

Corrective Feedback in Conversation Courses at CEIC, Alajuela Site

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Abstract

This study analyzes corrective feedback practices implemented by three teachers of conversational courses in oral production skills carried out in a classroom setting. It was conducted in the *Centro de Estudios en Inglés Conversacional* (CEIC), outreach program at the *Universidad Nacional*, Alajuela Site, in the fourth bimester in 2014 with three different proficiency level groups: beginner, intermediate, and advanced conversational English as a Foreign Language students. Throughout the study, students developed a series of oral production activities; in these activities the mistakes made, the correction techniques implemented, the type of activity in which students participated, and the responses after providing feedback were recorded. To collect the necessary information, several data collection methods such as participant observation, surveys with students, and questionnaires with teachers were administered. The results showed that student mistakes were corrected in most cases, and that corrective feedback techniques were effective according to the learners' proficiency level.

Key words: learning a foreign language, proficiency level, corrective feedback, corrective feedback techniques

Resumen

Este estudio analiza las prácticas de corrección de errores empleadas en tres cursos conversacionales en la producción oral dentro del aula. Este se realizó en el Centro de Estudios en Inglés Conversacional (CEIC), de la Universidad Nacional en la Sede Interuniversitaria de Alajuela, en el cuarto bimestre de 2014, con un grupo de estudiantes de nivel principiante, otro de intermedio y uno de avanzado. Durante el estudio, los estudiantes desarrollaron actividades de producción oral; en estas se anotaron los errores, técnicas de corrección, las actividades en las que los estudiantes participaron y su respuesta ante la corrección realizada.

Se implementaron diversos métodos de recolección de datos como observaciones no participativas, encuestas y cuestionarios. Los resultados demostraron que los errores fueron corregidos en la mayoría de los casos, y que las estrategias de corrección fueron efectivas de acuerdo con el nivel de dominio de idioma de los estudiantes.

Palabras claves: aprendizaje de lengua extranjera, nivel de dominio de la lengua extranjera, corrección de errores, técnicas de corrección de errores

Introduction

A learner's interlanguage, a term referred to "...the separateness of a second language learner's system, a system that has a structurally intermediate status between the native and the target languages" (Brown, 2007, p. 256), represents a threshold to a phenomenon common to EFL learners: making mistakes, and what this entails to pedagogy: error correction (also known as corrective feedback). Learners undergo a process of departing from their L1 background knowledge and the instruction received to formulate possible utterances in their L2; they may be successful or they may produce faulty language. Both students and teachers must be aware of the importance of corrective feedback in the improvement of oral skills. In a conversation course, instances in which learners always produce accurate utterances are idealistic. When communication takes place in an EFL conversation course, learners do not usually achieve a precise message (James, 1998, p. 248); in fact, foreign language learners need more correction than second language learners since an EFL context is less contextualized and meaningful than the context of native speakers. Corrective feedback techniques

then help learners to overcome their difficulties while speaking the target language. The present study provides insights on corrective feedback best practices in conversation EFL classrooms, particularly at the *Centro de Estudios en Inglés Conversacional (CEIC)*, an outreach program from *Universidad Nacional (UNA)*. This program holds two sites: Heredia and Alajuela; the latter is where this study took place.

A distinction between errors and mistakes needs to be addressed. "Mistakes," as stated by Brown (2007), "are what researchers have referred to as performance errors (the learner knows the system but fails to use it), while errors are the result of one's systematic competence (the learner's system is incorrect)" (p. 258). For the purpose of this study, mistakes were the focus of research since mistakes represent the system known by the learners' interlanguage. In order to add variety to the writing style of this study, mistakes will be referred as negative evidence, faulty language, or erroneous or even ill-formed utterances. The present study was aimed at examining how mistakes that affect students' oral performance in communicative tasks are treated in order to contribute to the analysis of corrective feedback practices in beginner, intermediate

and advanced conversation groups at CEIC-UNA, Alajuela Site, by answering the following questions:

- RQ1. How are students' mistakes corrected in three English conversational program levels?
- RQ2. How do beginner, intermediate and advanced students respond when their mistakes are corrected?
- RQ3. How should students' mistakes which affect oral communication be corrected according to their proficiency level?
- RQ4. What pedagogical implications does oral corrective feedback have for beginner, intermediate and advanced students?

The methodology at the CEIC is intended to develop Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) principles. According to James (1998), CLT tasks such as role-plays, information gap activities, simulations, and other tasks which involve pair and group of learners can all be used as means for observational studies dealing with error correction (248).

Literature Review

Scholars have addressed interlanguage through studies on error analysis and error correction. In one study carried out on sixty university students, Ramírez (2007) emphasized the fact that correcting learners' faulty language might actually have either positive or negative consequences; among the side, disadvantageous effects, hindering students' oral participation is the main concern of this

author; he conducted a survey in order to know how feedback, from the students' point of view, either facilitates or hinders participation in oral courses, given that "When students are corrected appropriately and supportively, they are likely to modify their interlanguage and are more likely to participate again" (Ramírez, 2007, p. 128). Moreover, Bonilla (2003) reported a case study of a conversation course observed within a four-week period; this author focused on the perceptions behind the teacher's use of corrective feedback techniques: "Teacher's own definitions of error correction may not necessarily reflect the form of corrective feedback used in the classroom" (p. 329). Although teachers might be theoretically familiar with the array of corrective feedback techniques, teachers' decisions when providing feedback is exclusively specific to each language learning setting.

Disadvantages of providing feedback cannot be overlooked. Lyster and Ranta (1997) pointed out that "If teachers do not correct errors, opportunities for students to make links between form and function are reduced; if teachers do correct errors, they risk interrupting the flow of communication" (p. 41). Not only does corrective feedback represent an issue for teachers but also for students. In the same line, Honglin (2010) suggested,

... 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. (p. 128)

As noted, corrective feedback can be seen as threatening or disturbing by students themselves.

Types of Corrective Feedback Techniques

Walz (1982) detailed a number of techniques to treat faulty language orally. For instance, *pinpointing* refers to the teacher's practice of localizing the error without specifying what the error is. If a learner shows difficulty in forming a specific word, the teacher can make use of *cueing* and *discrimination exercises* as to provide variations or options for the learner to choose from. If a learner's utterance is somehow incomprehensible, then *questioning* about it can make the learner repeat what was not understood. Similarly, teachers often ask students for *repetition* of those utterances containing errors. *Grammatical terms* can be mentioned for corrective purposes; i.e. the teacher says "preposition" to indicate that the word with this function in the sentence just uttered needs to be corrected. *Gestures* are used to correct ill-formed utterance forms nonverbally like word order, stress, omission of a word, and verb tense, among others. Finally, teachers can choose between *providing correct answer* to avoid wasting time or reducing confusion about what the proper form in question is, and they can do *paraphrasing* to substitute the wrong answer with the right one.

Lyster and Ranta (1997) addressed a taxonomy in which six different feedback types are identified:

- *Explicit correction* refers to the explicit provision of the correct form. As the teacher provides the correct form, he or she clearly indicates that what the student has said is incorrect.
- *Recasts* involve the teacher's reformulation of all or part of a student's utterance, minus the error. Recasts are generally implicit in that they are not introduced by 'You mean'. 'Use this word', 'You should say...' as in explicit correction.
- *Clarification requests* indicate to students either that their utterance has been misunderstood by the teacher or that the utterance is ill-formed in some way and that a repetition or a reformulation is required. A clarification request includes phrases such as 'Pardon me...' It may also include a repetition of the error as 'What do you mean by...'
- *Metalinguistic feedback* contains comments, information, or questions related to the well-formedness of the student's utterance, without explicitly providing the correct form.
- *Elicitation* refers to techniques that teachers use to directly elicit the correct form from the students. The teacher can elicit completion of an utterance, ask questions to elicit correct forms, or ask students to reformulate their utterance.
- *Repetition* refers to the teacher's repetition, in isolation, of the student's erroneous utterance. In most cases, teachers adjust their intonation so as to highlight the error.

Responses to Feedback

Brown (2007) stated that learners might have three possible responses

to feedback: *uptake*, *repair*, or *repetition*. According to definitions given by Mitchell, Miles and Marsden (2013), the first term refers to the instance “When a reformulation provided by an interlocutor [the teacher or a classmate] is subsequently used by a learner” (p. 306); then, repair is stated as the action of “Solving communication difficulties and achieving shared meaning [through self-repair or peer repair]” (p. 304); finally, repetition is associated with the “production of modified output [when the correct form is repeated after feedback is provided]” (p. 178). It is important to clarify that uptake constitutes a reaction to the feedback provider’s intention to some aspect of the ill-formed utterance while repair represents the correction of the ill-formed utterance after feedback is provided. Responses to feedback compliment the operationalization of corrective feedback techniques; learners, however, do not always attend to feedback as expected; they may pay attention to the feedback, but they do not produce the corrected version of the ill-formed utterance; another case would be that of learners noticing feedback, but they do not reach complete understanding of what they did wrongly or misinterpret what the correct utterance should be.

Feedback based on Learners’ Proficiency Level

Overall, the way to treat faulty language produced by a student who is just starting differs in the way of treating errors by a student who has been learning the language for a while. About this approach and based on a proficiency level hierarchy previously proposed by Hendrickson, Ramírez (2007) remarked

that in order to promote a healthy environment for oral participation, “... beginners should only be corrected on errors hindering communication; intermediate students should be corrected when errors are frequent, and advanced students must be corrected on errors that stigmatize them” (p. 130). In Kennedy’s study (2010), participants were divided in two groups: *Low* (those students with a low proficiency level) and *Mid/High* (those students with a higher proficiency level); it is reported that “The Low group produced more content errors, whereas the Mid/High group produced more errors of form” (p. 43); likewise, the type of feedback technique provided varied in both groups: “... the low group received more feedback in which the correct form was provided (recasts fall under this category), whereas the Mid/High group received more feedback in which the correct form was not provided [by using other techniques like clarification request or elicitation]” (p. 46). As learners move onto a higher language proficiency level, they have more opportunities to use the language; hence, they are more likely to make mistakes when producing L2 utterances.

Treating Mistakes in Communicative Language Teaching

One of the principles in CLT methodology summarized by Richards (2006) stresses, “Be tolerant of learners’ errors as they indicate that the learner is building up his or her communicative competence” (p. 13). This author added, “Language learning is a gradual process that involves creative use of language, and trial and error. Although errors are a normal

product of learning, the ultimate goal of learning is to be able to use the new language both accurately and fluently” (p. 21). Vásquez (2007) mentioned that teachers have to deal with when facing the accuracy and fluency dichotomy. According to this author, in accuracy practices, where students focus on language forms and patterns per se, teachers tend to make more corrections rather than in communicative practices, where the learners’ goal is to produce language freely and fluently. Having these two types of practices in a CLT methodology based class implies that learners should not be constantly interrupted when engaged in free communicative tasks, but it does not mean that learners should not be corrected at all.

Implications for Providing Corrective Feedback

On one hand, Naeini (2008) stressed that “...language teachers are suggested to try to increase the learners’ attention to any kinds of the forms which will definitely improve their fluency and accuracy” (p. 131). This indicates that mistakes are to be detected and corrected, but issues regarding corrective feedback arise when choosing the moment and the way to correct students. On the other hand, Honglin (2010) referred to the main implications teachers should consider when treating mistakes: “If an error is likely to hinder comprehension or lead students into further errors, then it should be corrected” (p. 129). Besides, teachers should be aware of the context (i.e. the class task) where the mistake occurs. Honglin (2010) stated,

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. (p. 129)

Finally, Walz (1982) referred to whom is responsible for correcting errors, advocating a hierarchy, in which the student who makes the mistake should be the first to be allowed to correct it; then, if the student is not able to do so, other peers can correct the mistake made by the first student; and only if the mistake is not corrected by the mistake maker or the peers, should the teacher intervene for correction purposes (p. 17).

Teachers’ and Learners’ Perspectives toward Corrective Feedback

Regarding the types of corrective feedback techniques, in Lyster and Ranta’s study (1997), it was found that elicitations and metalinguistic feedback led to more corrected target language forms from the students; recasts and clarification requests can be understood by learners as simple answer-interaction forms from the teacher, and explicit corrections and repetitions did not necessarily make students correct or produce the target-like form but pay attention to the teachers’ explanation on the matter being corrected (p. 50-55). In a study on perceptions of oral errors and their corrective feedback,

Tomczyk (2013) claimed that, from a teacher's perspective,

A learner needs to receive the information of their errors, so that he or she does not commit the same error repeatedly in the future. What is more, corrective feedback helps teachers in controlling students' utterances and it also improves the effectiveness of them. It must be highlighted that students should be aware of their erroneous forms, since in many cases error correction motivates to work on their deviant forms and, as a consequence, make a progress. (p. 927)

On the other hand, students' perspective reveals that learners "...expect and even want to have their errors corrected;" also, they become "... nervous and angry because of committing an error or because the teacher provides the feedback generally" (Tomczyk, 2013, p. 929). Several criteria on how and why to correct errors and mistakes must be met by teachers. These aspects are, at the same time, assessed and even judged by learners.

Methodology

The methodology selected throughout this study corresponds to the mixed-method approach, as "... it collected both quantitative and qualitative data and integrated the data at different stages of inquiry" (Creswell, 2006, p. 17).

Context and Participants

CEIC's program consists of twelve levels; each of them is taught in a two

month period. There are two introductory levels (Intro A and Intro B) and ten regular levels (I-X). Each level lasts forty hours, with students meeting for a period of eight weeks (i.e. a bimester). Among the twelve levels that constitute CEIC's study plan, the groups selected belonged to three different proficiency levels: Level I (beginner group), Level IV (intermediate group), and Level X (advanced group). The students who enrolled the program from the beginning had already taken 80 hours, 200 hours, and 440 hours of instruction in the beginner, intermediate and advanced groups, accordingly. Regarding the nonstudent participants, three teachers were part of the study; all of them hold a major in EFL teaching.

Data Collection Instruments

First, class observation sessions were carried out at the beginning, in the middle, and at the end of the bimester to explore the mistakes students made when communicating orally in the target language, the techniques used to correct their mistakes, and the response given by students in these particular instances. A tally sheet observation guide was used (see *Appendix A*). Observations were non-participant and structured. On a second stage of the study and by the end of the term, perspectives of the student participants were gathered through a confirmation survey (see *Appendix B*). After conducting the observation sessions and surveys, the teachers in charge of the group were interviewed by the end of the term (see *Appendix C*).

Analysis of Results

Generally, faulty language produced by three groups of learners corresponded to four types of mistakes: grammatical (i.e. instances 1, 2, 3, 5, 8, 10, 12, 13, 15, 20), interference from L1 (i.e. instances 9, 11), lexical (i.e. instances 6, 7, 14, 17, 18, 19, 21, 22, 24), and phonological (i.e. instances 4, 23) types of mistakes. Below, the examples of mistakes uttered by learners and recorded by the researchers are provided per level group:

Beginner group:

1. I live is Desamparados.
2. child [referring to a group of kids]
3. I live with your family [referring to one's family].
4. He is a bet [referring to a veterinarian].
5. She have one sister.
6. I watch play soccer.
7. My stepfather do vegetables.
8. He don't play video games.

Intermediate group:

9. It's a large history [telling a personal anecdote].
10. I haven't did it.
11. Nilo River.
12. My brothers has learned English.
13. Have you break your leg?
14. How is the smallest city in the world?
15. He went with your son [referring to a male's son].
16. She go to the gym.

Advanced group:

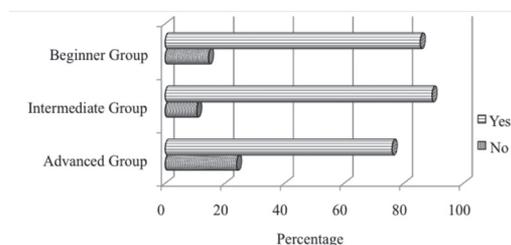
17. earn cash
18. make a bank account
19. make an expense
20. the most cheapest
21. She is conscience about it.

22. I dislike political [referring to the field].
23. demons [referring to diamonds].
24. ancient people [referring to senior citizens].

A lower level learner may produce more mistakes of content, while a more advanced level learner may make more mistakes of form.

Another aspect recorded refers to the extent whether mistakes were corrected or not. The results revealed that most mistakes produced by the learners were corrected in 86% of the instances in the beginner group, 89% in the intermediate group, and 76% in the advanced group, as accounted in figure 1.

Figure 1
Mistakes corrected orally



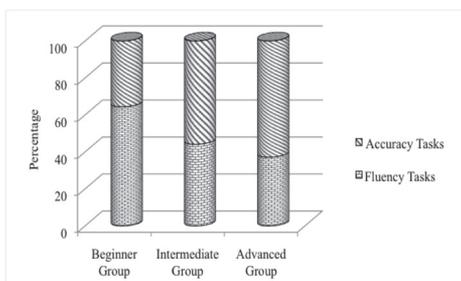
Source: Observations, September 2014

The reason why the percentage of corrections decreases in the advanced group and is similar in the first two groups can be again the result from differences in the proficiency level. Teachers can also become, as pointed by Richards (2006), tolerant of mistakes and make judgments on the fact that corrective feedback practice cannot limit students from building their communicative competence.

Out of the instances in which mistakes were corrected, the context of

these ill-formed utterances was also observed. In other words, mistakes were classified if these were produced in tasks oriented to develop accuracy or in tasks executed for fluency purposes. It was indicated that the lower the proficiency level of the students was, the more mistakes were corrected in fluency oriented tasks, as it can be shown in figure 2. Conversely, as students belong to higher proficiency levels, learners' mistakes were mainly corrected in terms of accuracy; in fact, 63% of the mistakes recorded from beginners took place in fluency tasks, while mistakes in accuracy tasks occurred in 56% of the instances in the case of intermediate learners, and 63% for the advanced learners.

Figure 2
Mistakes corrected per task type



Source: Observations, September 2014

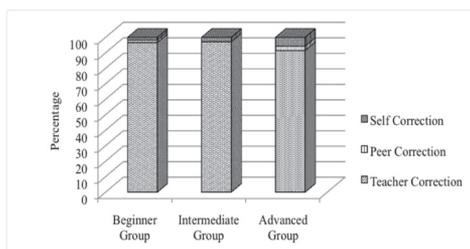
As previously addressed, hierarchical principles can be followed when correcting students of different proficiency levels. All teachers strongly agreed or agreed with the principles proposed by this author. According to the surveys with students, similar results revealed that students have the same perceptions as teachers about these principles.

Through the questionnaire, teachers also reported their perceptions on the contexts when mistakes should be

corrected. For instance, teachers expressed that learners in beginner and intermediate levels should be corrected during both accuracy and fluency tasks, whereas the advanced level teacher said that learners in that level should be more corrected in accuracy tasks due to the fact that “Unlike outcomes in accuracy tasks, making a mistake [during a fluency task] is not as important as the students’ participation and as long as they get to communicate” (Advanced Level Teacher, questionnaire, Sept. 29). All of the teachers stated that corrections must be delayed during oral presentations (i.e. role plays, debates, discussion forums, among others). Conversely, when students carried out exercises or checked assignments orally, the teachers reported that mistakes were corrected after these ill forms were made in the three groups. Remarks collected by the researchers showed that the instances in which mistakes were not corrected at all occurred because students were either developing a fluency task or the teacher may have paid attention to the content rather than the form conveyed in the learner’s message at the moment the mistake was produced.

It was also observed that mistakes can be corrected by the three different agents of the classroom. As it can be noticed in figure 3, most of the corrections were carried out by the teacher; in the beginner group a 96% is shown, 97% in the intermediate group, and 91% in the advanced group. Furthermore, the same students who made the mistakes and their classmates contributed in providing feedback in a much lesser degree.

Figure 3
Agent correcting mistakes



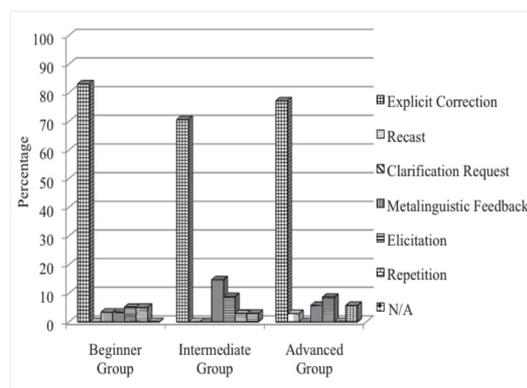
Source: Observations, September 2014

As stated before, language teachers are concerned with correcting first in order to make learners notice aspects that need improvement for the sake of their fluency and accuracy. From the questionnaire with teachers, they noted who corrected students' mistakes during the term observed. The beginner level teacher stated he "...was the one who corrected the students since students at this level think it is the teacher the only one able to correct" (Beginner Level Teacher, questionnaire, Sept. 30). The intermediate and advanced level teachers claimed that peer and teacher correction were practices implemented during the term, being the latter the most common practice. Additionally, the surveys with students indicated that the teacher was the agent who most corrected their mistakes during the term observed.

As it is shown in figure 4, explicit correction was the most used technique during the observations. This technique is present in 83% of the instances in the beginner group; 71% in the intermediate group, and 77% in the advanced group. Metalinguistic feedback and elicitation were also implemented but not as much as explicit correction. Furthermore, recast and clarification request were the least accomplished on

the three different levels. The research team recorded a few instances in which no technique was implemented due to the fact that the students were able to apply self-correction.

Figure 4
Implementation of feedback techniques



Source: Observations, September 2014

The questionnaires applied to teachers revealed which techniques these EFL professors considered they had implemented. The professor of the first group selected explicit correction, metalinguistic feedback, elicitation and repetition as the techniques used for these learners. The intermediate level teacher acknowledged implementing all the techniques, except for recast. The teacher of the last group asserted using all the techniques but repetition. In addition to reporting the techniques used, teachers also classified these techniques according to the level of appropriateness for each proficiency level. For instance, the teacher of the first group expressed that explicit correction, metalinguistic feedback, elicitation, and repetition are the most suitable techniques for beginner students; the teacher of the second group selected clarification requests, metalinguistic

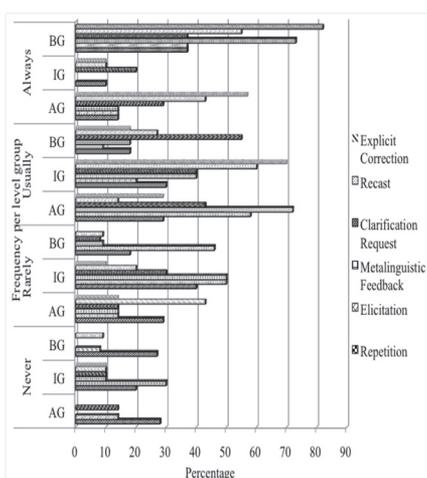
feedback, elicitation and repetition as the most useful techniques for intermediate learners; besides, the teacher of the last group considered that all techniques but repetition were the most convenient for advanced students.

Based on the surveys conducted with students, the learners selected explicit correction as the most implemented technique (see figure 5). Recast and clarification request were ranked as the least used techniques by the students in the intermediate and advanced groups (coded as IG and AG). Nevertheless, students' reports indicated that recast was actually implemented in a higher frequency in the beginner group (coded as BG), though. These results are opposed to the data obtained from the observations; it is important to take into account that teachers might have implemented other techniques during other classes

which were not part of the observation sessions for this study. It might be feasible that teachers have selected their techniques based on the impact each technique might have; particularly, these teachers may have selected those techniques that led to more direct correction, as elicitation.

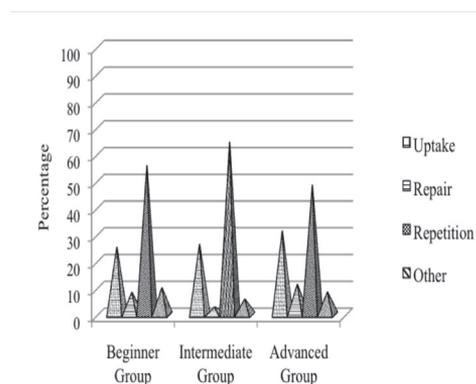
Observation sessions also informed of the responses toward corrective feedback from the learners. Once the correction was provided, students were expected to display one of the following responses stated by Brown (1998): uptake (i.e. correction noticing), repair (i.e. mistake fixing from self or peer correction), or repetition (i.e. uttering the correct form from teacher's correction). Figure 6 reveals that 56% of beginner students, 65% of intermediate students and 49% of advanced students resorted to repeating the correct form provided by their teacher as correction.

Figure 5
Learners' perceptions on feedback techniques



Source: Surveys, September 2014
Note: BG stands for Beginner Group, IG for Intermediate Group and AG for Advanced Group

Figure 6
Responses to corrective feedback



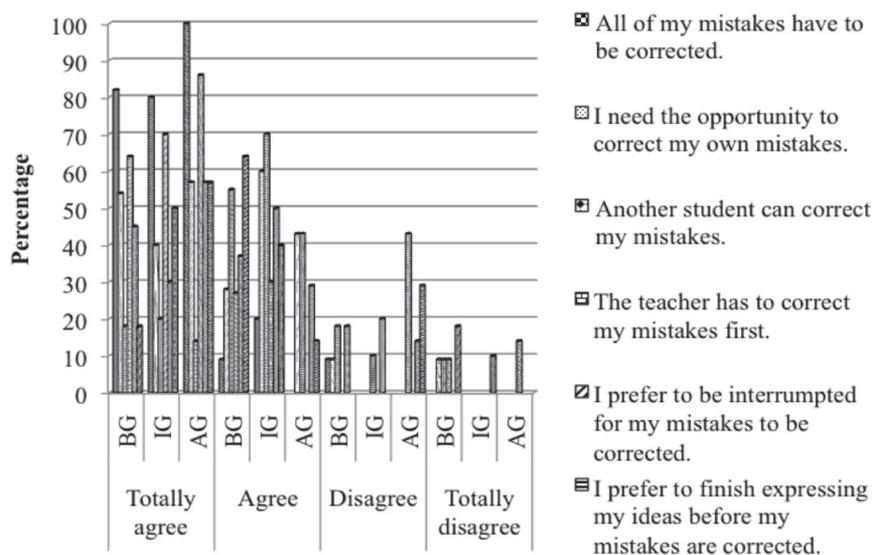
Source: Observations, September 2014

Other types of responses were also recorded; these responses corresponded to instances in which students ignored the correction provided in the moment because they were distracted; the students misunderstood the correction or did not know they were being corrected (they thought the teacher was following up with a comment rather than a correction); or the students simply seemed to have paid attention to the correction provided, but they did not show any verbal or paraverbal response toward the correction. Although these other types of responses were found in all the three level groups, these instances occurred in the beginner group in a higher frequency.

According to the surveys administered to students, these participants showed a number of perceptions

toward corrective feedback practices. In item 1 of the survey, participants selected the level of agreement with a series of statements, which showed that a range of 80% to 100% among beginner, intermediate and advanced groups (BG, IG, and AG as coded in figure 7) either totally agreed or agreed with the fact of having all their mistakes corrected. Additionally, 50% of the IG and 57% of the AG totally agreed that they prefer to finish expressing their ideas before mistakes are corrected; likewise, 64% of the BG agreed with the same statement. When consulted about being interrupted for corrective feedback purposes, about half of the students in each one of the groups expressed total or a regular level of agreement with this statement. About the perceptions on whom they consider

Figure 7
Learners' perceptions toward corrective feedback



Source: Surveys, October 2014

Note: BG stands for Beginner Group, IG for Intermediate Group and AG for Advanced Group

should be the correction agent for providing feedback; most of the BG (54%) and AG (57%) participants totally agreed that self-correction is a practice that is needed, while most of the IG (60%) participants agreed with the same statement. Similar results can be seen when asked about the possibility for peer correction. However, participants from the three groups totally agreed that the teachers should be the first ones to correct their mistakes.

Several aspects were found from the questionnaire with teachers about the rationale when providing feedback. First of all, the teachers of the three different groups took into account other factors aside from the proficiency level of the learners to decide the way they correct students' mistakes. The factors reported by the three teachers included age and personality; two of them (the teachers of the beginner and the intermediate groups) also stated that students' preferences should be taken into account as a factor for corrective feedback. Teachers claimed that since most of the students in the three groups are adults, they were receptive to corrective feedback and did not mind being corrected as long as these practices had been done supportively; in this regard, they shared the following comments:

- Every time I try to correct mistakes, I do so as much as I can; I let the students finish their ideas, then I paraphrase and correct the students. (Beginner Level Teacher, questionnaire, Sept. 30).
- I try not to make them feel threatened; I try to paraphrase, so I say the sentence in a correct way. (Intermediate Level Teacher, questionnaire, Sept. 29).
- Depending on the moment, I correct the students by repeating what they say incorrectly but in a correct way, like paraphrasing. (Advanced Level Teacher, questionnaire, Sept. 29)

Paraphrasing was a common element in these comments, which might indicate that these three teachers share similar beliefs about correcting mistakes in order to help students progress in their language learning process. On the other hand, students suggested ways in which they should be corrected in conversation courses; below, there are some of the most remarkable insights, translated by the researchers:

Beginner group

- Mistakes should be corrected by the teacher, peers and oneself.
- Students should be exposed to speaking activities to learn from mistakes.
- Students should be interrupted the moment they make a mistake.

Intermediate group

- Students should be corrected once they finish expressing their ideas.
- Students should be told why they are making a mistake, and the teacher should be aware if students understand the correction.
- Students should be provided exercises on the area they frequently have flaws in.

Advanced group

- Students should be corrected in a nonthreatening way.
- Students should be reported what mistakes they are making through student-teacher conferences.
- Teachers should correct students as simply as possible.

The opinions provided by both teachers and students informed of some pedagogical implications that corrective feedback brings about. First, mistakes are significant in the sense that they represent the yardsticks to measure what has been learned, what needs remedial teaching and what needs to be learned in a future. Secondly, the way corrective feedback is provided implies positive and negative outcomes; primarily, constant and unsupportive correction and interruption to the students lead to hindering communication. Then, learners' features such as age, preferences and proficiency level are crucial factors to determine the most suitable plan to provide feedback. Lastly, learners can be informed on how to improve their communicative competence if faulty language is properly corrected.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Regarding the first research question, it can be concluded that students' mistakes are corrected in the three groups observed. For instance, it can be stated that at CEIC beginner students were corrected, especially if their mistakes hindered their communication; intermediate learners' mistakes were corrected when their mistakes were found to be frequent; and advanced counterparts were provided feedback when their mistakes were stigmatizing or impeding improvement in their communicative competence. Besides, CEIC teachers demonstrated that a teacher-driven hierarchy, in terms of whom should correct mistakes first, was achieved. As for the second research question, it can be said that due

to the nature of explicitness shown in the selected techniques by three teachers, students were led to more corrective forms. Their response to feedback indicated that they mainly repeated the correct form provided by the teacher, and they also uptook or repaired ill-formed instances. It can be inferred that the more direct the technique implemented is, the more chances students have to utter a correct form. Finally, answers to the third and fourth research questions revealed pedagogical implications for providing feedback. When deciding on how to correct student's mistakes, teachers should analyze how to proceed effectively. The results obtained from this study revealed that teachers took into account the needs and expectations of the learners, the learners' level of proficiency, and the specific learning context. In addition to the learners' proficiency level, both teachers and students alike shared the belief that suitable corrective feedback can be characterized as supportive, simple and informative.

Proficiency level is an important aspect to take into consideration; teachers must explain to students since the first day of class about the importance of making mistakes based on their level. Additionally, teachers should familiarize students with the different techniques to be applied during a given course. It is necessary to consider that too much correction might affect student's confidence, while not effective correction blocks student's process. Furthermore, when corrective feedback techniques are provided, it is significant to have evidence that indicates students receive and understand this feedback; after all, students expect to be corrected. By the same token,

teachers should motivate students to monitor themselves and correct their own mistakes by giving them the necessary cues and hints; it is essential to promote the ability to self and peer correct. Teachers should give students time to correct themselves and each other. Likewise, teachers should aid students in becoming aware of the importance of producing faulty language and the relevance correcting ill-formed utterances has for the enhancement of their communicative competence. Finding a balance between avoiding interruptions and delaying corrections is beneficial for improving oral skills.

It is imperative to analyze the context in which mistakes are made, the student's level and the corrective feedback technique implemented in order to provide students with the best corrective feedback practices, and thus to internalize the correct utterance. Teachers should vary these practices by alternating techniques that are certainly effective and that correspond not only to the students' proficiency level but also with other learning factors such as the learners' age, needs and expectations.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Observation Guide

Objective: To analyze the implementation of oral corrective feedback techniques within students' oral performance.

1. Class information

1.1. Level:

Beginner (Level I) __

Intermediate (Level IV) __

Advanced (Level X) __

2. Variables to be observed:

- **Mistake:** write down the faulty utterance said by the student.
- **Practice:** checked whether or not a correction was applied by checking *Yes* or *No*, and specify the well-formed utterance in the column *Correction*.
- **Correction Agent:** indicate who made the correction by specifying *SS* for same student, *DS* for a different student, and *T* for teacher.
- **Technique:** classify the corrective feedback technique implemented and specify *EC* for explicit correction, *RC* for recast, *CR* for clarification request, *MF* for metalinguistic feedback, *EL* for elicitation, and *RP* for repetition.
- **Activity:** check whether the correction occurred in a task to develop accuracy or fluency.
- **Response to Feedback:** briefly record what happened after the correction occurred. Write *U* for uptake (the student is aware of the correction); *R* for repair (the student identifies the illed form and utters a correct form out of self or peer correction); *Rp* for repetition (the student reproduces a well-formed utterance); or *O* for other situations like the mistake was not modified, the

student did not understand the correction, the teacher resorted to a different technique, among others.

3. Remarks

4. Tallying:

4.1. Total of corrections applied

Yes__ No__

4.2. Total of corrections made by agent

By the same student __

By a different student __

By the teacher __

4.3. Total of corrections per technique

Explicit correction __

Metalinguistic feedback __

Recast __

Elicitation __

Clarification Request __

Repetition __

4.4. Total of corrections made per task

intended to develop accuracy __

intended to develop fluency __

4.5. Total of responses to feedback

Uptake __

Repair__

Repetition __

Other __

Mistake	Practice			Task			
	Applied	Correction	Correction Agent	Technique	Accuracy	Fluency	Response to Feedback
<input type="checkbox"/> Yes			<input type="checkbox"/> SS <input type="checkbox"/> DS	<input type="checkbox"/> EC <input type="checkbox"/> RC	<input type="checkbox"/> MF <input type="checkbox"/> EL		<input type="checkbox"/> U <input type="checkbox"/> Rp <input type="checkbox"/> R <input type="checkbox"/> O: _____
<input type="checkbox"/> No			<input type="checkbox"/> T	<input type="checkbox"/> CR	<input type="checkbox"/> RP		
<input type="checkbox"/> Yes			<input type="checkbox"/> SS <input type="checkbox"/> DS	<input type="checkbox"/> EC <input type="checkbox"/> RC	<input type="checkbox"/> MF <input type="checkbox"/> EL		<input type="checkbox"/> U <input type="checkbox"/> Rp <input type="checkbox"/> R <input type="checkbox"/> O: _____
<input type="checkbox"/> No			<input type="checkbox"/> T	<input type="checkbox"/> CR	<input type="checkbox"/> RP		
<input type="checkbox"/> Yes			<input type="checkbox"/> SS <input type="checkbox"/> DS	<input type="checkbox"/> EC <input type="checkbox"/> RC	<input type="checkbox"/> MF <input type="checkbox"/> EL		<input type="checkbox"/> U <input type="checkbox"/> Rp <input type="checkbox"/> R <input type="checkbox"/> O: _____
<input type="checkbox"/> No			<input type="checkbox"/> T	<input type="checkbox"/> CR	<input type="checkbox"/> RP		
<input type="checkbox"/> Yes			<input type="checkbox"/> SS <input type="checkbox"/> DS	<input type="checkbox"/> EC <input type="checkbox"/> RC	<input type="checkbox"/> MF <input type="checkbox"/> EL		<input type="checkbox"/> U <input type="checkbox"/> Rp <input type="checkbox"/> R <input type="checkbox"/> O: _____
<input type="checkbox"/> No			<input type="checkbox"/> T	<input type="checkbox"/> CR	<input type="checkbox"/> RP		
<input type="checkbox"/> Yes			<input type="checkbox"/> SS <input type="checkbox"/> DS	<input type="checkbox"/> EC <input type="checkbox"/> RC	<input type="checkbox"/> MF <input type="checkbox"/> EL		<input type="checkbox"/> U <input type="checkbox"/> Rp <input type="checkbox"/> R <input type="checkbox"/> O: _____
<input type="checkbox"/> No			<input type="checkbox"/> T	<input type="checkbox"/> CR	<input type="checkbox"/> RP		
<input type="checkbox"/> Yes			<input type="checkbox"/> SS <input type="checkbox"/> DS	<input type="checkbox"/> EC <input type="checkbox"/> RC	<input type="checkbox"/> MF <input type="checkbox"/> EL		<input type="checkbox"/> U <input type="checkbox"/> Rp <input type="checkbox"/> R <input type="checkbox"/> O: _____
<input type="checkbox"/> No			<input type="checkbox"/> T	<input type="checkbox"/> CR	<input type="checkbox"/> RP		
<input type="checkbox"/> Yes			<input type="checkbox"/> SS <input type="checkbox"/> DS	<input type="checkbox"/> EC <input type="checkbox"/> RC	<input type="checkbox"/> MF <input type="checkbox"/> EL		<input type="checkbox"/> U <input type="checkbox"/> Rp <input type="checkbox"/> R <input type="checkbox"/> O: _____
<input type="checkbox"/> No			<input type="checkbox"/> T	<input type="checkbox"/> CR	<input type="checkbox"/> RP		
<input type="checkbox"/> Yes			<input type="checkbox"/> SS <input type="checkbox"/> DS	<input type="checkbox"/> EC <input type="checkbox"/> RC	<input type="checkbox"/> MF <input type="checkbox"/> EL		<input type="checkbox"/> U <input type="checkbox"/> Rp <input type="checkbox"/> R <input type="checkbox"/> O: _____
<input type="checkbox"/> No			<input type="checkbox"/> T	<input type="checkbox"/> CR	<input type="checkbox"/> RP		
<input type="checkbox"/> Yes			<input type="checkbox"/> SS <input type="checkbox"/> DS	<input type="checkbox"/> EC <input type="checkbox"/> RC	<input type="checkbox"/> MF <input type="checkbox"/> EL		<input type="checkbox"/> U <input type="checkbox"/> Rp <input type="checkbox"/> R <input type="checkbox"/> O: _____
<input type="checkbox"/> No			<input type="checkbox"/> T	<input type="checkbox"/> CR	<input type="checkbox"/> RP		
<input type="checkbox"/> Yes			<input type="checkbox"/> SS <input type="checkbox"/> DS	<input type="checkbox"/> EC <input type="checkbox"/> RC	<input type="checkbox"/> MF <input type="checkbox"/> EL		<input type="checkbox"/> U <input type="checkbox"/> Rp <input type="checkbox"/> R <input type="checkbox"/> O: _____
<input type="checkbox"/> No			<input type="checkbox"/> T	<input type="checkbox"/> CR	<input type="checkbox"/> RP		

<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> SS	<input type="checkbox"/> EC	<input type="checkbox"/> MF	<input type="checkbox"/> U	<input type="checkbox"/> Rp
<input type="checkbox"/> No	<input type="checkbox"/> DS	<input type="checkbox"/> RC	<input type="checkbox"/> EL	<input type="checkbox"/> R	<input type="checkbox"/> O: _____
<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> T	<input type="checkbox"/> CR	<input type="checkbox"/> RP		
<input type="checkbox"/> No	<input type="checkbox"/> SS	<input type="checkbox"/> EC	<input type="checkbox"/> MF	<input type="checkbox"/> U	<input type="checkbox"/> Rp
<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> DS	<input type="checkbox"/> RC	<input type="checkbox"/> EL	<input type="checkbox"/> R	<input type="checkbox"/> O: _____
<input type="checkbox"/> No	<input type="checkbox"/> T	<input type="checkbox"/> CR	<input type="checkbox"/> RP		
<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> SS	<input type="checkbox"/> EC	<input type="checkbox"/> MF	<input type="checkbox"/> U	<input type="checkbox"/> Rp
<input type="checkbox"/> No	<input type="checkbox"/> DS	<input type="checkbox"/> RC	<input type="checkbox"/> EL	<input type="checkbox"/> R	<input type="checkbox"/> O: _____
<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> T	<input type="checkbox"/> CR	<input type="checkbox"/> RP		
<input type="checkbox"/> No	<input type="checkbox"/> SS	<input type="checkbox"/> EC	<input type="checkbox"/> MF	<input type="checkbox"/> U	<input type="checkbox"/> Rp
<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> DS	<input type="checkbox"/> RC	<input type="checkbox"/> EL	<input type="checkbox"/> R	<input type="checkbox"/> O: _____
<input type="checkbox"/> No	<input type="checkbox"/> T	<input type="checkbox"/> CR	<input type="checkbox"/> RP		

Appendix B: Survey

Encuesta para estudiantes

Universidad Nacional
 Facultad de Filosofía y Letras
 Escuela de Literatura y Ciencias del Lenguaje
 Centro de Estudios en Inglés Conversacional, CEIC
 Sede Interuniversitaria de Alajuela

Descripción: Esta encuesta se enfoca en la manera que los errores son tratados en cursos conversacionales. La información suministrada será manejada de manera confidencial. Agradecemos su ayuda.

Instrucción: Marque con una X la casilla correspondiente o conteste en el espacio indicado.

1. Seleccione la casilla que mejor describe su nivel de concordancia con los siguientes enunciados, de acuerdo a la siguiente escala:

- 1: Totalmente de acuerdo
- 2: De acuerdo
- 3: En desacuerdo
- 4: Totalmente en desacuerdo

En el momento de hablar, ...	1	2	3	4
todos mis errores deben ser corregidos.				
necesito la oportunidad para corregir mis propios errores.				
otros estudiantes pueden corregir mis errores.				
el docente debe de primero corregir mis errores.				
prefiero ser interrumpido para que corrijan mis errores.				
prefiero terminar de expresar mis ideas antes de que mis errores sean corregidos.				

2. ¿Quién corrige sus errores en las siguientes actividades? Puede seleccionar más de una opción.

Actividad oral	Usted mismo	Algún compañero	El docente
Prácticas y ejercicios orales			
Revisión oral de tareas (revisión del <i>workbook</i>)			
Presentaciones orales (conversaciones, debates, discusiones, otros)			
Examen final de producción oral			

3. Seleccione la casilla que mejor describe la frecuencia de las siguientes maneras de corregir errores durante este bimestre.

Manera de corregir errores	Siempre	Casi siempre	Casi nunca	Nunca
a. la forma correcta es suministrada de manera directa. Ejemplo <i>Forma incorrecta:</i> “ <i>I have 20 years old.</i> ” <i>Forma correcta:</i> “ <i>You don’t say ‘I have 20 years old’. You say: I am 20 years old.</i> ”				
b. la forma correcta es suministrada de manera indirecta (repetiendo la misma frase menos el error). Ejemplo <i>Forma incorrecta:</i> “ <i>I have 20 years old.</i> ” <i>Forma correcta:</i> “ <i>I ...</i> ”				
c. la forma correcta es suministrada en forma de aclaración. Ejemplo <i>Forma incorrecta:</i> “ <i>I have 20 years old.</i> ” <i>Forma correcta:</i> “ <i>Do you mean ‘I’m 20 years old?’</i> ”				
d. la forma correcta es suministrada por medio de una explicación. Ejemplo <i>Forma incorrecta:</i> “ <i>I have 20 years old.</i> ” <i>Forma correcta:</i> “ <i>In English, we use verb -be to talk about age. The correct form is ‘I’m 20 years old.’</i> ”				
e. la forma correcta es suministrada solicitando al estudiante notar su error. Ejemplo <i>Forma incorrecta:</i> “ <i>I have 20 years old.</i> ” <i>Forma correcta:</i> “ <i>Could you repeat that again?</i> ”				
f. la forma correcta es suministrada por medio de la repetición del error (en algunas ocasiones con entonación en este error). Ejemplo <i>Forma incorrecta:</i> “ <i>I have 20 years old.</i> ” <i>Forma correcta:</i> “ <i>I HAVE 20 years old?</i> ”				

4. ¿Cuál es su opinión acerca del siguiente enunciado?

Enunciado para estudiantes de nivel principiante

Durante este bimestre, los errores producidos en su caso como estudiante de nivel principiante fueron corregidos solamente cuando estos errores afectaron la comunicación oral.

Enunciado para estudiantes de nivel intermedio

Durante este bimestre, los errores producidos en su caso como estudiante de nivel intermedio fueron corregidos solamente cuando estos errores se presentaron de manera frecuente.

Enunciado para estudiantes de nivel avanzado

Durante este bimestre, los errores producidos en su caso como estudiante de nivel avanzado fueron corregidos solamente cuando estos errores impidieron avances en el desempeño oral.

- Totalmente de acuerdo
- De acuerdo
- En desacuerdo
- Totalmente en desacuerdo

5. Sugiera dos maneras en las que los errores deben ser corregidos en una clase conversacional.

- a. _____.
- b. _____.

Appendix C: Interview

Universidad Nacional
Facultad de Filosofía y Letras
Escuela de Literatura y Ciencias del Lenguaje
Centro de Estudios en Inglés Conversacional, CEIC
Sede Interuniversitaria de Alajuela

Questionnaire for Teachers

Description: This questionnaire focuses on the way mistakes are treated in conversational courses. The data provided will be handled anonymously. We really appreciate your help.

Instruction: Complete the following instrument in the space provided.

1. How do you deal with the treatment of mistakes made by students in this conversation class?

2. When should mistakes be corrected in a conversational course?

- During accuracy activities
- During fluency activities
- During both accuracy and fluency activities

3. Who corrected students' mistakes during oral activities in this specific course?

- The same student who produced the mistake
- Classmates of that student who produced the mistake
- Yourself as a teacher

4. How did you correct students in this specific course during the following oral activities?

Activity	Mistakes were corrected immediately after they were made	Mistakes were corrected once the activity was completed
Exercises carried out to develop oral production		
Assignments checked orally		

Oral presentations done by students
(i.e. role-plays, debates, discussion forums, among others)

Oral task (s) carried out as the final oral production test

5. Which learners' factor (s) did you take into account to decide the way mistakes were corrected for oral production purposes in this specific course?

You can choose more than one option.

- Age
- Gender
- Proficiency level
- Preferences
- Personality
- Other factors

6. Which corrective feedback techniques did you use in this specific course?

You can choose more than one option.

- Explicit correction** (refers to the explicit provision of the correct form)
- Recast** (involves the teacher's reformulation of all or part of a student's utterance, minus the error)
- Clarification request** (indicates to students either that their utterance has been misunderstood by the teacher or that the

utterance is ill-formed in some way and that a repetition or a reformulation is required)

Metalinguistic feedback (contains comments, information, or questions related to the well-formedness of the student's utterance)

Elicitation (refers to techniques that teachers use to directly elicit the correct form from the students)

Repetition (refers to the teacher's repetition, in isolation, of the student's erroneous utterance)

7. Which corrective feedback techniques do you consider the most appropriate for each proficiency level?

You can choose more than one population of students.

Technique	Beginner students	Intermediate students	Advanced students
Explicit correction			
Recast			
Clarification request			
Metalinguistic feedback			
Elicitation			
Repetition			

8. What is your opinion about the following statements?

Scale for Beginner Level's Teacher

Statement	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
a. Beginner students should be corrected only if mistakes hinder their communication.				
b. Beginner students should only be corrected when mistakes are constantly repeated.				

c. Beginner students should be corrected when mistakes stigmatize these students.

Scale for Intermediate Level's Teacher

Statement	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
a. Intermediate students should be corrected only if mistakes hinder their communication.				
b. Intermediate students should only be corrected when mistakes are constantly repeated.				
c. Intermediate students should be corrected when mistakes stigmatize these students.				

Scale for Advanced Level's Teacher

Statement	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
a. Advanced students should be corrected only if mistakes hinder their communication.				
b. Advanced students should only be corrected when mistakes are constantly repeated.				
c. Advanced students should be corrected when mistakes stigmatize these students.				