An Enriched Perspective Towards Corrective Feedback

Una Perspectiva Enriquecida para la Retroalimentación Correctiva

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Resumen

El presente ensayo analiza tres aspectos que la población docente debería tomar en cuenta al suministrar retroalimentación correctiva en el aprendizaje del inglés como segunda lengua. El primer aspecto es la medida en la cual el contexto y enfoque instruccional influencian la decisión de los docentes sobre el tiempo y el tipo de retroalimentación que se brinda. El segundo punto menciona cómo el análisis de los errores propios puede contribuir al corregir errores de los demás. El último aspecto es la forma en la que la población docente puede balancear sus preferencias y las de sus estudiantes al momento de suministrar dicha retroalimentación. Se establece una asociación entre las técnicas utilizadas para la corrección de errores y el contexto instruccional en el que se emplean (expectativas y antecedentes de los estudiantes, así como sus habilidades). Además, se examina la importancia de analizar los errores propios con el fin de preparar material correctivo relevante para la población estudiantil, a partir de la anticipación de sus posibles errores. Finalmente, se destaca la necesidad de procurar un ambiente en el cual puedan interactuar las preferencias sobre técnicas correctivas implícitas y/o explícitas que tiene la población estudiantil y la población docente.
Palabras clave: retroalimentación correctiva; contexto instruccional; fuente de errores; enfoque en forma; preferencias.

Abstract

Three aspects that teachers should consider when planning and providing corrective feedback (CF) in English as a Second Language teaching are analyzed in this essay: the extent to which the instructional context and focus influence teachers' decision about the timing and type of corrective feedback, how the analysis of one's error sources can contribute to the provision of CF, and in what way teachers can balance their preferences and those of their students towards CF techniques. The link between error correction and the instructional context in which the CF techniques used on teachers when they were learners and students' expectations, background, and current abilities is uncovered in this essay. Furthermore, this essay examines the importance of analyzing one's error sources in oral and written productions in order to promote autonomous students while strengthening their abilities through relevant material as their mistakes are anticipated. Finally, the significance of promoting a safe environment in which learners may interact with their teacher and providing scaffolded assistance through different explicit and implicit CF strategies are revealed to highlight the significance of integrating students' and teachers' preferences for specific types of CF and timing.
Keywords: Corrective Feedback; Instructional Context; Error Sources; Focus-on-Form;Focus-on-Forms; Preferences.

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I. Introduction

To err when putting into practice a specific knowledge in order to master it is an inherent quality of learning; however, detecting errors shows being a step forward on knowledge acquisition, and correcting them without any support already demonstrates an advanced proficiency level. Understanding the nature of errors in an instructional context can allow English as a Second Language (ESL) teachers to plan the activities they will develop in class to provide attuned assistance to their learners and strengthen their abilities. The instructor, then, will obtain resources that will help him or her to decide whether the best option to promote oral or written production will be reviewing the theory, supplying learners with more examples to illustrate rules, or engaging them in interesting exercises. Moreover, understanding the nature of errors will support instructors' information provision about learners' current linguistic developmental stage, which should raise students' awareness of the aspects that need to be reinforced and enable them to monitor themselves. Self-monitoring is more than only being able to correct oneself without further assistance; it is an important sign that students are already at an advanced level in language acquisition.

The literature on corrective feedback (CF) has highlighted that students and teachers have to deal with different perceptions towards corrective feedback. Li (2017) mentions that teachers are influenced by their own experiences when they decide the type of corrective feedback provision. In contrast, Lee (2013) and Schulz (2001) focus on the fact that learners' variables, like language proficiency or learning background, impact teachers' decisions regarding the manner they will treat errors. Some other scholars claim that in-class interaction influences students' attitudes towards certain language features and their motivation. Brosh (2017) demonstrated that teachers that did not discuss the reading that learners were supposed to read previously increased their apathy towards learning about grammar. Furthermore, the manner in which the teacher addresses their learners significantly impacts students' willingness to learn. Csaszar, Curry, and Lastrapes (2018) highlight the importance of establishing empathic relationships with students to motivate them to accomplish performance objectives as empathy makes learners feel that they matter. On the other hand, the type of assignments also influences perceptions towards CF, which can also be provided by employing peer-correction. Adams et al. (2019), Zamora, Suárez, and Ardura (2018), and Zamora and Sevilla (2011) agree that error-detection tasks significantly improve students' language performance. Adams et al. (2019) show the effectiveness of collaborative learning by assigning students to provide feedback to a peer and evaluate each other's feedback using a web-based platform. Zamora, Suárez, and Ardura (2018) point out that error-detection tasks make students improve their performance since they also train self-regulation skills, while Zamora and Sevilla (2011) revealed that their participants expanded their linguistic knowledge, which may lead them to depend less on teachers' feedback provision.

Furthermore, scholars argue that CF strategies may depend on the type of instruction and the assistance level required by the student. Pawlak (2014) links the use of corrective feedback to the different types of instruction: focus on form and focus on forms. The former deals with meaning-focused interaction in which there is brief attention to linguistic structures, while the latter emphasizes linguistic forms by presenting metalinguistic information such as grammar rules. Aljaafreh and Lantolf (1994) claim that effective CF depends on the level of assistance provided by instructors. Indeed, these authors proposed a regulatory scale based on Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), an area between the "actual developmental level of the learner and the level of potential development" (p. 467). Since focus-on-form instruction requires dynamic lessons, Willis (n.d.) helps teachers to plan several activities to promote students' participation such as matching or classifying tasks. Although Pawlak (2014) treats both instructional foci

separately, which teachers may perceive as having to choose only one option for their English classes, Spada and Lightbown (2008) discuss the benefits of integrating them depending on the language feature to be studied and the learners' characteristics.

The issue of finding the best manner to provide effective CF has received considerable critical attention. Some scholars point out that teachers and students bring different perceptions towards CF to the class; these points of view are closely related to instructors' personal experience and students' language skills. The literature reviewed above also shows that the relationship established between the teacher and students significantly impacts self-regulatory abilities. Moreover, other authors show that CF techniques are highly related to the type of instruction (focus on form, focus on forms, or both, depending on the subject matter being studied) and the assistance level needed by the students. In the following pages, attention will be centered on three aspects that teachers need to take into consideration when planning and providing CF strategies in English as a Second Language teaching: the extent to which the instructional context and focus influence teachers' decision about the timing and type of corrective feedback, how the analysis of one's error sources can contribute to the provision of CF, and in what way teachers can balance their preferences and those of their students towards CF techniques.

II. Factors affecting teachers' decisions about timing and type of corrective feedback

Affective factors influence teaching decisions in the instructional context. Indeed, Li (2017) states that "students' and teachers' attitudes toward corrective feedback may vary as a function of their experience and the instructional context" (p. 146). In other words, the manner in which teachers were given corrective feedback when they were also learners tends to shape the type of corrective feedback they will choose for their learners. For example, teachers

may prefer to use marginal comments as a technique to provide feedback on a written assignment because this same strategy was used by their instructors when they were university students. However, as Li (2017) and Schulz (2001) point out, students' preferences also play an important role in this matter, as they can be recognized by paying close attention to each students' responsive actions when applying any feedback strategy. For instance, teachers may perceive that delayed feedback may be effective for some students in their oral course, while others prefer to be corrected as soon as they produce an incorrect utterance. Moreover, following Lee (2013) and Schulz (2001), learner variables like the proficiency level also have an effect on teachers' choices regarding corrective feedback due to the students' responsive actions. For example, in comparison to beginner-level learners, advanced-level students are likely to effectively correct themselves with little or no support from their instructors. The previously mentioned authors state that teachers and students bring their preferences and skills regarding corrective feedback provision and reception to the classroom not to put one over the others, but to raise awareness of negotiation as it will always be key for instructors to promote improvement and for students to enhance their abilities.

The explicitness of feedback provision can increase or decrease depending on the learners' responsive actions, and scholars agree on the existence of significant mismatches between some of the teachers' and students' perceptions concerning error correction. In this respect, Li (2017), Lee (2013), and Schulz (2001) imply that instructors favor delayed and implicit (or indirect) feedback, while learners are keen to receive immediate and explicit (or direct) CF. Since teaching practices should be in agreement with students' needs and expectations for better results in the learning process, engaging in immediate and direct error correction should be taken into consideration depending on the classroom environment. For example, learners can become aware of the

errors they made by using recasts, which can also encourage self-correction. Nevertheless, there might be some students that may need the teacher to be more explicit and explain the correct language use. As learners reach more advanced proficiency levels, the explicitness of feedback provision may decrease; however, they should always be attentive to students' responsive actions to spot important discrepancies between the teachers' and students' perceptions concerning error correction as scholars mentioned above. Flexible teachers that adjust their feedback provision techniques may obtain students that are willing to know what their errors are and how to correct them.

Some learner variables have also proven to be very influential in teachers' decisions when treating learners' erroneous utterances. According to Lee (2013), beginners are not likely to recognize or respond positively to implicit correction, so they need explicit and direct interventions. A similar situation happens with intermediate-level context, where the language level, although higher, still does not always allow students to recognize implicit correction techniques. For example, intermediate students may be able to remember how to formulate questions in English; however, they fail to follow a correct grammar structure when it comes to reported questions, saying *Do you know where is the hospital?* instead of *Do you know where the hospital is?* In this case, the instructor may want to explicitly point this error out, correct it, and provide an explanation about the correct form of the language. On the other hand, students with high proficiency levels in the target language can more easily recognize implicit and indirect CF (Lee, 2013). Therefore, the type of feedback implemented in a specific teaching scenario should be linked to the learners' language proficiency level.

The second variable that influences instructors' decisions for providing CF is the learning context. Lee (2013) proposes the learners' educational background as another reason why they might prefer some feedback types over others. For instance, the

way students are taught and evaluated (Schulz, 2001), or more specifically, the approaches and methodologies used such as the traditional grammar-translation approach, rote-learning, memorization, or more communicative approaches may lead to habits and attitudes towards CF that could clash with instructors' preferred techniques. The language proficiency level and learning context are students' variables that influence instructors' decisions when treating erroneous utterances. Teachers should take into consideration how advanced the students' language skills are to decide the explicitness extent to which the CF will be provided. Furthermore, teachers' and students' educational backgrounds impact their perspectives towards CF techniques. The approaches and methodologies used by the learners' previous instructors may shape students' attitudes towards CF, which can be different from their current teachers' backgrounds.

The instructional focus also directs teachers' decisions about the timing and type of CF. Whereas the focus on form instruction drives learners' attention to the meaning of target language features during communicative tasks, focus on forms instruction highlights linguistic structures such as using the PPP (Presentation-Practice-Production) process. In focus-on-form instruction, corrective feedback appears to be driven by the needs of learners engaged in more meaning-based tasks. On this matter, Spada and Lightbown (2008) indicate that focus-on-form instruction seems to be particularly useful in classrooms where learners err due to misleading similarities between their first language and the one they are acquiring. Since differences between the two languages need to be shown and this type of instruction requires teachers to plan dynamic lessons to promote students' participation, Willis (n.d.) suggests entertaining activities like matching or classifying tasks to introduce keywords extracted from the topic to be studied. Regarding incorrect oral utterances, Pawlak (2014) points out that the instructional focus may depend on "whether or not an error committed by the learner triggers a communication breakdown."

(p. 26). CF provision based on conversational focus-on-form instruction will be useful to address errors related to unintelligible statements; however, if the communication flow is not interrupted, the incorrect utterance may be approached from a didactic focus-on-form instruction perspective. On the other hand, corrective feedback is an inherent characteristic of a focus-on-forms instruction. In this case, learners' need for assistance ranges from explicit to implicit, using first accuracy-based activities and then fluency-oriented activities as teachers gradually move within the PPP process. According to Pawlak (2014), during the presentation stage, the teacher may provide immediate CF related to the accurate use of the target language when learners err. Then, explicit corrective feedback will be needed during the practice stage as it requires an additional explanation of the linguistic feature being studied. Finally, after learners have trained enough, CF will be focused on fluency and the development of self-monitoring in which learners acquire more language independence.

III. Error sources in one's production

The analysis of error sources in one's oral and written production may contribute to providing pertinent corrective feedback to learners since this examination may build more empathic teachers that promote students' autonomy. Errors can be both a source of learning and teaching because as part of the teachers' learning process, they have also erred and have been corrected through CF. Therefore, teachers can show empathy and interest in supporting their students to enhance their performance and achieve the required knowledge level. In fact, Csaszar, Curry, and Lastrapes (2018) indicate that students feel encouraged to do greater task attempts and accomplish performance objectives through empathy. Moreover, by analyzing the source of their errors, instructors may foster self-correction and peer-correction strategies to promote autonomy among their learners. Zamora and Sevilla (2011) proved that self-correction (monitoring of personal errors) and peer-correction (monitoring of others'

errors) foster one's confidence and autonomy to improve language skills and develop significant self-teaching skills. Because there are often more students than teachers in a classroom, teachers can encourage peer-correction to both streamline and personalize the corrective feedback provision required by their students. Peer-correction also encourages students to support each other and develop self-teaching skills as Zamora and Sevilla (2011) state. Their research participants "affirmed not only to have enhanced their own confidence [by strengthening the knowledge they have already acquired] but to have learned [how] to help their peers through the class activities" (para. 8, Section 3.2). In short, analyzing one's oral and written production sources of errors gives rise to pertinent corrective feedback to learners due to empathic teachers that motivate them to improve their performance and also promote a certain level of autonomy in their students through peer correction.

The analysis of one's error sources may also help to anticipate learners' errors and prepare pertinent materials before the lesson to prevent students from making the same errors as those of their teachers. Learning from one's errors leads to knowing how to address them. When planning the following classes, teachers may detect potential sources of errors since they are allowed to recall their personal experience. This early error identification can allow teachers to build a relatively controlled environment in which they will know how to address errors before they happen by elaborating more examples to help students recognize the correct form, creating audio-visual materials to help them listen to the correct pronunciation of words, or developing activities in which learners can participate while they put into practice the grammar rules they will study. Other scholars mention some options that can be adopted with almost all types of errors that may arise due to the topic of the lessons. Conducting error-detection tasks is suggested by Adams et al. (2019), and they mention that errors have to be identified and corrected by explaining how to do it and the reason for doing it in that way. If teachers reflect on their

sources of errors, they may address students' errors before they occur by preparing pertinent tools in advance, preventing students from making the same errors as those of their instructors.

IV. Integrating students' preferred types and timing of feedback

Teachers can integrate their students' preferences for specific types and timing of feedback into their practice and find a balance between those preferences and their own preferred CF techniques. Promoting a safe environment in which learners feel free to interact with their instructors is key to balancing students' and teachers' likes towards CF. Expecting pupils to absorb knowledge only by reading the textbook or listening to a lecture and putting it into practice almost immediately is unrealistic. In fact, Brosh (2017) points out that several of the participants of his study "reported that what made the grammar-learning experience particularly unfavorably was when the Arabic instructor took for granted that the students understood grammatical features just by reading explanations in the textbook" (p. 42). In other words, learners were not provided with a space in which they could clarify any doubts regarding what they read. This attitude may make students think that the teacher is not concerned about students understanding the material, which possibly makes them feel intimidated. If students perceive the teacher as a person, they cannot access to seek assistance, they will likely have more difficulty receiving corrective feedback. Therefore, instructors need to build a strong bridge between them and their students through communication to supply the type of assistance that learners need.

Providing scaffolded assistance in which the teacher may experiment with different explicit and implicit CF strategies may help create a balance between students' and teachers' preferences towards CF techniques. As part of this scaffolding process, instructors may explore different explicit, implicit, immediate, and delayed CF strategies. Schulz (2001)

claims that "it is important that teachers explore their students' perceptions regarding those factors believed to enhance the learning of a new language and make efforts to deal with potential conflicts between student beliefs and instructional practices" (p. 244). A useful manner in which teachers may discover the CF technique that works best for students is by applying several of them and observing which produces more responsive actions. On this subject, Aljaafreh and Lantolf (1994) proposed a regulatory scale based on Vygotsky's theory on the Zone of Proximal Development to effectively provide feedback in which an expert has to "estimate the minimum level of guidance required by the novice to successfully perform a given task" (p. 268). This scale allows teachers to gradually contribute with that guidance by putting into practice several CF strategies that can range from explicit to implicit depending on the students' skills and responses. Moreover, by supporting teachers' CF supply with their regulatory scale, Aljaafreh and Lantolf (1994) call teachers to promote a negotiation on corrective feedback methods to make students learn from their errors and develop self-monitoring abilities. While experimenting with different corrective techniques and exposing learners to them, the teacher can identify and apply the strategies that both parties feel are effective. Therefore, a scaffolded assistance benefits teachers and students; the former obtains several opportunities to experiment with various CF techniques until he or she discovers the most adequate ones and the latter gradually gets the support that is needed to improve his or her language skills.

V. Conclusion

In conclusion, the purpose of this paper was to present several options to bring CF in order to manage students' errors. The extent to which the instructional context and focus influence teachers' decisions about the timing and type of corrective feedback, the importance of analyzing one's error sources, and the relevance of keeping a balance of teachers' and students have been established

above. A critically-oriented teacher regarding corrective feedback provision is flexible, as he or she regulates his or her assistance considering the learners' needs. Learners' responsive actions will contribute to determining the explicitness level they need in order not only to identify their errors but also to eventually produce the correct form without teachers' support. Furthermore, a critically-oriented teacher regarding corrective feedback provision can select appropriate strategies depending on the instructional focus. Form-focused instruction requires communicative tasks that emphasize the meaning of a language feature. On the other hand, the focus-on-forms type of instructional context allows the teacher to use strategies depending on the phase of the PPP process in which learners are, which will gradually change from explicit to implicit. Teachers and learners cannot be detached from their attitudes and preferences towards corrective feedback. While instructors may bring their useful tools from their personal and professional backgrounds, they should be observing their students' responsive moves to find a balance between what teachers and learners expect from each other. Using recasts to provide CF may sound adequate in the teacher's head, but if students are not able to understand this technique, the instructor will need to immediately change his or her approach.

As with any other practice, providing feedback is a learned action that can improve as long as the professional is willing to reconsider his or her beliefs and usual teaching practices. This can be achieved through self-assessment and ongoing education programs such as feedback and error correction workshops. Students are not the only people who need to be assessed and instructed, so do teachers. Consequently, part of the teachers' duties is to provide students with a holistic education that remains updated with state-of-the-art instructional practices. Complying with all the requirements of a course of this kind helps to raise instructors' awareness of the fact that individual perceptions and opinions concerning certain topics are not entirely reliable all the time. Instructors should

not assume that their actions are always correct just because they are the expert ones. Even when the professor's intentions are to benefit students, it does not precisely mean that the former is doing the right thing or the best thing for the latter. Moreover, despite the desire to help students, which is part of the calling, an instructor may take actions that do not go together with what they want or expect from him or her. Therefore, a teacher that is willing to implement the necessary changes and even adapt personal habits in the teaching practice is more likely to become a critically oriented professional. Through continuing education and self-assessment or self-reflection, instructors can learn and implement new perspectives of subject matters of the learning process such as error correction, and ultimately, achieve that goal.

The corrective feedback process is necessary and justifies the appropriate assistance level through participatory teaching, which allows learners not only to acquire knowledge but also to put it into practice. Therefore, this turns the teacher into a guide that approaches interventions by selecting the most appropriate type of feedback depending on the instructional context and focus they were assigned to. Seen from new instructional perspectives, dialogue is key to creating a respectful and empathic environment in which errors are welcomed as part of the learning process. Indeed, it is necessary that the process of identifying and correcting errors generates an educational symbiosis in which teachers identify their shortcomings through their learners' feedback. Teachers should not be seen as the only givers but also as receivers. While learners seem to be only receiving CF, they are also learning CF strategies to apply with their peers or even when there is an opportunity to give feedback to their teachers, and this must be part of instructors' introspection to grow as professionals.

Moreover, raising awareness of the learners being the center of their knowledge acquisition not only allows them to acquire and put into practice knowledge but also makes teachers experiment

with different CF techniques until they find the ones that are the best for the learners they have at that moment. Times change, and so do people. Utilizing techniques that are now obsolete will turn English lessons into stressful or boring activities that will prevent learners from acquiring a second language. Planning classes should involve appropriate strategies that will gradually let students achieve language independence, and cause learners to need less support from teachers. Therefore, taking into consideration a regulatory scale that measures the level of assistance required by learners, and applying different implicit and explicit corrective feedback techniques drawn from the course readings, should undoubtedly transform learners' perspectives towards errors.

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