

their pronunciation errors and try to ignore errors in other areas such as grammar or word choice. I believe if you correct everything, you correct nothing; the reason being that students lose the objective of the task and they do not learn anything at all.”

Source of error

One cannot start “feedbacking” without first distinguishing the source of errors. In Audio-lingualism teachers identified interlingual errors, i.e., errors coming from the first language habits, (the case of negative transfer) as the only source of errors. Today, however, such a supposition is not accepted. Thus, teachers should differentiate their approach to the treatment of errors depending on the source of the error. For interlingual errors, teachers might like to juxtapose the first language form and the target language form on the board. Then through explanation, make students aware of the differences. For intralingual errors, however, direct feedback might not be a good option. This is because through further exposure to the target language, there is always a possibility for learners to discover the correct form. This way, they will better notice the faulty rule that produces the faulty example.

This realization helped these teachers take different approaches to each error source. Abbas explained:

“While students are communicating, I write their errors down. Then I classify them into interlingual and intralingual errors. For each group, I follow a different strategy. For interlingual errors, I try to juxtapose the first language form and the target language form on the board. Then through explanation, I try to make students aware of the

differences. As for the second group, i.e., intralingual errors, I never correct them, since I believe that through further exposure to the target language, learners will discover the correct form and they will self-correct the faulty rule that produces the faulty form.”

Concluding remarks

The idea of “learner-tailored Feedback” is in step with the latest theoretical findings concerning instruction. For instance, Connor, Morrison, and Katch (2004) showed that students achieved more growth when their instruction was matched to their needs—different children with different needs benefited from different opportunities. Similarly, it is prudent to suggest that teachers should realize that provision of feedback leads to language development if it is tailored to meet individual differences. Meanwhile, they should be cautioned that one-size-fits-all instruction would not be as effective as specialized instruction.

References

- Connor, C. M., Morrison, F. J., & Katch, L. E. (2004). Beyond the reading wars: Exploring the effect of child-instruction interactions on growth in early reading. *Scientific Studies of Reading*, 8, 305–336.
- Jensen, M. H., Kornell, N., and Bjork, R. A. (2010). The costs and benefits of providing feedback during learning. *Psychonomic Bulletin & Review*, 17 (6), 797–801.
- Lightbown, P. M., & Spada, N. (2006). *How languages are learned*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.
- Loewen, S. (2007). Error correction in second language acquisition. *Clear News*, 11(2), 1–7.
- Long, M. (1991). Focus on form: A design feature in language teaching methodology. In K. de Bot, R. Ginsberg & C. Kramsch (Eds.), *Foreign language research in cross-cultural perspectives* (pp. 39–52). Amsterdam, Holland: John Benjamin.
- Rosa, E., & Leow, R. P. (2004). Computerized task-based exposure, explicitness, type of feedback, and Spanish L2 development. *Modern Language Journal*, 88(2), 192–216.
- Yin, R. K. (2003). *Case study research: Design and methods*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

it deductive approaches. In comparison, children rarely understand it if the teacher explains a target language rule. Mehrdad, another teacher participant, pointed out:

“When young learners talk, I prefer to skip their errors. If I have to give feedback, I correct them in such a way that it would not hurt their feelings. As long as they proceed, I never correct. Instead, I write the erroneous forms and guide them through the correct form inductively. As young learners do not know technical jargon, they cannot understand it if I explain the rule. Again, I usually plan to immerse them in examples of the correct use of the erroneous form, and I leave the rest to the learners. It is my belief that they would find the correct form from the patterns presented.”

Level of language mastery

Expert teachers usually believe that depending on students' levels of language mastery they should use different methods and different degrees of error feedback. They distinguish their feedback techniques based on two distinct objectives: fluency and accuracy. Most of them seem to agree that at lower levels of proficiency they should focus on fluency. When learners are able to convey their intended meaning fluently, they focus on accuracy. It is at this stage that providing feedback comes into play. Mahgol explained:

“At lower levels, I focus on communication and learners' communicative intent rather than the form of their speech.

At these levels, we should rarely correct learners' errors for two reasons: first, correcting de-motivates learners, and second, they are likely to encounter and discover the correct form at other higher levels. At higher levels, I correct learners directly by showing what the erroneous form is and then try to present them with the relevant linguistic information through explanation.”

Task goal

One teaching unit may be organized around different types of tasks. Whilst some aim to involve students in communication, others may aim at presenting learners with mere practice.

Moreover, some tasks are devoted to developing pronunciation and some to improving grammar and vocabulary. One of the common pitfalls of teacher feedback is to give feedback on all errors irrespective of the objective of the task (comprehensive feedback). This

unsystematic approach not only disrupts communication, it is also useless in terms of creating form-awareness. Sadegh stated:

“In observing classes, I have found that feedback is very unsystematic. That is, each and every mistake is corrected on the spot. I believe that error feedback should be systematic. I believe that teacher feedback should be in line with the objectives of the task in hand. That is, if we teach grammar, we should correct grammatical mistakes. If the purpose of the task is to improve learners' pronunciation, I focus on

Connor, Morrison, and Katch (2004) showed that students achieved more growth when their instruction was matched to their needs—different children with different needs benefited from different opportunities

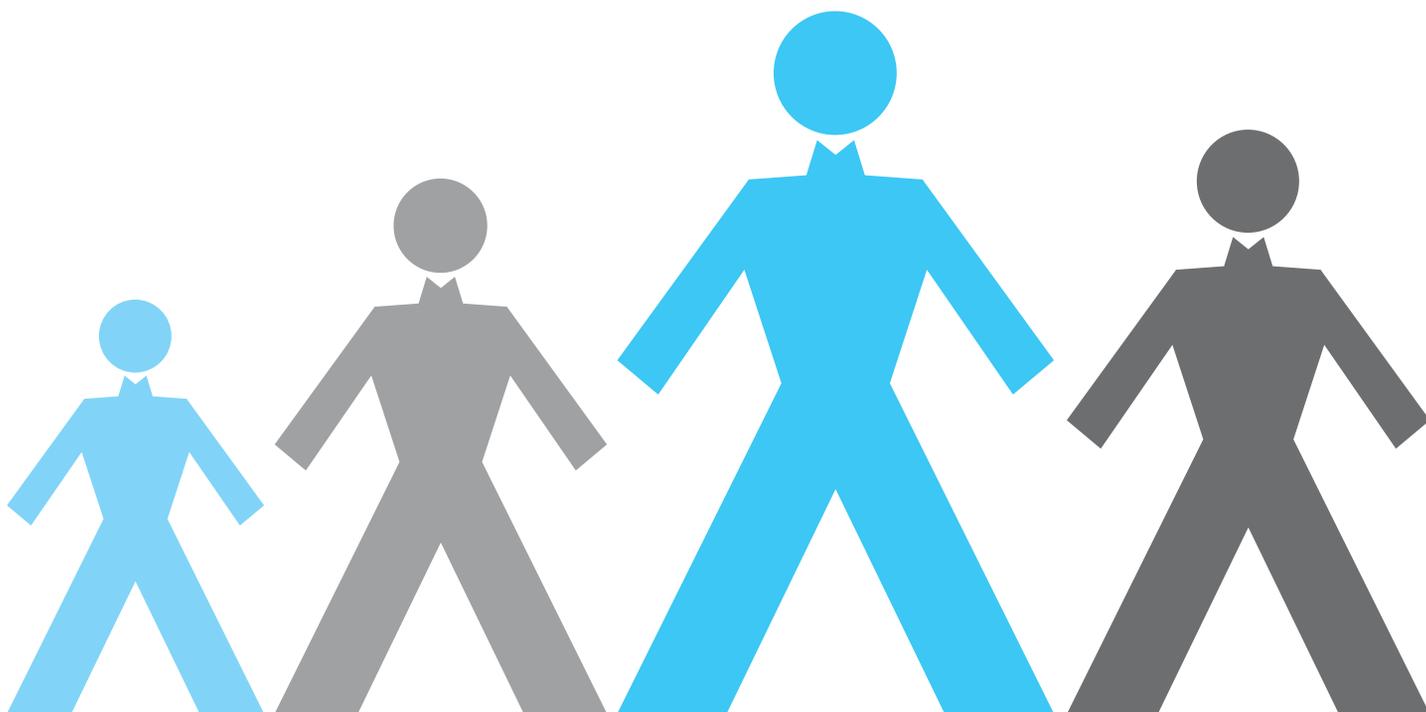
nication and fluency is vital for them. As a case in point, Kourosh, a teacher participant, distinguished his feedback based on the very learner variable. He stressed that his being lenient or strict towards learners' errors depends on learners' expectations of the course. Similar to teaching, feedback should respond to learners' needs. He explained:

"If they are learning English for university purposes, I tend to be strict on all errors as accuracy issues in academic contexts are of great use. In contrast, if their purpose is to use English in social contexts, I place higher priority on the fluency issues, that is comprehensibility of their utterances. When my audiences are novice teachers,

I comprehensively correct all errors because it helps them be sensitive about their own errors when speaking to the learners as a language teacher."

Students' age group

It is commonplace to hear from English teachers that direct feedback, i.e., presenting the correct form, is effective for adults. Quite the opposite, children respond better to indirect feedback i.e., circling, underlining the erroneous form. There is a growing body of evidence to show that children grasp better the target language form through implicit, inductive approaches. Conversely, adults come to grips with the target language form better through explic-

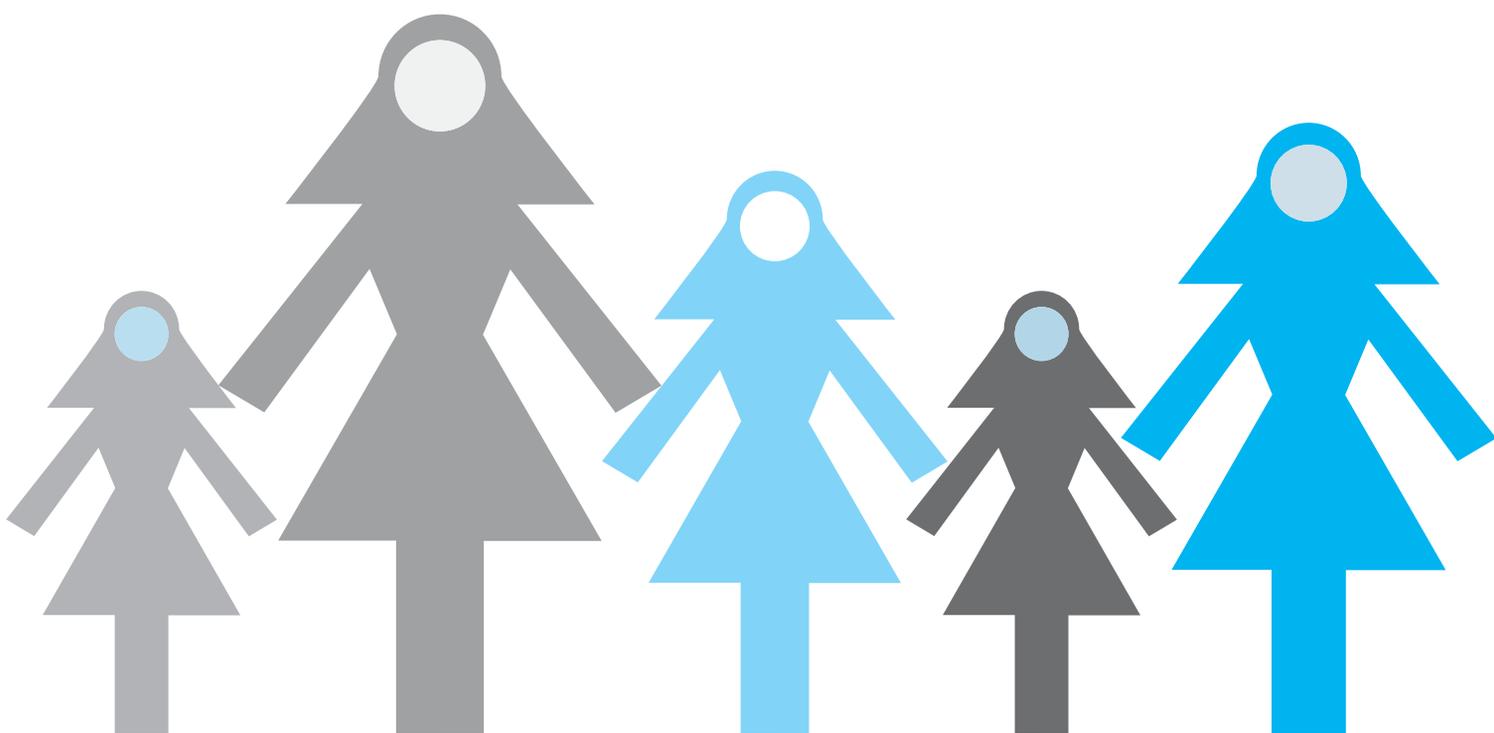


a refined set of categories. Fifteen teachers who taught EFL to mainly adult learners in five language institutions. Six of the participants had earned their Master's degrees in Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL), three had received their Bachelor's degrees in English translation; and still six held Bachelor's degrees in different fields of science.

What follows is an elaboration of the five categories extracted from these fifteen experienced (with more than eight years of teaching experience) EFL instructors' views. This might help language teachers developing procedural plans and designing unifying patterns in responding to students' errors.

Students' specific need

It is important to accept that the process of error feedback provision is decided on based upon a number of factors one of which is students' specific needs in learning English as a foreign language. In one class, there may be different groups of students who learn English for different purposes. There may be some who learn English because they need it for academic purposes. Alternatively, there may be some who learn English for social purposes such as travelling. Whereas the first group might want their errors to be rectified because accuracy is a main concern for them, the second group may not want their flow of speech to be interrupted because commu-





Introduction

From an integration of theory and practice, stand point it can be hypothesized that two elements are central to the progress in English as Foreign/Second Language (EFL/ESL) settings. One is involvement in communication or communicative tasks in which students can generate and test hypotheses about the target language (e.g. Rosa & Leow, 2004). And the other is providing error feedback (EF) which is assumed to help students evaluate, reflect and change their linguistic performance (e.g. Jensen, et al., 2010). The general opinion is that EF makes it possible for language learners to notice the gap between the forms they produce and the target language forms. In cases where teachers opt for the former at the cost of the latter, learners may achieve inadequate mastery necessary to tackle their accuracy problems. Conversely, when they go for the latter and disregard the former, learners show inadequate fluency in communicating the desired meaning.

The remedy suggested by Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) advocates is focus on form, i.e., teaching rules in context, rather than on forms, i.e., teaching rules in isolation (see, Long, 1991). Clearly, this entails an integrated approach to language instruction, shifting attention to language structures within a meaning-focused activity or task. One method to achieve an

integrated approach is to provide feedback in the course of communication.

Thinking of their value to learners, EFL/ESL teachers apply different methods of providing feedback. One method that has received considerable attention recently is recasting. A recast correctly reformulates a student's incorrect utterance while maintaining the central meaning of it (Lightbown and Spada, 2006). Experts who do not support recasts tend to adhere to prompts instead (e.g. Loewen, 2007). In prompting, the teacher does not offer the correct form

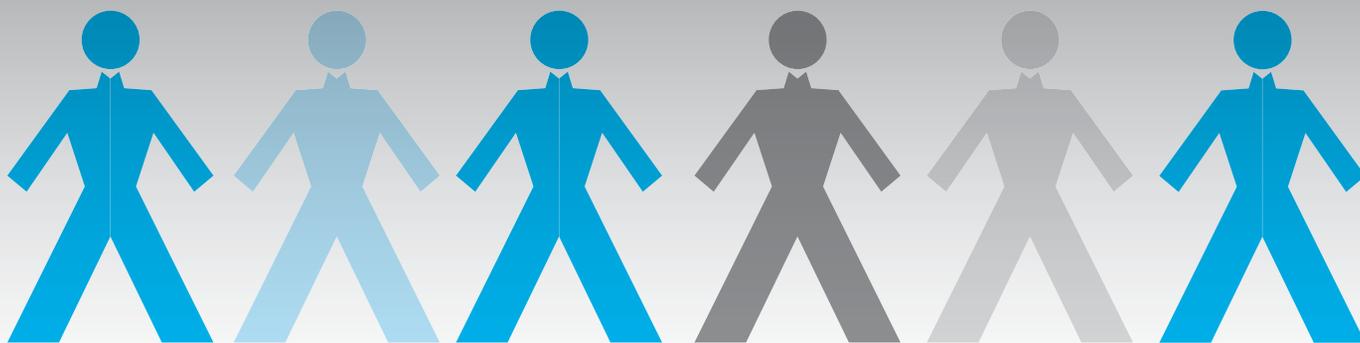
The general opinion is that error feedback makes it possible for language learners to notice the gap between the forms they produce and the target language forms

but rather attempts to get the student to self-correct. It is interesting to note that this technique is effective only if learners have some latent knowledge of the form. If the form is entirely new, no amount of prompting will suffice.

Apart from the type of technique used to give feedback to language learners, there seem to be critical considerations to make the whole thing more meaningful in an EFL/ESL context.

Research method

In the present study, an experienced male teacher volunteered to be interviewed on his views with regard to error feedback. The analysis and coding of this first interview shaped the subsequent questions which were asked from the other participants. The generation of questions and the answers by the participants led to



Teacher Feedback: NO to One-Size-Fits-All Approach

Reza Norouzian, English Teacher, Ministry of Education, PhD. Candidate
University of Tehran
Email: rnorouzian@gmail.com



چکیده

این مطالعه کاوشی، ملاحظاتی را در خصوص فرایند «بازخورد معلمان»، آن گونه که می‌نماید، در جهت مفید و سازنده بودن آن مطرح می‌کند. در ابتدا، با پانزده مدرس با سابقه زبان انگلیسی در پنج مؤسسه آموزش زبان مصاحبه شفاهی (با استفاده از سؤالات تشریحی) صورت گرفت. سپس محتوای مصاحبه‌ها براساس یک روش کیفی، ضبط و به نوشتار تبدیل شد و در ادامه نقاط مشترک آن‌ها کدگذاری گردید. پس از آن، از وجوه مشترک مجموعه داده‌ها گروه‌های نظام‌مندی استخراج شد. این گروه‌ها تحت عناوین «نیازهای ویژه زبان آموزان»، «گروه سنی زبان آموزان»، «سطح دانش زبانی»، «اهداف تمرین» و «منبع خطا» شناسایی گردیدند. در انتها، می‌توان نتیجه گرفت که آگاهی از این نکات در فرایند تولید بازخورد با در نظر گرفتن تفاوت‌های فردی و گروهی زبان آموزان ضروری است.

کلیدواژه‌ها: بازخورد معلمان، نیازهای ویژه زبان آموزان، تفاوت‌های فردی، گروه سنی زبان آموزان

Abstract

This exploratory study brings to the fore important considerations regarding how Teacher Feedback, as it stands, would be constructive. It is argued that “theory-first” nature of the past studies has barely helped yielding any practical results. Following a “data-first” methodology then, a set of fifteen experienced EFL instructors at five language institutes were selected and orally interviewed (using open-ended questions). First, the data were recorded, transcribed and then were coded for their common features. Later, a systematic array of categories taken from data clusters was cyclically extracted. These were identified as “Students’ Specific Needs”, “Students’ Age Group”, “Level of Language Mastery”, “Task Goal” and “Source of Error” with “Teacher Specialized Feedback” as the core (central) category. It is concluded that to suit individual and group differences when providing feedback, an awareness of these categories is necessary.

Key Words: teacher feedback, students’ needs, individual differences, students’ age