


MACEDONIAN STUDENTS' ATTITUDES AND PREFERENCES OF ENGLISH AS A SECOND LANGUAGE TO ERRORS AND MISTAKES			Morphology
		Keywords: corrective feedback, error correction, attitudes, ESL.	
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Abstract			
<p>Knowing students' attitudes towards a new language can be very useful for language teachers. If the techniques used to correct errors do not meet students' preferences, subsequent negative attitudes may emerge. This is why teachers should take into consideration students' preferences for being corrected. Many studies centre on the effect of feedback on students' writing, but they omit learners' attitudes and preferences towards corrective feedback (Katayama, 2007). In education, corrective feedback is viewed as crucial for motivating learners and helping their learning. A growing body of research on corrective feedback in ESL points to its importance for the process of language acquisition. The responses show that ESL learners generally have a positive attitude towards error correction.</p>			

Introduction

Mistakes and errors are an inevitable side effect of all learning, and yet so much learning time is spent denying or correcting them. There has always been much concern and discussion on errors and error correction in second (L2) and foreign language (FL) learning and teaching, therefore, studies on error correction have become a target of many researchers whose main goal is to investigate the role of error correction in language learning.

Ferris (1999, as cited in Truscott, 1999) asserts that no one should argue for the abandonment of error correction, and even gives a myriad of reasons for error correction in classroom. According to Corder (1973), language is not a question of acquiring a set of automatic habits, but a learner's process of discovering the underlying rules, categories, and systems of choice in the language presented to him or her by the teacher. Subsequently, many teachers provide corrective feedback in order to correct learners' mistakes and errors in language usage and to help them benefit from making those mistakes and errors. For this reason, the teacher's role seems to be crucial in corrective feedback.

However, there is little evidence that language acquisition comes from being corrected. Truscott asserts that error correction is actually harmful to learners and that focusing only on the incorrect and correcting every error discourages learners from taking risks in language learning.

Since it is considered normal that ESL students make errors, 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.

According to Ellis (as cited in Zhu, 2010), the most significant contribution of error analysis lies in its success in changing the status of errors from undesirability to that of a guide to language learning. 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.

Literature Review

A review of previous research and findings should be formulated and a definition of the term 'attitude', in an attempt to create an opinion on students' attitudes and preferences to corrective feedback. The term attitude is known as "a psychological tendency that is expressed by evaluating a particular entity with some degree of favor or disfavor" (Eagly & Chaiken, 1993: 1). This positive or negative behavior that attitudes imply should be respected and, as Brown (2007) claims, teachers need to bear in mind that students also have both positive and negative attitudes.

A distinction between mistakes and errors must be made. In linguistics, the definitions of terms 'mistake' and 'error' are rather diverse, even though the term 'error' is often assumed to incorporate the notion of a 'mistake'. Furthermore, Catalan (1997:62) asserts that, in the field of Psycholinguistics, mistakes in writing are the result of a wrong functioning of the neuromuscular commands of the brain. According to Brown (1987), a 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. Obviously, mistakes do not result from the learner's lack of knowledge. In addition, it can be said that errors reflect gaps in learners' knowledge and that they occur because the learner does not know what is correct and what is not.

It has been accepted that errors play an important role in the learning process. To language learners, language learning is not so much a question of acquiring a set of automatic habits, but rather a process of discovering the underlying rules, categories and systems of choice in the language by some sort of processing by the learner of the data of the language presented to him or her by the teacher (Corder, 1973). In order for this discovery to take place, learners have to go through several stages and processes.

One of the most important factors included in almost all the stages and processes of language learning is error making. Dulay and Burt (1974) stated that error making is inevitable and that it would appear necessary and crucial to language learning. In fact, it is a clear sign to show that the language learner actually develop and internalize the rules of the language. While

the errors a learner makes provide no direct measure of their knowledge of the language, it is probably the most important source of information about the nature of their knowledge.

By describing and classifying students' errors, teachers may build up a picture of the features of the language which cause the students learning problems. A learner's errors, therefore, are significant to the teacher, in that they show how far towards the goal the learners have progressed and, consequently, what remains for them to learn (Corder, 1981). On the other hand, learner's errors provide researchers evidence of how language is learnt and acquired, what strategies or procedures the learner should employ in their discovery of the language.

In fact, errors are essential to the learners themselves and it is a method the learner uses to test their hypotheses about the nature of the language. Furthermore, teachers can gain much benefit from error analysis and description because errors provide them with feedback on the effectiveness of their teaching materials and their teaching techniques. In addition, errors enable teachers to decide whether they can move on to the next item they are teaching and they also provide the information for designing an improved syllabus or a plan of improved teaching.

It is on the basis of the information the teacher gets from errors that he or she modifies their teaching procedures or materials, the pace of the progress, and the amount of practice planned.

Teachers and students have different attitudes toward errors and error correction. Teachers, as Pit Corder put it, are more concerned with how to deal with errors than with what causes them. Some of them think "if we were to achieve a perfect teaching method the errors would never be committed in the first place, and that therefore the occurrence of errors is merely a sign of the present inadequacy of our teaching techniques" (Corder, 1967).

Therefore, such teachers try every means to prevent their students from making errors by constant correction which they believe, would help students recognize their errors and not repeat them. On the other hand, some other teachers believe that the learning of the foreign language may be discouraged by the teacher who insists upon correction and grammatical accuracy. They also believe that continuous correction can raise learners' level of anxiety, and that this impedes learning (Krashen, 1982).

Like teachers, it is not surprising to see that some students like to be corrected every now and then by their teachers because they believe that frequent correction would improve the language they are learning. Cathcart and Olsen (1979) show that students want their oral errors to be corrected. In a study on EL2 student writers, Leki (1991) likewise finds that 100 % of these students wanted all their written errors corrected.

On the other hand, some students find continuous correction very annoying, distracting and discouraging. They do not mind being corrected if the error is really conspicuous but they hate it

whenever they make it. They do not like being corrected whenever they are speaking and some of them would even stop participating in the classroom interaction just because they do not want to be corrected.

Due to these different attitudes, both teachers and students should adopt a reasonable approach to handle the error-correction problem effectively and appropriately in order to adapt to their preferences in learning and teaching.

In order to get a clearer picture of the students' attitudes towards errors and error correction we should classify error correction methods into three categories: teacher correction, peer correction and self-correction. Teacher correction methods include:

- a) saying something positive before pointing out the mistake
- b) telling students what kind of mistake they make
- c) using gestures
- d) giving the students the correct answer directly
- e) saying nothing.

Peer correction is manifested by asking a student to evaluate if another student has made a mistake or inviting the whole class to correct a mistake. On the other hand, self-correcting methods involve repeating a student's answer until the mistake occurs, asking the student to repeat and asking the students to correct the mistake themselves.

Methodology

The research part of the paper was conducted by surveying 30 students from a private English language school. There were three groups of 9th grade students of primary school and each group consisting of ten students. They are all taught by the same English teacher, and therefore, comparable attitudes among the test subjects were ensured towards the teachers' commonly-used error correction methods. The assumption is made that the subjects represent a sample of primary school students. Therefore, the findings and implications of the study may be generalized to the extent that other students are similar to the subjects. Each student was asked the same set of questions regarding the preferred method of error correction and justification for their answers as well. They were also asked to decide whether they prefer the teacher to correct every mistake or have only the important mistakes corrected and give reasons.

Data Analysis

The results are presented in the following table.

Table 1. Results from survey

Type	Teacher’s Error Correction Method	Methods Students Like	Methods Students Dislike
Teacher Correction	Saying something positive before pointing out the mistake	40%	
	Telling students what kind of mistake they make	10%	
	Using Gestures	6.7%	
	Telling the students they have made a mistake	3.3%	
	Giving the students the correct answer directly	3.3%	
	Saying nothing		30%
	Imitating the mistake verbally		50%
Peer Correction	Asking a student to evaluate if another student has made a mistake	10%	
	Inviting the whole class to correct a mistake	6.7%	
Self-Correction	Repeating a student’s answer until the mistake occurs	10%	
	Asking the students to correct the mistake themselves	10%	20%

The following representation is the summed up results from all the different categories. Methods students like is a summary expressed in percentages of all categories consisted in teacher error correction, peer correction and self-correction.

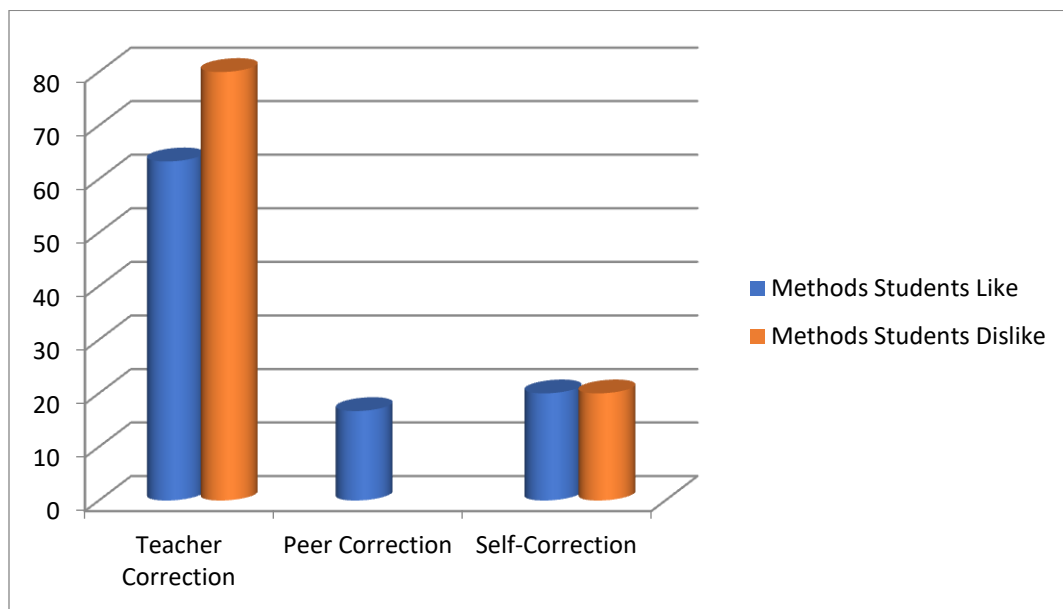


Figure 1. Students’ Preferred Method

Results and Discussion

The results have shown that the students prefer the most their teacher to correct them (63.3%) explaining that they would like to hear something good before pointing out the mistake (40%). They thought they could feel more confident in this way. Then follow, telling the student what area the mistake is in (10%), using gestures (6.7%), telling the student he has made a mistake (3.3%), giving the student the correct answer directly (3.3%). Only 16.7% chose peer correction as the preferred method with the teacher's asking another student if what has been said is correct (10%) and asking the whole class to correct the mistakes (6.7%). In the self correction category (20%) there were the teacher's repeating the student's answer until the mistake occurs (10%) and asking the students to repeat (10%).

The survey reveals that primary school students are accustomed to teacher correction. This may be due to the deep-rooted teacher-centered teaching approach. Also the students would like the teacher to appreciate their progress and make some positive comment on their performance.

Even though the students were asked to choose only the method they like, they still gave reasons and justification for the methods they do not like. 50% of students don't like the teacher to correct the mistakes by exaggerating their voice. Their reason is that they are afraid of being laughed at by others and it can make them lose their confidence. 20% of students dislike self-correction and 30% of students dislike saying nothing about their mistakes. As far as the students' preference for teacher's correction is concerned, 70% of students prefer the teacher to correct every mistake. They explain that if the teachers were strict with them, they would make greater progress in their future language learning. In contrast, 30% students prefer the teacher have only the serious mistakes corrected for the reason that they might lose confidence and interest in learning English if the teachers were too particular about the mistakes they made.

Conclusion

It is very clear that individual students differ from each other in their attitudes towards errors and error correction. Before starting the process of correction and ensure that students are receptive to error correction, it is necessary to find out their preferences and attitudes towards correction and feedback. Being aware of these preferences and attitudes will help teachers to choose the appropriate way of correction and will help them serve their learners' needs (Fantozzi, 1998).

Knowing what errors to correct and when to correct them is crucial. Instead of correcting errors randomly, teachers should correct them systematically. They should concentrate on errors that hinder communication. If an error is likely to hinder comprehension or lead students into further errors, then it should be corrected. Besides, teachers should correct those errors which are

regularly repeated by students and those they consider to be the most serious. They should not correct every now and then in a way that affects learners' confidence or interest in learning.

In conclusion, teachers should be careful with regard to what error to correct and when should it be corrected and they should consider the nature of the activity (context) being undertaken. However, error correction should not always be the responsibility of teachers. Teachers should train their students to correct their own errors and give them the chance to do so.

Regarding to the peer correction method, a disadvantage is that it deprives the students of the opportunity to correct the error themselves. Moreover, some students hate to be corrected by their peers although they do not mind being corrected by the teacher. In spite of this, there is evidence that error correction by peers may be more likely to lead students to learning.

However, the repetitive use of the same type of feedback could be boring and may cause students to lose interest in finding out the reasons for their errors. All in all, the most important rule may be using a wide range of feedback alternatives, combining and mixing different methods and strategies to ensure the best possible results.

Recommendations

Even though, the conducted survey is valid and reliable, it is still a small-scale research whose results may not represent a general picture of this particular issue among Macedonian students. It should be taken into consideration that the number of participants is modest and in order to get results which may be generalized to the wider population it should be retaken again.

It is clearly visible that students and teachers both have very different attitudes when it comes to error and mistakes. The learning - teaching process should be based on transparency and mutual agreement regarding the error correction methods used in the classroom. By doing this both parties will have reached their goal successfully.

A very important aspect that should be taken into consideration is the context in which the error has occurred. Being aware of the context leads teachers either to correct immediately when an error is made, postpone the correction until the end of the activity or ignore the error. With regard to speaking activities (a context where the focus is on fluency), the usual advice is to delay feedback until the end of the activity so as to avoid interrupting the student's flow of speech. While in a pronunciation activity (a context where focus is on accuracy), students should be stopped immediately when they make a mistake, otherwise they will continue repeating it.

On the other hand, when it comes to correcting errors in writing, teachers can use some correction codes to indicate to students that there is an error instead of giving them the correction directly (e.g. writing the letter 'T' to indicate that the tense being used is wrong). Of course, these

correction codes should be explained to students in advance so that students are familiar with them. An example of this coding system is given in Hedge (2000:319). Teachers can also encourage students to use discovery techniques. For example, if a student makes an error while speaking, the teacher could say: “Excuse me?”, “Sorry, could you say that again?” or he could repeat the student’s sentence and stress the error to indicate that it is not correct. By doing so, the students will try to correct themselves and as a result, would be more confident when dealing with errors and less dependent on the teacher. Actually, there is much evidence that a self-discovery approach reduces the likelihood of students’ dependence on external assistance.

However, the most important aspect is implementing a wide variety of different methods and techniques in the error correction process so as to respond to everyone’s style and needs.

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