Oral Corrective Feedback Preferences of University Students in English Communication Classes

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Abstract

The ultimate goal of teaching foreign language is to achieve an elevated level of language competence via providing maximum language exposure and minimum learner mistakes. To fulfill the goal, many strategies have been developed. One of the strategies is the provision of feedback during the formal speaking courses. Nevertheless, format of the oral corrective feedback in English as a foreign language (EFL) classes has been one of the controversial issues among both researchers and teaching staff including methods of correction, timing of correction and target errors. Moreover, learner attitudes toward correction are deemed to be an important component. In this study, the aim is to investigate how and when the error correction should take place in EFL communicative classes based on students' perspectives. A total of 65 students pursuing to English Language and Literature Department and French-English-Turkish Interpretation Department at Kafkas University who were pre-intermediate and intermediate levels were interviewed using a self-report questionnaire, 14 of which were discarded due to irrelevant and redundant replies. The results revealed that 90% of the learners would like to be corrected when they had errors during the process of speaking English. Majority of the students indicated the preference to be corrected after finishing turn with nice and friendly manners. The results indicated that teachers should be aware of student attitudes toward oral corrective feedback.

Keywords: corrective feedback, oral correction, feedback preferences, speaking skills

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Introduction

Being fluent is not the only component of language learning/teaching in foreign language classes; accuracy is also an indispensable element to create meaningful interaction, particularly for oral communications. One way to improve accuracy in oral communication is the constant oral corrective feedback (OCF) during second or foreign language teaching. In both behavioral and cognitive theories of language learning, feedback is an essential element of language learning. In both structural and communicative approaches to language teaching, feedback is seen as a tool for strengthening student motivation and providing linguistic accuracy (Ellis, 2009). Nevertheless, the principles on which the correction should be based were formulated in a number of very eloquent questions of whether to correct, what to correct, how to correct, and when to correct by Hendrickson (1978).

In class interaction, negotiation of the form can only occur if the teacher initiates a corrective move; that is, there is a formal error and that the student gets an opportunity to correct his/her mistake. In corrective feedback (CF), negotiation of form is thought to provide opportunities for foreign language learning by letting learners recognize the gap between their expressions and the target language, and create more accurate utterances (Lochtman, 2002).

Major theories derived from Chomsky's Universal Grammar argue that acquisition is completely motivated by positive feedback and CF should be regarded as a source of positive response. The theory of cognitive interactionists claims that CF assists acquisition via helping learners to develop target-like form-meaning mappings while engaging in communication efforts (Ellis, 2010).

Corrective feedback plays a key role in teaching as it highlights a learner's errors that will enable them to gradually eradicate such errors in an extended period of time. The target language skills are acquired through practice and adequate feedback is crucial to fasten the learning process and to improve the pronunciations (Alsolami, 2019). Language learning process is generally described by errors involving pronunciation and even spelling. In addition to learning the accurate pronunciation of words in a given language, it is also very essential for the learners to know how to spell the words properly as well as how to interact efficiently using the language (Sheen, 2010). Teachers recognize the importance and advantages of corrective feedback and the effectiveness of instant correction of student mistakes to improve their oral skills (Lee, 2013; Rahimi & Zhang, 2015).

The investigation on the effect of implicit and explicit corrective feedback on EFL learners' awareness of and accuracy in English demonstrated that applying both implicit and explicit corrective feedback help improve grammar accuracy and learners' awareness. In addition, explicit group outperformed implicit group and explicit corrective feedback appears to be more efficient than implied feedback (Zohrabi & Ehsani, 2014). Teachers might generally depend on metalinguistic feedback and elicitations when they initiate the correction move. Such corrective feedback, which usually results in negotiations, seems to be typical for an analytical foreign language teaching (FLT) context, as opposed to recasts, which is believed to be more in the context of natural foreign language (FL) learning (Lochtman, 2002). Lee found that recasts was the most frequent form of corrective feedback based on classroom observations, which produced a higher rate of learner repair (Lee, 2013). Other recent studies on oral CF have shown that output-prompting strategies are more effective than

recasts-an input-prompting strategy (Ammar & Spada, 2006; Ellis, 2009; Lyster, 2004; Mousavi & Alavinia, 2018). The mutually exclusive feedback strategies in response to any expression containing an error in the target language are recasts (implicit feedback) and metalinguistic explanation (explicit feedback). A clear advantage of explicit feedback over implicit feedback for both delayed imitation and grammar judgement tests were reported and the study concluded that both types of CF, implicit and explicit, assist acquisition and explicit CF is generally more effective than implicit (Ellis et al, 2006).

The results of this research for the relationship between instruction, interaction and acquisition indicated that through meaning-based training in which corrective feedback approach is used, all language skills are developed (Lightbown & Spada, 1990). Oral corrective feedback was generally not evaluative, however, as it generally aims to highlight a learner's errors and thus trigger self-correction. Furthermore, oral feedback helps improve the language spoken by the learners. Corrective feedback leads to a good teacher-student interaction that is very important in language courses. Corrections were also thought to play a facilitative and constructive role in the learning process (Alsolami, 2019).

One important aspect of the CF is the timing of correction. In general, three strategies regarding the timing of correction explained in the literature. The first form implies an immediate intervention and ought to be practiced when a learner commits an error involving the use of the linguistic feature that is the main focus which would also be explicit (overt) enough for the learner to notice. There are studies which found that in the middle of their conversations and during teacher-student interactions, participants preferred to receive explicit and immediate corrections (Lee, 2013). The second strategy is the delayed CF where the correction is practiced after the oral recast. Delayed correction feedback is one of the approaches which require instructors to leave correction until the end of fluency activities. Nevertheless, in accuracy oriented activities, the immediate correction is suggested (Ellis, 2009) despite the presence of studies showing that immediate CF may not disturb fluency work after all (Ellis et. al., 2001). Finally, in the third form the provision of corrective feedback is postponed until the end of a class or even until the next meeting which is known as post-delayed CF (Pawlak, 2013). According to Bitchener and Ferris, observing and practicing the right model adequate times in language learning is the basic method of avoiding error; overcoming errors is possible by shortening the time between the incorrect response and the presentation of the correct model once more (Bitchener & Ferris, 2012)

The study aimed to delineate teachers' perspective about the significance of CF revealed an emphasis on teacher-led feedback and the need to determine learner-related variables (Bao, 2019). While correcting errors, instructors/teachers need to consider if the correction is pedagogically convenient. Therefore, EFL learners' emotional responses and anxiety might stimulate a negative effect on the way learners benefit from the oral feedback process (Agudo & de Dios, 2013). Hence, preferences of learners are important because they can influence learning behaviors and inform instructors about learners' perspectives and subsequently may help teaching practices on OCF more effectively (Lyster et. al., 2013).

Error correction is a debatable subject in language teaching and still has a controversy regarding whether to correct, what to correct, how to correct, and when to correct. The present study focuses on investigating perceptions of Turkish speakers of English for

how, when, by whom, and how often to be corrected in an EFL classrooms.

Method

Participants

A total of 65 fulltime undergraduate students of language learning programs (English Language and Literature Department and English French Turkish Interpretation Department) from Kafkas University in Kars/Turkey in 2018 and enrolled to a speaking course at the time participated in the study. The selection of students was random, and the participation was voluntary. The students' language advancement ranged from preparation class to 3rd year. Eight students who were to English Language and Literature Department preparatory class were at the language proficiency level of B1 and nine students in preparatory class of Translation and Interpretation Department were at the language proficiency level of A2+. A total of 28 students were at 2nd year of English Language and Literature Department with B2+ level. Finally, there were six students registered to Translation and Interpretation Department at their 3rd year with the language proficiency level of C1. After receiving reports, researcher discarded 14 of the responses due to incomplete or irrelevant responses. Therefore, a total of 51 responses were considered for further analyses.

Data collection and analysis

A self-report questionnaire that included four open-ended questions was used to gather the data to address the research questions of whether Turkish speakers of English would like to be provided feedback in speaking in EFL classes, how they feel when corrected, the timing and correction type they would like to have, and their preference of person who provides the feedback during conversation. The questionnaire included following questions.

1. Would you like to be corrected while speaking English in communicative/speaking classes?
2. How do you feel when you are being corrected?
3. When and how would you like to be corrected?
4. By whom (peers or teachers) would you like to be corrected?

The responses were subjected to "Content Analysis" and results were subsequently quantified within the tables presented below. Elo & Kyngäs define content analysis as a family of analytical methods that range from impressionistic, intuitive, interpretive analysis to systematic, rigorous textual assessment (Elo & Kyngäs, 2008). Content analysis has also been described as a systematic, replicable method for compressing many phrases of text into fewer classifications of content based on specific coding regulations provides a wide definition of content analysis as "any method for making inferences by objective and systematic identification of specific features of texts (Stemler, 2001).

Results

When student responses were assessed based on the queries, the first analyses were conducted on the question *would you like to be corrected?* The student responses indicate that 44 attendees/interviewees (86%) were positive about getting oral correction when they have speaking errors. While 6 out of 51 learners (12%) were even eager to be corrected for every single error, 2 participants (4%) preferred to be corrected only when

they are not understood and five of them (10%) indicated that they did not desire to be corrected at all (Table 1).

Table. 1 Student Responses to the First Query and the Corresponding Frequencies.

Would you like to be corrected?	Percentage	Freq.
I would like to be corrected	86.3%	44
If only my speech isn't intelligible	3.9%	2
I don't want to be corrected	9.8%	5
TOTAL	100%	51

The second question in the present study was *how would you feel when being corrected?* Twenty students (39%) pointed that they would be happy when corrected. About 7 students (14%) indicated that despite feeling uncomfortable when corrected they needed correction in order to improve. Twelve learners (23%) expressed that they felt bad when corrected while the other 12 (23.5%) did not to reply this question (Table 2).

Table 2. Student Responses to the Second Query and the Corresponding Frequencies.

How would you feel when corrected?	Percentage	Freq.
Correction makes me happy	39.2%	20
Correction makes me feel a bit bad	23.5%	12
It feels really bad, but I need to be corrected	13.7%	7
No answer	23.5%	12
TOTAL	100%	51

The question which aims to deduce the student preferences regarding the timing of correction revealed that 19 of the students (37%) preferred to be corrected after finishing their turns. Another 3 (6%) indicated that errors should be corrected toward the end of classes not immediately whereas 9 students (18%) opted for immediate correction for their progress. Three students (6%) expressed that they prefer to be corrected without presence of others (e.g. after class dismissed). Five learners (10%) preferred not to be provided correction at all, but 6 students (12%) think that instructors could correct the learners anytime they would like to (Table 3).

When self-reports were assessed based on the method of correction, 11 students (22%) expressed that they would like to be corrected nicely and friendly to avoid emotional misconduct. Four students (8%) specifically demanded that teachers use recasts to correct their errors. About 12 students (24%) wanted pronunciation errors to be corrected. Three students (6%) chose not to be corrected in front of others (Table 3).

Table 3. Student Responses to the Third Query and the Corresponding Frequencies.

When and how would you like to be corrected?	Percentage	Freq.
	When	
At the end of my speech	37.3%	19
Errors should be corrected at the end of class	5.9%	3
Our errors should be corrected during the talk/ speech	17.6%	9
Not in front of class-one to one	5.9%	3
They should never correct me	9.8%	5
Anytime teachers need to correct	11.7%	6
No answer	11.7%	6
TOTAL	100%	51

	How	
They should correct me kindly and friendly	21.6%	11
Our mistaken sentences should be reconstructed by teachers	7.8%	4
Pronunciation errors should be specifically corrected	23.5%	12
Somehow errors should be corrected	13.7%	7
No answer	33.3%	17
TOTAL	100%	51

The last query in the study was directed to students to deduce the corrector preferences and the results revealed that 39 participants (76.5%) preferred to be corrected solely by instructors and 5 students indicated (9.8%) that they could be corrected by peers as well. Five participants indicated that nobody should correct them. Only two students could not have the answer for this inquiry (Table 4).

Table 4. Student Responses and the Corresponding Frequencies Regarding Corrector Factor During OCF

Whom you'd like to be corrected by?	Percentage	Freq.
Instructors should correct our errors not others	76.5%	39
Anybody can correct, teacher or friend	9.8%	5
Nobody should correct me	9.8%	5
No answer	3.9%	2
TOTAL	100%	51

Discussion and Conclusions

In general, a mistake is an accidental form where the language learner is aware the wrongdoing whereas the error refers to the unconscious repetition of a linguistic misconduct. While learning a foreign language, learners could have erroneous communicative contexts either in the form of error or mistake. To get these ill-formed utterances fixed, instructors employ CF. Empirical studies designed to investigate whether CF is effective in classroom settings revealed that CF had significant and durable effects on target language development (Lyster & Saito, 2010). It is suggested that foreign language teachers should expect many errors/mistakes from their students and accept these as a natural phenomenon that is part of the process of learning a second language. When teachers ignore some errors, students often feel more confident about using the target language than having all errors corrected. Teachers are reminded that people commit errors when learning new skills, but these errors transform into mistakes and gradually disappear when they periodically receive feedback (Hendrickson, 1978). In the present study, the majority of students (90%) agreed on the query whether they would like to be corrected and they gave positive reaction on correction during communicative activities. Nevertheless, a few students explicitly stated that they do not expect any oral correction since they emotionally feel intimidated when corrected and they believe they will somehow improve in target language without feedback. The resulting data in the present study suggests that although the majority of students would be positive about being corrected, instructors should take all students into account not only what majority of class demands. It is suggested that teachers inform the learners regarding the error correction at the beginning of the teaching activity to achieve an effective OCF. Similar to the results reported here, previous research has revealed that learners have a clear tendency to express a preference for receiving CF over having their errors ignored. Schulz (1996), for instance, reported that 50% of the respondents in their study of ESL learners in the USA expressed concern that they did not receive enough CF (Schulz, 1996). Another study aimed to infer the perspectives of 2,321 high school

students and 45 teachers in Canada found that students were very favorable toward CF (Jean & Simard, 2011). The findings of the current study are also consistent with the results reported in Zhang and Rahimi (2014). In the aforementioned research, the participants (students) strongly favored receiving frequent CF in English oral communication classes when the purpose, significance and types of CF were made known to them (Zhang & Rahimi, 2014). It is clear that there is a general agreement regarding the need for CF across different language learners.

The second query in the present study aimed to infer how students feel when they receive OCF. The analysis of second question revealed that the learners generally do not feel intimidated when corrected. Although some students expressed that they might feel intimated during the correction, they also indicated awareness of the need for OCF for further improvement. The presence of learners who are intimidated from correction shows that learners need to be informed regarding efficiency of OCF at the beginning of the courses and would ultimately help them to develop oral language skills. Zhang and Rahimi (2014) demonstrated that the participants expressed positive attitudes towards CF in English oral communication classes when they were made of aware of the purpose, significance, and types of CF at the beginning of the course. Research conducted by Agudo (2013) delineates that EFL students react emotionally to oral corrective feedback from teachers in various ways. Most learners, although, find oral corrective feedback from educators extremely helpful and they expect and want to be regularly corrected in classroom settings, some learners also find oral corrective feedback inhibiting and embarrassing (Agudo & de Dios, 2013).

The timing of correction is also an important component of the OCF. The effectiveness of the timing strategies is noted to be a pedagogical choice and has been a developing subject that needs comprehensive research. Nonetheless, the nature of error has been listed as the major factor for prioritizing one of the strategies over the others (Rolin-Ianziti, 2010). The analysis of third query in the present study sought to answer what language learners' perception of the strategy and the timing of error correction. The results indicated that learners prioritize withholding correction until they finished speaking. This timing of correction corresponds to the delayed correction. A relatively lower number of learners indicated the need of correction during the conversation which is the immediate correction. A few students indicated reference of a private correction at the end of the class which would correspond to the post-delayed CF.

Nonetheless, there is a discrepancy among different learner groups in terms of the perception of the timing of the correction. The participants of this study indicated that they generally preferred (37.3%) a delayed correction e.g. when they completed conversation. Corrective feedback is not intended to teach the pronunciations and phonetics of the learners in a particular language, but rather to trigger self-correction. This strategy indicates that corrective feedback should be delayed in order to enable learners to understand their errors naturally leading to self-repair (Sanavi & Nemati, 2014) and current study shows parallel finding as students would like to be provided delayed correction. However, findings of the present study regarding to the timing of the correction differs with the findings of study conducted by Lee (2013) and Brown (2009). In both studies the students indicated that they would like to receive immediate corrections in the middle of their conversations and during teacher-student interactions. Brown (2009) reported that learners believe that being able to immediately correct oral errors is a quality of efficient teachers. Presence of difference in student perception regarding the time of correction can be attributed to the cultural differences among

students.

There is a variation in the degree that students want to be corrected among the reported studies. While learners expressed positive attitude to get CF in some studies (J. W. Brown, 2009; Jean & Simard, 2011; Lee, 2013; Schulz, 1996), they also expressed the concern that continuous correction could hamper communication and expressed a preference for CF focused on selected errors (Lasagabaster & Sierra, 2005). Similarly, teachers, strongly disagreed that they should correct all the errors and mistakes of the learners, although they acknowledged the advantages of corrective feedback from the teachers and the effectiveness of immediate correction of the errors to improve students' oral skills (Lee, 2013). Nevertheless, about 80% of EFL students in Singapore indicated that constant CF does not inhibit their readiness to interact in the target language (Oladejo, 1993). A small portion of students (11.7%) in this study expressed that the frequency of correction should be determined by teacher. Therefore, teachers should be aware of the type of errors students commit because not every single error to be corrected.

When the source of corrective feedback is considered, three possible courses of action are present: self-correction (students themselves), teacher correction, peer-correction (Pawlak, 2013). Learners interviewed in the present study expressed distinctive replies for the source of corrective feedback. Majority of them insisted on exclusively teacher's feedback. Nonetheless, a relatively small portion stated that there is no preference on peer or teacher feedback. A significant portion of the reported studies indicated that the predominant corrector in all the classroom settings are teachers and there are doubts regarding the quality of the feedback from the peers (Allwright et al, 1991; Ellis, 2008; Hyland & Hyland, 2006; Pawlak, 2004, 2010; Van Lier, 1988; Yang et al, 2006).

The mutually exclusive feedback strategies in response to any expression containing an error in the target language are recasts (implicit feedback) and metalinguistic explanation (explicit feedback). A clear advantage for explicit feedback on implicit feedback for both delayed imitation and grammar judgement tests and concluded that both types of CF, implicit and explicit, assist acquisition and explicit CF is generally more effective than implicit (Ellis et. al., 2006). In this regard, some respondents (8%) in current study specifically asked for teachers to use recasts to correct their errors. A majority of learners (86%) preferred having explicit correction because they think that they would not realize if they were corrected implicitly. A relatively lower rate (9.8%) did not want to have correction either as implicit or explicit. Moreover, there were indecisive learners who believed that there must be correction somehow, but they could not decide implicit or explicit (14%).

With this study it can be inferred that some Turkish speakers of English have different expectation of correction in oral feedback. Although majority of students have expressed positive attitudes toward the teacher correction in the classroom, there were a number of students who stated a concern regarding the in-class corrective feedback which ultimately require teacher awareness of such student's perspectives for pedagogical purposes. The study also revealed that the students' preference of the correcting factor was predominantly teacher rather than peers.

Corrective feedback is an integral part of the speaking courses in EFL classes which is largely implemented by the instructors. The best way for instructors to handle OCF would be taking into account student anxiety (e.g. create a friendly atmosphere), fluency, ability of self-correction. It is also crucial to consider what errors to correct,

how and when to correct optimally. Further research targeting effectiveness of various OCF strategies and corrector factor (teacher vs. peer) will be an interesting research venue and help teacher to develop better pedagogical strategies while applying OCF.

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