production. Central to the interviews was the “why to discontinue speaking” question. To make sure those students understood the questions, all interviews were carried out in Vietnamese.

Results and discussion

Class observations

All in all, 6 classroom hours of observations have been done. Two hours were with class A2 (lower-intermediate level), two hours with class B1 (intermediate level), and another two with class B2 (upper-intermediate level).

Table 2 below sums up the results.

Table 2. Results of correction instances

	Class	Correction	Positive effect		Negative effect	
			No.	%	No.	%
	A2	32	30	93.75	2	6.25
	B1	25	24	96.00	1	4.00
	B2	18	18	100.00	0	0.00
Total	3	75	72	96.00	3	4.00

As can be seen from Table 2, the total number of corrections observed was 75, of which 72 (96 %) did have positive effects on students' efforts to go on speaking in such a way as making some changes, retrying or repeating after the teacher, paraphrasing, and clarifying. Only three out of 75 corrections created negative effects on the students.

It is also important to note that the higher levels of learning the students were engaged in, the lower percentages of negative impact resulted. The negative impact reported in the table was 6.25 % for students at lower-intermediate level whereas it was 4 % for those at intermediate level. With B2 class, at the highest level of learning, not even a single

student aborted his attempts at speaking. This can be concluded that higher level students responded more positively to corrective feedback than lower level students.

With respect to correction manners, almost in all the cases, the teachers provided their students with positive feedback from the affective dimension. The teachers showed:

- a smiling face indicating supportive and encouraging expressions;
- friendly behaviours to ease embarrassing situations in which the students seemed to encounter because of being corrected;
- their patience at incurring desired responses elicited from the errors makers; and
- gestures to create humours while encouraging students to alter their responses.

As regards the cognitive feedback in the correction of errors, there appeared higher degree of conformity to what has been reviewed in the literature. First, priority was given to the treatment of errors which blocked communication (often, those were errors at discourse level - ones which were inappropriate and which cause misunderstanding or ambiguity). In these students' speaking opportunities, the teachers did tolerate some errors, especially those of local errors so as to instil a sense of confidence and success in the students. Second, high frequency and common errors were also paid due attention to, but not

immediately after an error was committed. More often these errors were brought to class attention either right after the student terminated his/her presentation or a few minutes before breaks. Yet, errors of irritation did not receive much attention from the teacher. Errors which cause stigmatizing effects on native speakers of English might not have the same effect on Vietnamese teachers. This is, perhaps, because of the influence of culture. In Vietnamese conversations, for example, it can be accepted not to use the word "please" when a person asks someone to say or do something. But this is not the same in polite requests among native speakers of English. Therefore, a Vietnamese teacher may tolerate this type of error.

In general, selective correction and positive feedback from the affective channel have brought about encouraging effects on efforts made by the learner in producing oral language.

Interviews

The results from six observations indicated three negative correction instances. Those students, after receiving feedback and correction from the teacher, aborted their attempts at speaking. Interviews with these students yielded the following results.

Table 3 below shows the reasons why those students discontinued speaking.

Table 3. Reasons for aborting attempts at speaking

Case	Interruption of thought	Discouragement	Feeling of shame	Feeling of incompetence
Students 1		v		
Students 2			v	v
Students 3	v	v		

As is shown in the Table, the negative effects fall onto four categories: interruption of thoughts, discouragement, feeling of shame,

and feeling of incompetence. Student 1 did not continue speaking due to an unsupportive feedback from the teacher. This kind of

feedback was at the same time emitted from the affective domain - unsupportive manner from the teacher and cognitive channel - too many corrections. The message conveyed by this student was misunderstood. The teacher, then, instead of trying to pursue (incur) any possible way to encourage this learner to make some alterations, confirmed definitely that "I don't think so", at the same time he frowned and shook his head (a negative affective feedback). This kind of feedback does give evidence to highlight the affective dimension of human interactions. If the message sender (the student in this case) is not affirmed and appreciated, he/she will give up his/her efforts to communicate. The works of Vigil and Oller [6] fit well in this specific case.

Student 2 shut off her will at conversing because of vigorous corrections which led to a feeling of losing face and incompetence. Student 3 stopped speaking since the teacher gave him too much correction; as a result, his thoughts were interrupted and he felt discouraged. This is similar to the finding by Walker's [14] survey study in which he warns that minor errors in speaking should not be marked down because this destroys the learner confidence. In a discussion about one of the personality factors – inhibition (building defences around one's ego) - in foreign language learning, Brown [2: 140] argues that the making of errors can be viewed as both internal and external threats to one's ego. Internally, the two aspects of one's critical self and one's performing self can be in conflict (the learner performs something 'wrong' and becomes critical of his or her own error). Externally, the learner perceives others exercising their critical selves, even judging his very person when he/she blunders in a second language. After all, if we consider the ultimate

goal of the communicative language teaching which holds that fluency takes on more importance than accuracy, strict correction may undermine self-confidence in the learner and increase the level of self-defence.

It is undeniable that the issue of FCE becomes complicated when actual classroom interactions take place. Indeed, frequent stops for speech error corrections together with unfriendly manners from the teacher might yield some counter-productive consequences on learners' efforts of on-going speaking because they interrupt the learners' flow of thoughts or ideas, de-motivate them, and increase their feeling of shame and incompetence.

4. Conclusion and recommendations

Conclusion

The outcome of the study can be summarized as follows.

(1) Almost all corrections have had positive effects on students' participation in oral production. Higher-level learners respond better to FCE than lower-level learners.

(2) Positive feedback from the affective dimension such as a smiling face, friendly behaviours, and patience can encourage students to continue speaking.

(3) Feedback from the cognitive dimension can have a profound impact on incurring desired responses from students when selective corrections are observed; that is priority is given to the treatment of misunderstanding, high-frequency and common errors.

(4) Negative feedback from the affective channel like frowning faces or shaking heads and from the cognitive dimension such as

vigorous corrections can result in situations where students abort their attempts at speaking.

Recommendations

Obviously, FCE in formal foreign language instruction in Vietnamese universities tends to have both encouraging and discouraging effects on learners' attempts to orally communicate. To achieve better FCE, teachers of English should bear in mind the following.

- Not all speech errors need correcting. Sentence-level errors can sometimes be ignored. More attention should be paid to errors which hinder communication and which are of high-frequency and of the common type. In the case of irritative errors, teachers should see the student's errors from the native speaker perspective because they are also the ones which affect communication when the student communicates in real-life situations.

- Correcting a student's speech errors should aim at getting more involvement from the students. By showing friendly manners, the teacher encourages students' active participation in oral practice.

- FCE is a sensible practice. It is believed that the teacher's practices are influenced by their viewpoints on error correction; therefore, teachers should be encouraged to gain knowledge of and insights into error correction through attending workshops, conferences, and courses. Such training, especially in-service training should be made available at times suitable for teachers (e.g. mid-semester breaks or summer holidays) so that they can arrange their schedules to attend.

This study has focused on the short-term effects of FCE (the immediate effects on attempts made by the students to continue speaking). The long-term effects – students' subsequent improvements indicated by the

absence of the errors – need to be traced for further scrutiny. Furthermore, future investigations into FCE can be undertaken, for example, studies on the relationship between short-term and long-term effects of FCE or on cultural aspects that might influence the teacher's practices in class.

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Ảnh hưởng của phản hồi và chữa lỗi nói cho sinh viên đến hoạt động giao tiếp trên lớp

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Tóm tắt: Nghiên cứu tìm hiểu ảnh hưởng của việc phản hồi và chữa lỗi nói tới hoạt động giao tiếp nói trên lớp của sinh viên. Đối tượng nghiên cứu là sinh viên Trường Đại học Khoa học Tự nhiên, ĐHQGHN đang theo học tiếng Anh ở các trình độ trung cấp thấp (A2), trung cấp (B1) và trung cấp cao (B2). Nghiên cứu này sử dụng hai phương pháp thu thập số liệu là quan sát lớp và phỏng vấn sâu đối với những sinh viên từ bỏ mong muốn tiếp tục giao tiếp. Kết quả cho thấy phản hồi tốt từ kênh cảm xúc có tác dụng kích lệ giao tiếp. Từ kênh nhận thức, khi giáo viên chữa lỗi có chọn lọc thì có tác dụng thúc đẩy sinh viên tiếp tục thực hành nói. Ngược lại, phản hồi tiêu cực từ kênh cảm xúc và chữa lỗi quá nhiều đã khiến cho sinh viên nản lòng và từ bỏ mong muốn giao tiếp.

Từ khóa: Lỗi, phản hồi, chữa lỗi.