

The Different Ways to Provide Corrective Feedback

It is happening again. Your students just arrived to class and you inform them that today they are going to practice speaking. Immediately you notice that some of your students start to shift uncomfortably in their seats and make themselves as small as possible in their chairs. They lower their heads and try to avoid making eye contact with you, hoping with all their hearts that they will not be called on to speak. The students are terrified of making a mistake and being corrected in front of the class.

Have you ever been in a similar situation as a language teacher or learner yourself? Unfortunately, this is the reality for many of our students. As language teachers, it is our responsibility to lower the level of anxiety that students feel with the way that we provide feedback. The type and delivery of corrective feedback given to learners can either aid them in their language acquisition or have detrimental effects that could potentially deter the learners from continuing to pursue the language. Knowing the line between the two extremes and finding a balance for providing feedback present challenges for teachers. As Lyster and Ranta (1997) highlight, “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.” (41). Therefore, it is beneficial for teachers to be aware of the various types of corrective feedback they can provide and the effects that feedback can have on learners.

The purpose of this article is to highlight the impact language anxiety can have on foreign language acquisition and more specifically, its influence on the learner’s understanding of the error after receiving corrective feedback. I will define the different types of corrective feedback and address the relationship between what a learner notices and each individual type of feedback. My hope is that this article will heighten your awareness of the anxiety your students

may be feeling and provide strategies to make the learning environment more friendly and receptive to corrections.

LANGUAGE ANXIETY

I want you to take a moment to reflect upon your own language learning experience. Did you enjoy speaking in front of the class? Did it make you anxious? Did your teacher help you overcome your fear of making mistakes or did he or she cause you more anxiety? Learning a language can be scary for many students and one of the most important responsibilities of a teacher is to help reduce the students' anxiety levels when they enter the classroom.

In 2008, Younghee Sheen highlighted that learners who lack proficiency in a language are susceptible to feelings of anxiety when asked to perform in the L2. This type of anxiety is categorized as 'specific' because learners tend to only experience the anxiety when they are in a specific situation, which in this case is a foreign language classroom (Horwitz, Horwitz, & Cope 1986). Symptoms of 'specific anxiety' can include difficulty concentrating, becoming forgetful, sweating, and having palpitations (Horwitz et al. 1986).

Krashen was one of the few researchers to connect language anxiety to corrective feedback (Sheen 2008). He developed the theory of the 'affective filter hypothesis' which introduced the idea of a barrier that prevents learners from acquiring language due to feelings of anxiety, stress, or boredom (Lightbown and Spada 2006). Regarding corrective feedback, Sheen (2008) paraphrased an article by Krashen which stated that corrective feedback could be harmful for learners because it is likely to increase their level of anxiety and raise their affective filters. This, in turn, can inhibit a learner's capability of processing the input which then limits the learner's ability to acquire the language.

There is still much research to be done on the subject of language anxiety and more specifically the relationship between anxiety and corrective feedback. Mary Siew-Lian Wong

(2009) emphasized the idea that language learning depends more on the relationship the teacher has with the students rather than on the materials that are used in the class. Language teachers need to be aware of all the factors that can influence the learners with regard to corrective feedback, because some types of feedback can increase feelings of anxiety in a student. So what are the different ways that teachers provide their students with feedback? We will now examine the six different ways to provide corrective feedback which were identified in a study done by Lyster and Ranta (1997).

CORRECTIVE FEEDBACK

Before we look closely at each type of corrective feedback, we need to understand what corrective feedback means. Corrective feedback is defined as the different types of feedback that teachers provide to learners (Lightbown and Spada 2006). The article by Lyster and Ranta (1997) identifies the six different types of corrective feedback, as well as argues the likelihood of comprehension occurring after each type of feedback has been given to the learner. The six different types of corrective feedback that will be discussed in this paper include: explicit feedback, clarification requests, meta-linguistic feedback, repetition, elicitation, and recasting. In 2010, Erlam and Loewen conducted research specifically on the effectiveness of recasting used in a foreign language French classroom which provides more information on recasting, which is the most debated type of corrective feedback.

The term uptake also appears frequently in discussions concerning corrective feedback. Lyster and Ranta (1997) provide a more specific definition of uptake as “[a] student’s utterance that immediately follows the teacher’s feedback and that constitutes a reaction in some way to the teacher’s intention to draw attention to some aspect of the student’s initial utterance.” (49). The goal of providing learners with corrective feedback in a foreign language classroom setting

is for the learners to understand and repair the error. According to previous research, in order to repair the error, the student has to first notice the correction. Richard Schmidt (as cited by Lightbown and Spada 2006) developed the idea of the ‘noticing hypothesis’ which states that nothing can be learned unless it is first noticed. Schmidt (1990) believed that second language learners could not begin to acquire a language feature until they become aware of it in the input. If a learner’s language is not fully developed, he or she may not be able to recognize the teacher’s correction, and therefore, uptake will be less likely to occur. The ‘noticing hypothesis’ will become even more applicable later in this paper during the discussion regarding the effectiveness of recasting. First, however, we need to identify the different types of corrective feedback that occur in a foreign language classroom starting with explicit feedback.

Explicit Feedback

Explicit feedback occurs when the teacher provides the student with the correct form and clearly indicates the error that was in the student’s statement. An example of explicit feedback would be the following:

Teacher: How old are you?

Student: I have 15 years old.

Teacher: You mean I am 15 years old.

Student: Oh yes! I am 15 years old.

In the example, the teacher is directly correcting the student’s mistake of using the verb “have” to talk about age. The student is immediately made aware of the correction and repeats the sentence using the proper structure. Explicit feedback does not require any negotiation of form on the part of the student, because the teacher is simply providing the correct formulation.

Clarification Request

A clarification request is a type of feedback that points out the student's error and requires the student to repeat or further explain the answer. One example of this would be asking the learner what he or she meant by the utterance or to repeat what was said. The phrases "Pardon me", "What?", "What do you mean?", and "Excuse me?" are often used by the teacher in clarification requests to draw out more information from the student. Below is an example using "excuse me" to elicit more information from the student.

Teacher: How often do you go to the movies?

Student: Three.

Teacher: Excuse me? Three what?

Student: Three times a month.

The teacher asks the student to clarify what she or he meant by the answer three and prompts the student to provide more information. With clarification requests, the teacher is not giving the students the answer but instead encourages the students to determine the answer on their own.

Meta-Linguistic Feedback

Metalinguistic feedback is a comment or information that indicates an error to the student without stating it explicitly, such as asking for the past tense form of the verb. One example would be:

Teacher: How was your weekend?

Student: It was great! I play soccer with my friends.

Teacher: Good but we are talking about the simple past so it's not play.

Student: Ah I played soccer with my friends.

As with clarification requests, meta-linguistic feedback requires the student to use the cues the teacher is providing to reformulate the response.

Repetition

The next type, repetition, is often used in conjunction with other types of corrective feedback and was only categorized in the study by Lyster and Ranta (1997) as repetition if the student's error was isolated by the teacher. The repetition by the teacher was typically accompanied by a change in intonation in order to emphasize that an error occurred. Take a look at the following conversation:

Student: I made my homework last night.

Teacher: Made? (with rising intonation)

Student: Did. I did my homework last night.

The teacher is emphasizing the error by placing stress on the word to help the student notice the mistake, but the student must decide on the correction.

Elicitation

Elicitation refers to the teacher's attempt to draw out the desired information from the learners by asking questions, reformulating phrases, or prompting them. Look at the following example:

A) Teacher: I'm from _____? (prompting)

Student: Ecuador.

B) Teacher: How do we form the simple past tense of watch?

In both examples, the teacher is eliciting information from the student whether it is by prompting the students like in the first example or asking them a question as with the second example. The teacher is not explicitly providing the students with the answer but rather encouraging them to find it on their own.

Recasting

The last type of corrective feedback is recasting. Recasting is the most commonly used type of corrective feedback in language classes and often avoids interrupting the flow of the conversation. This type of feedback occurs when the teacher reformulates the student's ungrammatical or inappropriate utterance with the correction. According to a study by Erlam and Loewen (2010), there are two types of recasts: implicit and explicit. In their study, implicit recasts were defined as a "correction of the error made, given with rising intonation." (Erlam and Loewen 2010, 886). The following is an example of an implicit recast:

Student: I will playing the piano after class.

Teacher: You will play the piano after class.

The second type of recasting is explicit which contains two uninterrupted feedback moves. Erlam and Loewen (2010) state, "In the first, the student's error was repeated with rising intonation. In the second, a correction was provided in declarative form." (886). The theory behind using two feedback moves is due to the evidence that supports significant more uptake following multiple feedback moves (Erlam and Loewen 2010). Below you will find an example highlighting the difference between the implicit example above and explicit recasting:

Student: I will playing the piano after class.

Teacher: I will playing the piano? I will play the piano after class.

First the teacher repeats the student's error before providing the corrected version. By recasting, the teacher is providing the student with the answer and it does not require the student to internalize the error. Commonly, recasts go unnoticed by the students which limits the amount of uptake that occurs after the correction. Because of this and the frequency of which recasting is applied in the classroom, it is considered the most controversial type of corrective feedback.

LIKELIHOOD OF UPTAKE

The results of the corrective feedback study performed by Lyster and Ranta (1997) indicated that elicitation was the most effective in terms of learner uptake. Clarification requests, metalinguistic feedback and repetition were also determined to be effective in regards to learner uptake. Each of these types of corrective feedback require the student to negotiate for meaning, which provides them more opportunities to notice their errors. According to Schmidt (1990), noticing is essential for the acquisition of a linguistic feature.

The results of the study by Lyster and Ranta (1997) also showed that recasting, which comprised over fifty percent of all corrective feedback in their study, is the least effective for learner uptake. However, this area lacks definite research and many scholars continue to debate the issue. An essential factor in the effectiveness of recasting is whether the learner is developmentally ready to notice the correction (Sheen 2008). A study involving thirty-five adult ESL learners done by Mackey and Philp (1998) highlighted that there is a connection between a learner's linguistic readiness and the success of the recast. Their study indicated that corrective feedback might only be effective when learners are developmentally ready to acquire the target structures (Mackey and Philp 1998). After reviewing the studies conducted on recasting, Sheen (2008) determined that the following four aspects are necessary for uptake to occur: the recast must be directed at features that the learners are ready to learn, they must induce noticing, be linguistically important, and they must be directed repeatedly at one linguistic feature.

Another element to acknowledge regarding recasts is that although the student making the error may not be developmentally ready to notice the correction, another student in the classroom may benefit from the recast. Amy Ohta (as cited by Lightbown and Spada 2006) led a study with adult learners of the Japanese language. She found that learners were more likely to react to a recast when it was directed to another learner or the whole class, rather than when the

recast was focused on their own individual errors. Therefore, incorporating recasts into the classroom may actually be advantageous to the students.

The study by Erlam and Loewen (2010) also emphasized the importance of incorporating both implicit and explicit recasting in a laboratory or foreign language setting. The results of their study showed that students were more likely to notice the error which may lead to uptake. The study did not conclusively determine the effectiveness of recasts but the researchers stated that the context of foreign language classrooms is more conducive to students noticing the error because the primary focus is on learning the language versus in an ESL setting where the focus is more on communication or content (Erlam and Loewen 2010).

Teachers should consider using a variety of corrective feedback types in their classrooms rather than just selecting one. Lyster and Ranta (1997) argued this point by indicating that using a range of techniques rather than relying mainly on recasting can be beneficial for the learner. Another aspect to take into consideration with corrective feedback is the proficiency, age, and learning goals of the learners (Lightbown and Spada 2006). All of these factors, along with the impact language anxiety can have on learner uptake, should be considered when deciding which types of corrective feedback to select in a foreign language classroom.

IMPLICATIONS IN THE CLASSROOM

Teachers have many roles in the classroom including being a mentor, counselor, and guide. It is the responsibility of the teacher to create an atmosphere that promotes language development and growth for students. One way to accomplish this is to be informed about the different ways to successfully provide students with corrective feedback so that students will not be deterred from learning the language.

The role of the teacher is to make sure that learners notice and understand the errors they are making in order to provide opportunities for uptake to occur. This can be done by incorporating body language and improving the delivery of the correction to highlight the error. This is especially important when using recasts as a type of corrective feedback. The recast should not be just an echo but should alert the learner to the linguistic feature that is being corrected.

Understanding the students' opinions and thoughts on the feedback that they receive in the classroom is also essential for teachers. Teachers should ask their students how they prefer to be corrected and if the corrective feedback they receive affects them positively or negatively. For instance, in the French language recast study, the students were asked their opinions on implicit and explicit feedback (Erlam and Loewen 2010). The majority of the students responded positively to both types of recasts stating, "I liked being corrected that way because they were double checking- giving you another opportunity to redeem yourself." (Erlam and Loewen 2010, 895). However, there were some students who responded negatively to the recasts which emphasize the importance of forming a relationship with the students in order to be aware of which type of corrective feedback to provide the students.

Teachers must also be aware of the effects a high affective filter can have on a learner's foreign language acquisition. As a mentor to the learners, the teacher should focus on creating a positive atmosphere and gaining the trust of the learners in the class. By developing that relationship, the teacher can positively influence the learners' experience. The teacher should be aware of those that do have a higher affective filter and alter the corrective feedback to ensure that the learners will not be negatively affected by the correction. Failing to form a bond with the learners can be detrimental to their learning process. Discovering the best way to provide

corrective feedback to students and taking into consideration the impact language anxiety can have on a classroom are two important issues that teachers need to consider in second and foreign language classrooms.

CONCLUSION

It is evident that there is still much research to be done on the issue of corrective feedback and the effect that language anxiety has on the learner's uptake of the correction in foreign language classrooms. Today, there is still a shortage of research that indicates which types of corrective feedback are the best to incorporate in the classroom. There is evidence that suggests that providing the learners with feedback that allows for negotiation of form to be an effective technique for allowing learners to notice their own errors. Research supports that noticing the correction is essential for the acquisition of a particular language feature.

Researchers also continue to debate the effectiveness of recasts as a form of corrective feedback and whether it has the potential to lead to learner uptake. There has been research both supporting and negating the success of recasts. However, the research often fails to consider the delivery and body language accompanying the recast. Intonation and delivery of a recast can affect whether the learner notices the correction. A recast that simply echoes the learner's utterance is less likely to lead to uptake, whereas if the error were emphasized, the learner may be more likely to recognize the correction.

Language anxiety is a reality in foreign language classes and teachers need to be aware of the effects a high affective filter can have on a learner. This is particularly important to consider when evaluating if corrective feedback leads to learner uptake. If the learner has a high affective filter, he or she is less likely to notice a correction such as recasts, because research has shown that speaking in the foreign language could cause stress and anxiety. Creating an atmosphere

where learners feel comfortable taking risks in the language can potentially lead to improved uptake from corrective feedback techniques.

As language teachers, it is important to acquaint ourselves with the techniques and research available on a topic that can have a profound impact in a foreign language classroom. If corrective feedback is not approached in a cautious manner, it can have negative effects on the learner and potentially cause the learner to lose interest in the language. Further research is needed on the subject of corrective feedback and its relationship to language anxiety in second and foreign language learning.

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