

Native English Speaking Teachers' Use of Corrective Feedback in a Thai Speaking Oriented ESL Context

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Abstract

Corrective feedback and its classroom implementation has been one of the most studied topics in language teaching for many years. Many studies have focused on the relationship between corrective feedback forms and learner uptake or the learner's immediate and observable reaction to the feedback. However, few studies have looked at teachers' perceptions of corrective feedback techniques and compared them with their teaching practices. This exploratory study looks at teachers' perceptions of how they correspond with actual classroom practices. The study found that although teachers reported their preference for elicitation, they actually used recasts as the most common technique when observed by the researchers at the classroom level.

Keywords: *corrective feedback, native English-speaking teachers, Thai speaking oriented ESL context*

1. Introduction

The use of various oral corrective feedback techniques and the subsequent learner response has been of great interest to language teachers and researchers since the profound shift in language teaching methodology in the second half of the twentieth century. As teachers moved away from grammar-translation toward more learner-centered pedagogies, more attention was paid to the form of learner output. Naturally, teachers and researchers, in classroom practice and experimental studies began to test the efficacy and learner response to various techniques for delivering corrective feedback in the second language classroom.

According to Lyster, Saito and Sato (2013), several studies on oral corrective feedback use in second language classrooms have been conducted by quite a few researchers. Their reported findings suggest that oral corrective feedback is vital and effective to learners' progression in second language acquisition. To Foley (1994), oral corrective feedback is seen as scaffolding in that a highly proficient language learner uses language modeling derived from feedback in support of language acquisition in various speaking contexts.

Positive effects of different types of oral corrective feedback in the area of second language acquisition have been reported across instructional contexts, laboratory and classroom studies. A study conducted by Norris and Ortega (2000) investigated the effectiveness of second language instruction, including implicit and explicit feedback, and asserted that explicit types of instruction are more effective than implicit ones.

In Thailand, it is common for Thai English teachers to provide answers for learners without giving them a chance to attempt correct responses on their own. In their justification of such a practice, teachers tend to use the large class size of up to 30 students as an excuse for not giving corrective feedback which is considered time-consuming. According to Kirkpatrick (2012), English education in Thailand has kept traditional teaching methods which rely heavily on grammar translation and a teacher-centered mode.

While other studies have investigated teachers' perspectives on the use of corrective feedback in relation to learners' responses and attitude toward correction, little is known when it comes to exploring common correction experiences shared by native English speaking teachers. In view of the researchers in this study, it would be interesting to look into corrective methods perceived as effective by native English-speaking teachers and their actual correction used in the classroom. Specifically, the researchers would like to explore whether there is any discrepancy between their perception of corrective feedback and their actual use of correction at the classroom level.

2. Background of the Study

The background of the study is supported by research in the area of teachers' perception toward corrective feedback. Corrective feedback has long been recognized as one of the key techniques used by language teachers to raise learners' awareness of errors in their L2 production and hopefully reduce deviations from the target form. There have been quite a number of studies conducted on the use and implications of corrective feedback techniques in L2 classrooms. Some researchers extended their studies to integrate corrective feedback into their language classroom experiments. This is especially true in investigating situations where corrective feedback is used in different learning areas of L2 writing and speaking.

Hendrickson (1978) posed five central questions that have shaped all subsequent explorations into corrective feedback in the L2 classroom. While studies over the past three decades have not projected a clear-cut picture of what and how language teachers handled their corrective feedback in the L2 classroom. In an attempt to shed light on corrective feedback in practice, Hendrickson put forward five central questions: (1) Should learners' errors be corrected?; (2) When should learners' errors be corrected?; (3) Which errors should be corrected?; (4) How should errors be corrected?; and (5) Who should do the correcting? Although these questions appear seemingly simple, experts in the fields of linguistics, second language acquisition, and cognitive processing have not quite agreed on their answers to these questions. The lack of common answers could stem from interpretations based on the basis of different academic disciplines.

Lyster and Ranta (1997) reported in their seminar paper the use of corrective feedback in the L2 classroom and learner uptake--the learner's immediate and observable reaction to the feedback—as a developed sequence of error treatments. The sequence, developed from Doughty (1994a, 1994b), traces the student-teacher interaction from the time of error utterance through a range of interactional possibilities and concludes with topic continuation. Errors are divided into six categories including (1) L1, (2) gender, (3) grammatical, (4) lexical, (5) phonological and (6) multiple-source errors. Practices in corrective feedback are classified into six different techniques: (1) explicit correction, (2) recast, (3) clarification request, (4) metalinguistic feedback, (5) elicitation and (6) repetition. The sequence progresses through a range of possibilities depending on learner uptake, either repaired or needing repair, and whether or not the teacher continues the topic before offering the students a chance for repaired production.

This sequence was used to analyze 18.3 hours of classroom teaching in a French immersion program in Quebec, Canada. The researchers investigated the student-teacher interaction at the primary levels with nearly equal proportions of the data coming from French language arts classes and content-based subject classes. All of the classes were audio recorded with a special focus on teachers' use of corrective feedback in response to student L2 errors (Lyster and Ranta, 1997).

The results of the study show the teachers' overwhelming use of *recasts* as the preferred corrective feedback technique with learner uptake at 69% of all instances. It was found that other corrective feedback techniques secured higher rates of learner uptake and learner-generated repair; however, they were implemented far less frequently than *recasts* (Lyster and Ranta, 1997).

In contrast with the study by Lyster and Ranta (1997), several controlled experiments have found less evidence that recasts are as deficient in yielding learner uptake and repair. McDonough (2006) compared the effects of *recasts* and *clarification requests on learner-repair* used in two experimental groups and a control group without corrective feedback. The results showed no statistically significant variation between *recasts* and *clarification requests*; however both experimental groups performed better than the control group. Leeman (2003) investigated the effect of corrective feedback by comparing *traditional recasts* with *recasts with negative evidence* which included a recast followed by an explicit reference to the learners' incorrect reference. It was found that neither of both corrective feedback techniques provided the learners with an opportunity for immediate repair. The results showed no statistically significant difference between the two techniques; however, both techniques appeared to be beneficial to learners in the experimental groups.

Yoshida (2010) investigated corrective feedback in Japanese language classrooms at an Australian university. The study reported that learner responses to corrective feedback often were not an indication of their awareness or understanding of corrective feedback being given. Similarly, teachers' perceptions of the corrective feedback seemed to be influenced by their perception of individual learners. Teachers perceived that "strong" students were more likely to notice and understand corrective feedback given in the classroom; however, stimulated recall interviews revealed that this was not true in many instances. In line with

previous studies, Yoshida (2010) found that implicit forms of corrective feedback were used more frequently than explicit forms, though less likely to yield learner uptake.

3. Research Objectives

The study aimed to explore common experiences in the use of corrective feedback shared by native English-speaking teachers in a speaking ESL class at a private language institution in Bangkok, Thailand. Since this study was of exploratory nature, its scope was confined to two research questions, being addressed as research objectives:

3.1 What are the NS teachers' perceptions of the use and efficacy of corrective feedback techniques?

3.2 Is there any discrepancy between NS teachers' perceptions of corrective feedback techniques and their actual corrective practices at the classroom level?

4. Research Methodology

Since this exploratory study attempted to identify corrective feedback techniques shared by NS teachers in a speaking-oriented EFL class in the Thai context. The researchers tended to rely on empirical evidence as well as qualitative data to account for the identified corrective techniques found at the classroom level in comparison with their perceptions via interview.

4.1 The Subjects

The subjects were three native-English speaking teachers, varied in nationality, presently working at a private English language institute in Bangkok, Thailand. They had completed a 120-hour course in TESOL, or a CELTA as well as a variety of in-house training programs offered by the language institute for its teachers. The subjects' teaching experience ranged from 1.5 to 6 years.

4.2 Research Instruments

The researchers used two instruments: (1) semi-structured interview and (2) classroom observation. The instruments were constructed and validated by three language specialists for data collection. The semi-structured interview focused on the NS teachers' perceptions of the use and efficacy of corrective feedback techniques. As for classroom observation, the researchers observed corrective feedback techniques individually used or shared by the subjects. Then the data obtained from both instruments were to identify whether there was any discrepancy between their perceptions and actual corrective feedback techniques.

5. Data Collection

The researchers collected data at a private English language institute in Bangkok, Thailand. The institute has focused on developing learner's listening and speaking skills through interaction with computerized instructional media and instruction by native-English speaking ESL teachers. Students were asked to study three lessons on language learning software developed by the institute prior to attending a small group, one-hour lesson with a teacher to work on the same grammatical points and language functions highlighted on the computer program. The teaching approach encouraged by the institute prioritized elicitation of the correct language forms rather than explicit instruction on the part of the teacher.

Data collection was done in two stages: semi-Structured interview and classroom observation.

5.1 Semi-Structured Interviews

The participants were interviewed first for their beliefs or perceptions of corrective feedback in the language classroom. The interviews tended to focus on the experience teachers had had in using oral corrective feedback in their classes at the language institute. Special attention was paid to corrective feedback techniques the teachers reported using and those techniques the teachers considered the most successful in current teaching at the institute as well as their previous ESL teaching experience. All of the interviews were semi-structured which allowed the researchers to explore further any interesting themes that emerged unexpectedly in the course of the interview. The interviews were audio recorded to allow the researchers to reinvestigate emergent themes that appeared across the data sets.

5.2 Classroom Observations

Following the interviews, the teachers' lessons were observed to gain insight into the use of corrective feedback techniques in a classroom setting. The classes at the language institute are small in size with a maximum of four students. As mentioned earlier, the institute has focused on oral language development so very little was written during the classes. The researchers took detailed descriptive and reflective notes on the implementation of corrective feedback in the classroom settings. The data were collected in the framework of taxonomy of oral corrective feedback developed by Lyster, Saito and Sato (2012). The observed corrective feedback techniques were classified as explicit and implicit categories, and then reclassified as reformulations of learner productions and prompts. This taxonomy was used to identify the teachers' actual implementation of corrective feedback in their class. Special attention was paid to the extent to which the teachers' actual use of corrective feedback corresponded with their reported beliefs and practices as secured in the prior interviews. In other words, the researchers checked discrepancy between perception and reality in the use of corrective feedback techniques.

6. Data Analysis

The interview data were first analyzed for opinions, experiences and feelings of the NS teachers toward the use of corrective feedback as given in their interviews. The obtained data were grouped according to common thematic variations. Then observation data were analyzed in the categories of (1) explicit techniques, (2) implicit techniques, (3) reformulations for productions and (4) prompts, after the corrective feedback taxonomy by Lyster, Saito and Sato (2013). Then the researchers identified discrepancy between the teachers' perception of corrective feedback and their actual use of corrective feedback in their classroom.

7. Results

7.1 NS teachers' perceptions of the use and efficacy of corrective feedback techniques

The NS teachers in their interview, all expressed the necessity of *being selective* in choosing when to use corrective feedback. Their common concern dealt with the possibility of overcorrection in a Thai speaking-oriented ESL context. The NS teachers unanimously agreed that correcting every mistake in the course of a normal lesson was both impossible

and counter-productive. Teacher 1 with six years' ESL teaching experience emphasized the need to be selective when offering corrective feedback:

You don't want to overcorrect. There's a lot of mistakes that you kind of look past. I think the challenge is finding which mistakes you should correct and which mistakes you should just let go. Because if you correct everything it will discourage people, they won't want to speak.

All NS teachers acknowledged that the overuse of corrective feedback techniques was a demotivating factor and discouraged student speech production in general. It was noted that none of the teachers explicitly mentioned the issue of Asian learners' silence in response to the former's corrective feedback.

The NS teachers also reported their *sensitivity to the type of activity* as an influencing factor in determining whether to offer corrective feedback. Activities that were deemed to be fluency building or informal conversation seemed to be exempted from corrective feedback. Teacher 2 with one and a half years of teaching experience, explained how activity type affected the use of corrective feedback:

[I] say what they did wrong and what is the correct way to say it. After they already did the role play otherwise they would be stopping all the time. During the role play I don't really make corrections. I just let them make mistakes. They won't be able to acquire any fluency if they are always stopping for correction.

In this case, the teacher seemed to draw a clear distinction between activities intended to develop fluency versus accuracy. The teaching materials provided by the institute moved from controlled activities with a focus on accuracy, to role plays, and then other fluency activities.

Another commonality that emerged from the interview data was the variety of techniques used by the NS teachers in the classroom setting. All three NS teachers expressed their preference for using *repetition with a tone adjusted to highlight student errors*. The teachers agreed that this was both efficient and effective as a corrective feedback technique and that the students usually understood what was offered as corrective feedback. Teacher 1 explained the use of repetition with a modified tone to offer corrective feedback as follows:

A lot of times the easiest way to correct someone is just to repeat what they said with that kind of questioning tone. It's like...*I'm study at...I'm* and usually they will understand that they've done something wrong and try to make a correction on their own.

While repetition with a modified tone seemed to be the preferred method of offering corrective feedback common to all teachers in the study, they unanimously stated that they employed a variety of corrective feedback techniques. Throughout the course of the interview, it became apparent that all teachers relied on both *implicit and explicit forms of corrective feedback*. Teacher 3 mentioned how explicit corrective feedback techniques fit in the overall error correction scheme:

Well, easy things like if the wrong form of the verb comes out, I'll just be like, if they say verb two and it should be three, I'll just be like three, three. And sometimes I'll just use my

fingers to show them three and they seem to understand pretty quickly what I'm talking about. I do that all the time like two, two. I don't say anything because they know. We've already talked about the structure.

In this example, Teacher 3 seemed to suggest that in some instances a metalinguistic clue like showing the number by fingers, is preferable to other forms of corrective feedback. The quotation signified that reduced time was required for learner uptake using a metalinguistic clue in contrast with implicit forms or forms that prompt learners to create their own *reformulated utterances* as expected by the institute's teaching guidelines for fluency development.

The NS teachers expressed a preference for *delayed feedback* using the written forms provided by the language institute. The teachers agreed upon the idea that an over reliance on corrective feedback would have a negative and demoralizing impact on students confidence in producing language. Teacher 1 explained thus:

No way. It is absolutely impossible to correct each and every mistake. Not only would you not get passed the first exercise in each lesson but the student's confidence would be completely and totally destroyed. If you understand that the students are usually making more than one mistake each time they speak; correcting every mistake would be so demoralizing.

The NS teachers all seemed to have an innate understanding of the relationship between offering error correction to improve the accuracy of students' production and the inverse effect that correction has on the students' willingness to speak and participate meaningfully. The institutional pedagogy has placed a high degree of importance on the development of fluency with the use of fluency building exercises, followed by interactions with the NS teachers. In this regard, the NS teachers were well aware that an overreliance on corrective feedback might impair the students' ability to develop fluency in L2.

7.2 Discrepancy between NS teachers' perceptions of corrective feedback techniques and their actual practices of corrective feedback in the classroom

The obtained observation data revealed major corrective feedback techniques used by the NS teachers in their classes. The elicitation technique and didactic recasts were dominant in use among all NS teachers in this study. Other techniques included repetition, metalinguistic clues, and paralinguistic signals.

The NS teachers actually used the elicitation technique as guided by the institutional pedagogy. They showed in their classes both implicit and explicit corrective feedback techniques. They relied on these techniques to reformulate the learners' production as well as to prompt the learners to correct their own utterances. In this regard, their reported perception of corrective feedback corresponded with their actual classroom practices.

It was surprisingly found in the classroom that the NS teachers tended to prefer *didactic recasts* which were not mentioned in their interview. Didactic recasts emerged as the most common form of corrective feedback offered to the students. Didactic recasts involved the teacher's reformulation of a learner's speech production without offering the

opportunity for the learner's self-repair. Didactic recasts used by the NS teachers appeared to be automatic and voluntary in response to errors made by the students. It was also observed that didactic recasts did not generate too much interruption or communication breakdown. This finding revealed a discrepancy between the teachers' perception and actuality of practices. Particularly in the perception data, the NS teachers even reported minimizing the use of recasts in favor of elicitation, repetition and other techniques which prompt learner self-repair.

It should be noted that the institutional pedagogy did not support explicit grammar instruction; instead it encouraged elicitation and other techniques to prompt students to correct their own utterances. Explicit grammar instruction was not encouraged for the fact that learners were expected to acquire the relevant grammatical points through computer mediated language learning sessions prior to each speaking class. At the classroom level, the NS teachers incorporated grammar instruction when providing their corrective feedback. Teacher 2 explained why it was sometimes necessary to deviate from institutionally guided practices:

I guess I give explicit grammar instruction a lot. I do that a lot I guess. I know we are not supposed to use those grammar terms but I find it is just easier than coming up with some long convoluted story. I mean these students have all been taught these terms before so it's just silly to pretend they haven't. I guess I don't really agree with that part of our method here.

The point on the use of explicit grammar instruction therefore marked another discrepancy between the NS teachers' perception of corrective feedback and their actual practice at the classroom level.

8. Discussion

The findings of this study appeared to be in line with previous research on corrective feedback use in the L2 classroom (Foley, 1994; Norris and Ortega, 2000; Lyster, Saito and Sato 2013). The teachers unanimously expressed their opinion that an overuse of corrective feedback tended to yield a negative effect on the learners' fluency development and willingness to speak in the classroom (Leeman, 2003). The *overuse of corrective feedback* could demoralize and impede learners' speech production, though unintentionally done by the teachers.

Implicit corrective feedback was preferred by the teachers in this study. The use of *implicit techniques* did not provide the learners with a reformulation for speech production but rather intended to prompt learner self-repair. It was noted that the use of implicit corrective feedback was dominant in the teachers' interview data. Such a point was in congruence with the significance of implicit feedback reported in the study by Norris and Ortega (2000).

The use of *didactic recasts* was in fact meant to assist learners to move on with fluency without sacrificing accuracy. The importance of the recast technique was highlighted in the work of Lyster and Ranta (1997) and Leeman (2003). In particular, the use of recasts with

negative evidence was cautioned by Leeman (2003) that it could have a negative impact on the learner's confidence in delivering intended speech productions.

It was pointed out by the NS teachers in the study that they had to turn to *explicit grammar instruction* to ensure accuracy of language use. Such a viewpoint could be controversial to the institutional pedagogy in that the institute provided guidelines for the use of elicitation in support of language development for fluency. The NS teachers perhaps considered such grammar instruction to scaffold the learners for language accuracy toward fluency. As pointed out in the work by Lyster, Saito and Sato (2013), oral corrective feedback is vitally important to learners' progression in second language acquisition. In such an ESL teaching context in Thailand, the NS teachers perhaps considered explicit grammar instruction as scaffolding in nature and thus provided it as part of their so-called "effective" corrective feedback for their students.

9. Conclusion

The use of corrective feedback for language fluency development in this study should require a peer observation program to help the teachers understand the way in which they actually tried corrective feedback techniques in their classroom. They should beware of any existing discrepancy between their perceptions of corrective feedback and actuality of the techniques used in the classroom. Such an awareness could help prevent their overuse of corrective feedback that could yield negative impacts on learners' confidence in producing their speech. Furthermore, it would be beneficial for the teachers to elicit the learner uptake with specific corrective feedback techniques to suit particular types of learners. The researchers in this study trusted that further research into peer teacher observation and feedback in the area of corrective feedback was to help teachers in identifying suitable corrective techniques for their learners' language development for both fluency and accuracy.

10. The Authors

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