

Perception of Effective Error Correction Techniques for Oral Production

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Abstract

The present study was conducted with 74 students from five Oral Communication courses in the English major at the Modern Languages School at University of Costa Rica. The research aimed at determining the most effective techniques used to correct oral production errors, an aspect of teaching which has long been discussed by educators and researchers. Taking into account the reviewed literature regarding the topic, three instruments were designed: a class observation checklist, a semantic scale regarding error correction for students and a questionnaire addressed to professors. A group sample of each of the five courses was surveyed along with their professors to identify the either positive or negative views on present error correction techniques. In general, students revealed their views of corrections as *useful, clear, consistent, positive, and constructive*. Moreover, professors indicated that covert corrections were effective for their students and used the most in their courses. As a conclusion, each professor is encouraged to explore and discover the error correction strategy which best suits students according to level and personality. This discovery should always be subject to change, for effective techniques for one group of students may vary from another.

Key words: error, error correction technique, effectiveness, oral production, overt correction, covert correction, recasting

Resumen

La investigación se llevó a cabo con 74 estudiantes de cinco cursos de Comunicación Oral del bachillerato en Inglés de la Escuela de Lenguas Modernas en la Universidad de Costa Rica. El objetivo del estudio consistió en identificar las técnicas más efectivas de evaluación de errores en la producción oral. Este aspecto de la enseñanza ha tenido muchas opiniones contrapuestas por parte de docentes e investigadores. Se encuestó a un grupo de cada curso junto con sus profesores para determinar si su perspectiva acerca de la corrección de errores dentro de los cursos concurrentes era negativa o positiva. Se utilizaron tres instrumentos: una

observación de clases, una escala semántica acerca de la corrección de errores para estudiantes y un cuestionario para docentes. Los resultados mostraron que los estudiantes en general percibieron la corrección de errores como útil, clara, consistente, positiva y constructiva. Además, los profesores se inclinaron por las técnicas de corrección encubierta como las más efectivas para enfrentar los errores de producción oral de los estudiantes. Como conclusión, se sugiere que cada profesor explore y descubra la técnica que rinda mejores resultados y se adapte mejor tanto a las necesidades del nivel lingüístico como a la personalidad de los estudiantes. Este descubrimiento debe estar sujeto a ser modificado, pues las técnicas más efectivas de corrección de errores pueden variar de un grupo de estudiantes a otro.

Palabras claves: error, técnica de corrección de errores, efectividad, producción oral, corrección explícita, corrección implícita, reformulación

Throughout the language learning process, students inevitably face imperfection in their production. Learners advance through stages of second language (L2) attainment when taught to identify their errors and understand the other language's differences in structures. Errors possess thus valuable implications for teaching. By means of error correction, teachers may raise students' awareness of the target language, providing the necessary input towards their gradual acquisition. Nonetheless, error correction techniques must be cautiously selected in order for them to be effective. Language pedagogy researchers constantly dispute the value or not of correction, whether to correct directly or indirectly (Ding, 2012; Larsen-Freeman, 2003; Thornbury, 1999; Harmer, 1998; Celce-Murcia; 1996; Edge, 1989; Krashen & Terrell, 1983). Since effective error correction techniques have not yet been ratified, additional research is needed. The

present paper examines the most effective techniques used in oral courses at the School of Modern Languages at UCR to correct pronunciation, lexical and grammatical production errors. Furthermore, the students provided their reactions towards the corrections made. The study will also analyze the possible reasons behind professors' choice of error correction types.

The main objectives of this study were:

- To determine whether error correction is seen by students as positive and needed
- To identify the error correction techniques used the most by Oral Communication professors and the causes behind that preference
- To categorize the most effective techniques for error correction in oral production
- The following section reviews the most important perspectives on the topic.

Review of Literature

There are many contrasting views on the way to appropriately correct students. Some argue that learners should be made aware of their error, hence, to correct in a direct manner; others discuss the need to indirectly recast students' utterances, correcting with more tactful techniques. Another element which determines the need for error correction is the type of error committed by students; by identifying the error type, teachers can prioritize the errors to decide the right timing to correct. The present review, organized in a thematic way, will examine a variety of opinions regarding researchers' perception of effective error correction techniques.

The Concept of Error

The notion of error has been scrutinized by diverse linguistic approaches. Behaviorists, for instance, viewed errors as negative results of the language learning process, considered "bad habits" which need to be eradicated. In 1967, S. Pit Corder presented an innovative theory on error analysis, deeming errors as "sources of insight into the learning process", providing information on the development of an individual's system of language (Saville-Troike, 2006, p. 38). Similarly, Corder (as cited in Saville-Troike, 2006) asserts errors are "a way the learner has of testing his hypothesis about the nature of the language he is learning" (p. 39). With the purpose of a better comprehension on the concept of error, Corder suggested a distinction from the concept of mistake.

Errors could be defined as "inappropriate utterances which result from learner's lack of L2 knowledge," whereas mistakes refer to "inappropriate language production that results from some kind of processing failure such as lapse of memory" (Saville-Troike, 2006, p.188 &191). Errors need to be corrected for they denote unawareness of the L2's structures and rules; mistakes are understood as random performance errors, liable to be self-corrected when consciously detected (James as cited in Douglas Brown, 2000, p. 217). On the other hand, there is some subjectivity in teachers or researchers' assumption regarding this attempted classification, as can be seen in the following quote "it is not always clear whether an error is the product of random processes, or the product of a developing but inexact system. For example, it may be the case that the learner knows the right rule, but in the heat of the moment, has failed to apply it" (Thornbury, 1999, p.115). In other words, occasionally there is no clear-cut distinction between the types of students' performance errors.

Yet another view of correction is reflected on Larsen-Freeman's (2003) suggested term: *feedback*. The attempt is clearly stated to distance learners from the externally norm-referenced notion of error correction. Feedback has a "less punitive connotation" (p. 123). Throughout the research, these three notions will be used interchangeably.

Types of Errors in Oral Production

According to Pit Corder's Error Analysis theory, once identified errors should first be classified in order to

perceive their cause (Douglas Brown, 2000). The categories of errors are usually divided into lexical, grammar, discourse and pronunciation errors, although they do not always fit neatly in these divisions (Thornbury, 1999). These errors refer to word level and verb form/tense confusion, as well as to sentence orders in texts. Pronunciation errors are frequent targets for correction, especially when teaching oral communication courses. The sounds of each language system are vital to convey words with correct meaning, consequently “if learners mispronounce key sounds, it can seem like they are producing ungrammatical utterances” (Bailey, 2005, p. 71). Hence, the need to identify and correct pronunciation errors is founded on a communication basis.

Pronunciation refers to sounds, stress, pitch and intonation. For instance, the divisible units of sound, called phonemes, would require explicit teaching, repetition and correction (Bailey, 2005, p.10). Appropriate pronunciation requires students to practice both vowel and consonant production in places and manners of articulation which are uncommon or non-existent regarding their L1. This fact is supported by Flores and Rodriguez's (1994) study on consonant cluster production. They confirmed their hypothesis on a small sample of students that “word-final consonant clusters represent a bigger problem for Spanish speakers because Spanish has fewer and less complex consonant clusters than English”, for even though Spanish permits syllable-initial and syllable-medial clusters, “syllable-final ones are rare” (Stockwell and Howell, as cited in Flores and Rodriguez, 1994, p. 102). Hence, leading researchers on

pronunciation for English as a Second Language (ESL) have addressed the need to “establish specific priorities for the ESL pronunciation classroom” (Prator, Parish, Morley and Stevick as cited in Crawford, 1987). Teachers should aspire to gradually guide learners towards accurate verbalization, by means of a careful plan of teaching and correcting.

Furthermore, Larsen-Freeman (2003) observes that accuracy and correctness are not emphasized in every activity. At times, instant improvement is sought for, even if this objectively possesses no immediate quantifiable results. In terms of accuracy, the more teachers solely center on form, the less natural language production would seem to be (Edge, 1989). When teaching speaking, both accuracy and fluency are likely goals. Nevertheless, teachers should bear in mind that the aim of communicative activities is to convey meaning; thus “constant interruption from the teacher will destroy the purpose of the speaking activity” (Harmer, 1998, p.94). Alternatively, teachers can address individual sounds which are worth correcting in general during open class discussion.

Causes of Errors

The causes of errors are numerous, although researchers mainly mention: language transfer, developmental errors, fossilization, as well as lack of will to improve, anxiety, demotivation, among other sociolinguistic variables (Thornbury, 1999; Douglas Brown, 2000; Laroy, 1995). Transfer can be either positive or negative. These interlingual errors are derived

from either the same L2's complex nature, or considered interference from L1 structures. The research on language transfer for consonant clusters, cited above, offered insight on Spanish speakers' tendencies on pronunciation. Flores and Rodriguez (1994) concluded that the phonological processes in each of the syllable positions manifested a systematic choice influenced by the L1. On the other hand, overgeneralizing exemplifies developmental errors – also called intralingual errors-- which are naturally produced by the acquisition of L2 rules, within a “process of hypothesis formation and testing” (Thornbury, 1999, p. 115). Yet another cause is fossilization, a state which is generally accepted as a certain fixed period, where learners cease to develop their L2 learning before reaching the target norms, despite constant L2 exposure (Saville-Troike, 2006).

The work of Hendrickson (as cited in Douglas Brown, 2000) provides yet another classification between global and local errors. The essential underlying matter disputed is the communication of meaning. Local errors are slips of tongue or mental lapse, which need no to be corrected, similar to the notion of mistakes, mentioned before. Global errors hinder productive communication, thus they “need to be treated in some way since the message may otherwise remain garbled” (Douglas Brown, 2000, p. 237).

Larsen-Freeman (2003) expands on the causes of errors by considering student's language knowledge acquired by formal L2 instruction, as can be seen in the following quote: “tutored learners tend to make errors of commission; they overuse forms, presumably because the forms have received attention during

instruction. Untutored learners, on the other hand, tend to make errors of omission; they tend not to use certain structures” (p.128). Other psychological limitations which may cause errors and mistakes are memory capacity and attention span. The above mentioned factors lead us to the need of actually correcting these errors.

Error Correction

As Larsen-Freeman (2003) perceptively states, “treatment of learner errors is one of the most controversial areas in language pedagogy” (p.124). Negative feedback has been arguably considered unnecessary, counter productive and harmful by some second language acquisition researchers. This correction is said to provoke anxiety on the learner. The criticized features for negative error correction are predominantly its being “futile, ambiguous, inconsistent and harmful” (Larsen-Freeman, 2003, p.127). In this sense, Ellis (2009) pointed out that professors' feedback is perceived as imprecise and inconsistent for “it is likely that teachers respond intuitively to particular errors committed by individual students rather than knowingly in accordance with some predetermined error-correction policy”(p.8-9). Another source of inconsistency is correcting some students' errors and ignoring other students' similar errors (Ellis, 2009). Furthermore, systematic correction of methods like audio-lingualism has created considerable tension in classroom environments over the years (Laroy, 1995). Consequently, lack of correction has been proliferated, causing damaging effects on the learner's language development.

The utmost counterargument maintains that errors should not be tolerated at all. Behaviorists feel that error prevention aids bad habit formation in the individual and the learning group as a whole. This objective from the introduction of an English course book exemplifies their belief: "Students should be trained to learn by making as few mistakes as possible... He must be trained to adopt correct learning habits right from the start" (Alexander as cited in Thornbury, 1999, p.116). The immediate correction of errors, thus, is seen as the only medicament that can prevent the infection of ignorance.

Nevertheless, a moderate view on correction addresses errors as an inevitable element of the language learning process. Errors helpfully illustrate students' L2 comprehension, "making a system develop beyond the set point of the norms, stimulating the creative pattern-formation process that results in linguistic novelty or morphogenesis" (p. 130). As an example, the work of Cathcart and Olsen (1976) indicated that students' will to be corrected encountered a sharp contrast to teachers' perception of correcting as harmful to students' motivation (as cited in Larsen-Freeman, 2003, p. 126). Similarly, in recent years, Schulz (2001) surveyed Colombian and U.S. foreign language teachers and their students and found agreement on the value of error correction. In terms of pronunciation, correction is vital, as mentioned before. To quote Flores and Rodríguez (1994), "learners need to be aware of the errors they make and the differences between L1 and L2. Closer approximations to the native accent, with instances of backsliding, will be made by the students if errors are taken as

a tool to build up and not to destroy" (p.109). Once students discover their own flaws in articulation, they will find ways to imitate and practice native like accents.

Types of Error Correction

Error correction techniques are generally divided into covert and overt corrections. Overt correction techniques include direct correction of a learner's error. Seen as clear negative feedback, much criticism of error correction is due to the wrong usage of this technique (Larsen-Freeman, 2003; Douglas Brown, 2000; Thornbury, 1999; Edge, 1989). The other set of techniques is labeled as covert, meaning the way of correcting is cast indirectly. Some examples of these types of error correction techniques are shown in Table 1.

Thornbury (1999) illustrates some direct correction techniques such as giving *No* for a response; directly pointing out the mistake and offering a group explanation; or by asking the rest of the students to reformulate the question. The most common covert techniques are recasting of students' statement with an emphasis on the corrected word; repetition of the incorrect statement in a quizzical way; or the elicitation of a student's utterances up to the point of the error occurrence. Moreover, teachers recurrently use clarification requests to cue self-correction. Students don't always consciously grasp their error, but they seem to self-correct themselves after repeating their message. Yet another error correction technique is its delay, to not interrupt the flow of speech. Teachers

Table 1
Error Correction Techniques

Error correction Technique	Definition	Example
I. Covert		
Elicitation	The corrector repeats part of the learner utterance but not the erroneous part and uses rising intonation to signal the learner should complete it.	L: I'll come if it will not rain. T: I'll come if it?
Repetition	The corrector repeats the learner utterance highlighting the error by means of emphatic stress.	L: I will showed you. T: I will SHOWED you. L: I'll show you.
Recast/ Reformulation	The corrector incorporates the content words of the immediately preceding incorrect utterance and changes and corrects the utterance in some way (e.g. phonological, syntactic, morphological or lexical).	L: There is two States T: There are two States
Clarification	The corrector indicates that he/she has not understood what the learner said.	L: boud T: Ok, again? L: bought T: exactly
Delayed correction	The corrector hears the error, jots it down and comments it at the end.	
II. Overt		
Explicit correction	The corrector indicates an error has been committed, identifies the error and provides the correction.	L: On May. T: Not on May, in May. We say, "It will start in May."

Note: Definitions and examples were taken from classroom observations at UCR and from Ellis (2009), p. 9.

say nothing, write the phrase down and comment on it later.

Edge (1989) observed the efficiency of self-correction and peer correction particularly in speaking activities inside the classroom. If students are able to self-correct or notice errors from their classmates, teachers may deduce that the language structures and the pronunciation are understood. When realizing the inability to correct, teachers may infer that the specific point has not yet been generally learned. Nonetheless, as Lynch (1996)

points out, "learners rarely pick up each other's errors, even in the short term" (p. 111). Self-correction apparently does not automatically generate clear-cut awareness of students' errors.

Effectiveness

Once having stated the types of techniques, the question of their effectiveness emerges. Investigations on effective error correction can be judged as highly subjective; hence, some minimum

guidelines are needed to define the term *effective*. Larsen-Freeman (2003) contributes to the notion of effectiveness by claiming that error correction should be judicious, affectively supportive and nonjudgmental; she also mentions that appropriate techniques should be used. The first characteristic refers to the correction of newly learned structures, as well as global errors, but not mistakes, or slips of tongue. Secondly, learners must feel comfortable when they are corrected; thus, teachers must take their personalities into account, identifying extremely cautious learners or more impulsive ones, for instance. Nonjudgmental refers to both cognitive and affective information transmitted through the teacher-learner relationship, as Vigil and Oller (as cited in Douglas Brown, 2000) comment:

Affective information is primarily encoded in terms of kinesics mechanisms such as gestures, tone of voice and facial expressions, while cognitive information [facts, suppositions, beliefs] is usually conveyed by means of linguistic devices (sounds, phrases, structures, discourse). The feedback the learners get from their audience [teachers] can be either positive, neutral, or negative. (p. 232)

Thornbury (1999) noted that appropriate techniques vary according to level, personality and activity. Covert or overt error corrections are implemented by teachers to help students identify what is being said incorrectly. Moreover, Ellis (2009) mentions that “Teacher educators have been understandably reluctant to prescribe or proscribe the strategies that teachers should use” (p.10). On one hand, a

number of researchers claim that there should be no direct treatment of an error, as is the case of Krashen and Terrell (as cited in Douglas Brown, 2000, p.237). They allegedly argue that reformulation is more naturally a real-world procedure; therefore, “the satisfaction of successful communication will relax the students” and “open” them into long-term learning (Bartram & Walton, 1991, p.53). Research by Ding (2012) suggests that “recasts provide learners with correct reformulations and exemplars of the target features and thus constitute part of the input in class”(p.87). Moreover, Loewen and Philp (2006, as cited in Ding, p.88) described recasts as “pedagogically expeditious” and “time-saving”; as students perform in communicative tasks, they focus on meaning while teachers recast and monitor linguistic form. On the other hand, Nicholas, Lightbrown, and Spada (2001) endorse recasting as an effective tool for correction, provided that students feel no sense of ambiguity due to the acknowledgement of the error. Similarly, many other linguists support the technique of writing down the error, and commenting about it later (Thornbury, 1999; Harmer, 1998; Celce-Murcia, 1996; Edge, 1989). In this sense, Celce-Murcia advises to “keep an informal written tally of errors for later correction” (p. 351). These views stand in contrast to the excess of correction, producing hammering in teaching and therefore, learners’ probable refusal to improve.

Nevertheless, some learners reach a point where they seek explicit discussion of their particular problems, and consequently, they do not really mind explicit feedback. At the same time, overt corrections are said to be

necessary, when other forms of correction fail; the teacher then proceeds to give an explanation and an example, when needed. For instance, beginner students need to be corrected directly, for there is no background knowledge of the studied structures. A study conducted in 2006 at the School of Modern Languages in UCR confirmed this idea (Abarca, 2008). When asked, a group of 23 students from LM 1001 Integrated English course replied that they wanted to be corrected explicitly to know “where the mistake was” and “which correct form [had] to be used” (Abarca, 2008, p. 25). Nonetheless, teachers should be cautious when correcting overtly, for they may favor teaching methodologies which over-used this technique in the past (Navarro-Thames, 1994; Bailey, 2005). The tendency to react to errors immediately should be restrained to first deliberate over the circumstances of the correction; as Larsen-Freeman (2003) states, “[learner] adjustments cannot be determined a priori; rather they must be collaboratively negotiated on-line with the learner” (p.136).

The evidence seems to be strong that the more resources and correction techniques are used, the better the learner’s language development tends to be. There is no single error correction technique which can be regarded as the sole key to effective learning (Lynch, 1996). Douglas Brown (2000) states that the task of the teacher must be the discernment of “the optimal tension between positive and negative feedback: providing enough green lights to encourage continued communication, but not so many that crucial errors go unnoticed” (p. 236). Therefore, error correction becomes

effective when conveniently adapted to student’s learning, for once the teacher develops a repertoire of techniques “that can be deployed as appropriate”, feedback is then adjusted to the individual learner: “giving students evaluative information on their linguistic performance in a nonjudgmental manner, while being affectively supportive of them and their efforts, may be the best combination to strive for” (Larsen-Freeman, 2003, p.136-138). Hence, judgmental correction regarding appropriate timing in class and every student’s needs is more relevant for better teaching and learning outcomes.

Methodology

Setting and Subjects

The present research study was carried out in the School of Modern Languages at Universidad de Costa Rica. As part of the BA program in English, second to fourth year majors take six specific oral communication courses to improve their speaking skills: two Oral Communication courses, three Communication and Pronunciation Techniques and an Intercultural Communication course. The courses are offered six hours per week for second and third year majors, and four hours for the fourth year majors, in semesters of sixteen-weeks.

The data was collected in a sample group of the first five oral courses of the program: LM 1230 Oral Communication I, LM 1240 Oral Communication II, LM 1351 Communication and Pronunciation Techniques I, LM 1361 Communication and Pronunciation Techniques II and LM 1471 Communication and Pronunciation Techniques

III. The total number of students that answered the survey was 74. In addition, their five professors completed another survey on effective correction techniques. Two of these professors have been teaching for more than 16 years; two, from 9 to 15 years; and only one professor checked 5 to 8 years of teaching experience.

Instruments and Procedures

Three instruments were designed to gather information on the error correction techniques used in the class, as well as the professors' and the students' perceptions of their effectiveness. The first instrument consisted of a class checklist designed to record the frequency of six types of error correction techniques, as well as an outsider's perception of both the professors' and students' reaction towards correction of pronunciation errors during the English class (see Appendix A). The first three oral courses were observed during a two-week period in May-June 2013. The goal of this observation was to gather a sample concerning error correction and compare it to the data collected from the other two instruments. Each course was observed once.

The second instrument was designed to obtain real feedback from students, that is, their honest description of the corrections made on their pronunciation errors (see Appendix B). The instrument was a semantic scale to collect data concerning the criticisms to error correction discussed in the review of the literature. It included the terms *futile*, *ambiguous*, *harmful* and *inconsistent* (Larsen-Freeman, 2003, p.127). The scale was designed

on a 4 to 1 basis, being 4 and 3 positive words and 2 and 1 their negative counterparts. The instrument was administered to the students from the five mentioned courses. Students were also asked whether they needed or wanted to be corrected more frequently.

The last instrument was a questionnaire intended for the professors of the five courses mentioned (see Appendix C). This data shed light on the reasons behind their particular choice of error correction techniques. The professors were also inquired about their avoidance of any particular technique. The gathered information provides valuable information about their perceptions on effective error correction techniques. The data collected was then compared with the opinions expressed in the review of literature.

The data collected will be discussed in chronological order from each of the three instruments used in the section below.

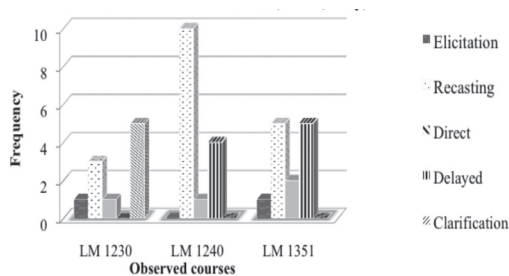
Results and Discussion

The results of the analysis provided some insight on the perceived effectiveness and daily use of error correction techniques. Using the information gathered through the first instrument (see Appendix A), the researcher tallied the frequency of error correction types observed in the three oral courses. A significant pattern emerged from each class observation, for the most frequent type of error correction technique used was covert, particularly the recasting technique (see Figure 1).

The students' utterances were reformulated by the professors either partially or completely with the error

corrected. Another covert technique used frequently by two of the professors was *delayed correction*, when the professors write down an error and comment on it afterwards. This technique is constantly selected by experts as the most effective, as was mentioned in the review of literature (Thornbury, 1999; Harmer, 1998; Celce-Murcia, 1996; Edge, 1989). *Clarification* was yet another implicate technique that one of the professors recurrently chose. *Elicitation*, repeating the students' utterances up to the point of the error but giving the students an opportunity to become aware of the error and produce the corrected word or sound, was a technique that was hardly used. A relevant factor from Figure 1 is the little use of *explicit* or *direct* correction. Although there is much controversy related to its use, many students expect professors to correct explicitly, for direct correction is an unambiguous manner of helping students to notice their own errors. More information was given in the professors' questionnaire.

Figure 1
Types of Error Correction Observed
in 3 Oral Communication Courses,
UCR, May, 2013



Source: Observation checklist

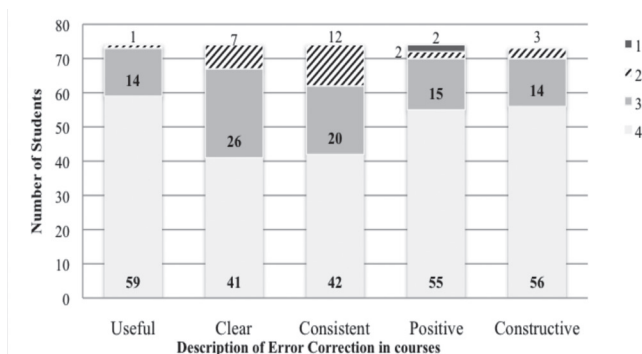
Regarding *clarification*, some students in LM 1230 repeatedly asked

teachers for the reasons behind the correct pronunciation of a word. Similarly, in LM 1240, two students stopped their speech to ask for the professors' clarification of specific pronunciation; they were uncertain about the pronunciation of a word, and needed confirmation that they were producing it correctly. Throughout the observed courses, positive correction from the professors was observed, as well as positive or neutral reactions from the recipients of the correction. This judgment was verified by means of the student survey.

The student survey (see Appendix B) indicated that the pronunciation of 71 students had been personally corrected; only 3 students replied that they had not been corrected throughout the course. These students were taking to LM 1361 and LM 1471. The semantic scale used in the survey contrasted the adjectives *-futile*, *ambiguous*, *inconsistent* and *harmful*- used by authors who opposed error correction with positive adjectives. Most students remarked that corrections were useful, clear, consistent, positive and constructive, as can be seen in Figure 2 below, using the 3-4 scale. The 2-1 scale implied the negative features.

The most outstanding finding is that 99% of students described error correction as *useful*. Moreover, despite the widespread belief that negative feedback is counter-productive and de-motivating, 95% of the students perceived the correction of their pronunciation errors as *constructive* and *positive*. This was a general comment from 70 students who checked *constructive* and *positive* with either 4 or 3 in the scale. Nevertheless, four students checked 2 or 1 to describe the corrections as *negative*, while three others

Figure 2
Students' Evaluation of Error Correction in
5 Oral Communication Courses, UCR, May, 2013



Source: Semantic Scale in Student Questionnaire

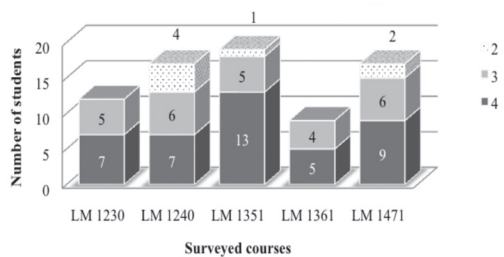
checked 2 to say the corrections were *harmful*. In general there was at least one student from each of the five courses which gave these answers, which is a fair percentage seen as a whole.

The two items that presented slight variations were the adjectives *clear* and *consistent*. In terms of clarity of correction, even though 41 students replied that the corrections had been completely *clear* within the 4-1 scale, 26 students checked 3; and still 7 checked 2, closer then to an *ambiguous* description of corrections. Four of these last replies came

from students in LM 1240; one from LM 1351; and two students from LM 1471 as can be seen in Figure 3.

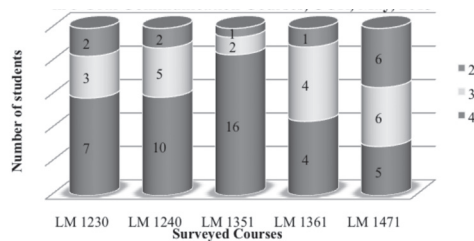
In other words, seven students wanted a clearer correction from the professors, in order to understand the error better. As for *consistency*, 42 students out of 74 described corrections as *consistent*. However, 12 students checked inconsistent with 2. The answers of the number of students per course can be seen in Figure 4 below. A significant pattern is the data shown from LM 1361 and LM 1471, for there is

Figure 3
Students' Perception of Clear Error
Corrections in 5 Oral Communication
Courses, UCR, May, 2013



Source: Semantic Scale in Student Questionnaire

Figure 4
Students' Perception of Consistent
Error Corrections in 5 Oral
Communication Courses,
UCR, May, 2013



Source: Semantic Scale in Student Questionnaire

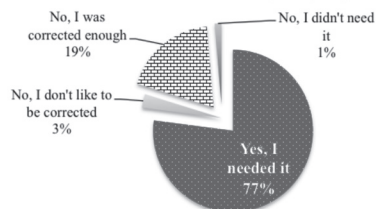
clearly a division among students. Students from LM 1361 were divided into two major groups: 4 students replied that error correction was consistent, 4 that they were at times consistent and finally one student described correction as inconsistent. In LM 1471, one third replied that the corrections were consistent within the 4-1 scale; one third marked corrections as partially consistent; and the last third answered that corrections were at times inconsistent giving a 2 value to this item. This suggests that there was some inconsistency regarding corrections, as observed by Ellis (2009) in the reviewed literature. If the causes of inconsistency include spontaneous or intuitive corrections without previous planning, this type of correction may point to a lack of strategy training for error corrections.

Another relevant finding is the fact that 57 of the 74 students responded affirmatively when asked if they wished they had had their pronunciation corrected with higher frequency throughout the course, confirming the results of Cathcart and Olsen's (1976) study (see Figure 5). On the other hand, 14 students answered that they had been corrected sufficiently; hence, they were not interested in further corrections. This data confirms the fact that students perceived their professor's corrections in their oral courses, and that the amount of corrections was enough.

Out of 74 students only 2 students marked the option *No, I don't like to be corrected* (See Appendix B), which is a very small percentage. An interesting finding was that one student added an option which was, *No, I didn't need corrections*; this student was in LM 1471, one of the final oral courses, so it can be inferred that he or she had a high

command of the language and did not seek for the professor's feedback. Perhaps, in a further study, this option might be included.

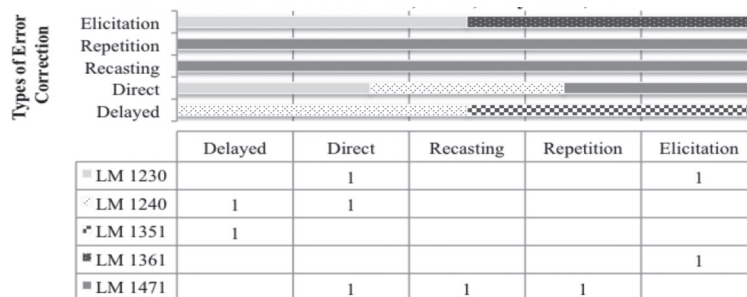
Figure 5
Students' Opinion on their Need of Error Corrections in 5 Oral Communication Courses, UCR, May, 2013



Source: Student Questionnaire

The last instrument collected the perception of the five professors (see Appendix C) concerning error correction types. All of the professors answered that they had used elicitation, recasting, direct correction and delayed correction techniques during the course. The exception was the use of repetition of statements in a quizzical way, for two professors stated not to have used it. As for the most effective feedback techniques, there were different beliefs as can be seen in Figure 6. The overall result of the five professors' questionnaire indicated that they tended to support covert correction: four professors chose either repetition, elicitation or recasting, while three of them also supported overt correction. Two of the professors chose elicitation as the most used technique, and one professor chose repetition of statements in a quizzical way. Concerning delayed correction, which is a different category in itself, two professors explained that they tend to use it

Figure 6
Professor's Use of Error Correction Technique in
5 Oral Communication Courses, UCR, May-June, 2013



Source: Professors' Questionnaire

especially when evaluating oral performances, to not interrupt the fluency of a speaking activity as Harmer (1998) had recommended.

Notwithstanding, two professors chose overt-direct correction as the most effective, for one of them claimed that "when the error is recurrent and very serious, I [the professor] immediately correct," and the other explained that "sometimes the error can be replicated rapidly in the rest of the group" (sic). These remarks seem to follow the behaviorist claim: errors should not be tolerated. However, since these two professors were teaching beginning courses LM 1230 and LM 1240, where students are still learning about specific vowel and consonant sounds, possibly, students are still unable to grasp other types of error correction. Undoubtedly, direct correction is an unambiguous manner of making students to notice their own errors. As was claimed by Flores & Rodríguez (1994), learners need to become aware of the errors they make, to distinguish the L2 from the L1. Yet, as explained previously, caution should be used. It is important not to react immediately to have

the time to quickly deliberate upon the circumstances and causes of the error, and only then decide if it is worth correcting directly or if students can learn more efficiently by means of another technique. Direct correction should not always be a teacher's first choice, especially with advanced learners.

Surprisingly, the two techniques -recasting and delayed correction- suggested in the review of literature as the most effective techniques were not chosen by professors. Recasting was observed in each of the three courses but was not selected by the professors as used the most or most effective, contrary to Krashen's and Terrell's (as cited in Douglas Brown, 2000, p.237) belief. Delayed correction is another strongly recommended technique that was mainly chosen by one professor and by two others as a complementary way to correct primarily during evaluations. Not to use this type of correction, either due to time constraints or because of forgetfulness, is to deny students of good opportunities for self-analysis, the confirmation of hypotheses, as well as of the reassurance of anonymous correction, supported by Ding (2012),

Thornbury (1999), Harmer (1998), Celce-Murcia (1996), and Edge (1989).

Regarding the most frequently avoided error correction techniques, three professors chose repetition of errors in a quizzical way as the least used, hence, the least effective. One professor mentioned that errors should not be repeated; students should be given the corrected word, and thus, they are more likely to overcome the error. This teaching belief seems to reveal behaviorism. Yet another professor who agreed on the value of repetition in a quizzical way disagreed on the usefulness of recasting. According to this professor, recasting up to the point of the error without repeating the error is confusing. Students may forget what they recently said, not notice the error, and be incapable of identifying the errors and correcting themselves. The professor who had viewed recasting-elicitation as effective found overt feedback rude and frustrating for students. This coincides with previous research on direct correction being described as negative and harmful. Nevertheless, overt-direct feedback is encouraged under some circumstances. The possible origin of these different perspectives might be the professors' own personality, familiarity with certain methodologies, as well as their appropriate adjustment to their learner's needs, as explained by Larsen-Freeman (2003). The latter is perhaps the most prominent variable to consider when teaching oral courses.

Conclusion

To conclude, it can be said that students not only expect error correction

to take place in English classes, but also are willing to receive it. Correcting effectively involves choosing the most appropriate technique according to the type of error, type of activity and type of learner. Using recasting and delayed correction is highly supported by current research as effective techniques. Alternatively, overt-direct feedback should not be completely discouraged, for it presents a convenient strategy for certain teaching skills and levels, such as pronunciation in beginner oral courses. Since there are many contrasting beliefs among researchers, there is no sole effective error correction technique that can be judged as absolute. Ultimately, professors must face the challenge of continuously adapting their teaching methodologies to their learners' need, for effective techniques for one group of students may be different for another.

Limitations and Recommendations

A limitation of the research involved the subjectivity of the topic. Many factors may influence each person's view on effectiveness, as for instance background experiences, or teacher/student personality types. Additionally, the groups surveyed represent just a fair scope of the total number of oral courses of the Modern Languages School taught in the first semester of 2013: 33% of the 15 courses. Another aspect which limits the study is the observation of both professors' corrections and students' production; the latter is difficult to quantify. In addition, the researcher observes a natural class, without manipulating the ongoing task; thus, professors and

learners are unlikely to produce exactly what the researcher wants to observe. If professors are informed of the topic of the research, on the other hand, they might avoid using any given technique or excessively repeat a required strategy altogether. Regarding effectiveness of correction techniques, this aspect could not be measured according to the students' performance, for acquisition of a given item usually takes longer than a two-hour class.

For further research, a quasi-experimental study might be implemented. Once having determined two effective error correction techniques such as recasting and delayed correction, two groups from oral communication courses could be compared: one with an emphasis on those two specific techniques throughout the course, and the other group as a control variable with no particular exposure to the techniques. In the end, the data collected may serve as well-supported advice for future professors of the course.

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2. Attends pronunciation errors of newly learned structures.

C Perception of students 0 1 2 3 4 5 #

1. Students seem to receive feedback in a positive way.
2. Students ask about their corrected errors.

*The following scale will be used:

1 = 1 time 2 = 2-3 times 3 = 4-5 times 4 = 5-7 times 5 = 8-10 times

Appendix B

Universidad de Costa Rica

Fecha: _____

Encuesta: Percepción de corrección de errores en la producción oral

La siguiente encuesta se realiza entre estudiantes de la carrera de inglés de segundo a cuarto año de la Universidad de Costa Rica, sede Rodrigo Facio. La encuesta intenta recoger datos acerca de la percepción de los universitarios al ser corregidos por sus profesores.

- A Ud. ¿Le han corregido individualmente la pronunciación en este curso?
___ Sí ___ No

- ¿Cómo describiría las correcciones de pronunciación en el curso actual?
Elija el adjetivo que mejor las describa en una escala de 4 (mayor) a 1 (menor).

	4	3	2	1	
útiles					inútiles
claras					ambiguas
consistentes					inconsistentes
positivas					negativas
constructivas					hirientes

- ¿Desearía que le hubieran corregido su pronunciación con mayor frecuencia en este curso?

___ Sí, lo necesitaba

___ No, no me gusta que me corrijan

___ No, me corrigieron bastante

¡Muchas gracias por su colaboración!

Appendix C

Universidad de Costa Rica

Error Correction in Pronunciation and Oral Production

The following questionnaire is intended to gather information on teaching pronunciation and oral production through error correction. This data will shed light on the reasons behind particular choices of error correction type.

General data:

Circle the option which best describes yourself:

Age range:

25-35 36-45 46-60

Years of Teaching Experience:

1-4 5-8 9-15 16-25+

What type of error correction have you used during this course? Check (√) the type below.

- Covert: Indirectly recasts the students' utterances up to the point of the error occurrence.

- Covert: Repeats the incorrect statement in a quizzical way.
- Covert: Correctly reformulates students' statement.
- Overt: Directly corrects errors.
- The professor hears the error, jots it down, and comments it at the end.

Which one of these did you use the most? Briefly explain why.

Which one did you barely use? Explain why.

