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Who do learners prefer to be corrected by? Teachers or classmates?

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Abstract

The current article aims to investigate the possible effects of Iranian EFL learners' age, gender and proficiency level on their preferences for corrective feedback provider. To meet this end, a questionnaire was distributed among 147 Iranian EFL learners to choose their preferences for corrective feedback provider. The data gathered was then submitted to SPSS software, and was analyzed using a Chi-Square test. The results have indicated that there was a statistically significant relationship between learners' age and gender and their preferences for corrective feedback provider. However, no statistically significant relationship was found between learners' proficiency level and their preferences for corrective feedback provider. The results demonstrated that female students prefer to be corrected by their teachers only, while males tended to receive corrective feedback from both their teachers and classmates. Moreover the results indicated that teens and young adults were more eager to be corrected by the teacher, whereas adults preferred to be corrected by both their teachers and their classmates.

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1. Introduction

As the focus of classroom instruction has shifted over the past few decades from an emphasis on language forms to functional language within communicative context, the question of the place of error correction or corrective feedback (CF), has become more and more important (Brown, 2004). The errors learners make are not anymore regarded as imperfection (Gass and Selinker, 2008), and the corrections teachers provide to students are considered as opportunities for developing students learning. Moreover, corrective feedback has shifted the traditional view of

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the teacher as the center of the teaching process to more student collaboration in class, which has also led to peer-corrective feedback in language classes as an alternative to teacher corrective feedback.

Corrective feedback (CF) as it is a very critical issue in learning languages, has been investigated and studied from a variety of different standpoints. Researchers have found out different answers to practical questions related to the issues such as how, when and who to correct students (Lyster and Ranta, 1997; Ellis et al., 2006; Surakka, 2007; Rahimi and Dastjerdi, 2012; Taipale, 2012). As observed in different studies, there are different techniques that teachers use to treat students' errors in classes. The effectiveness of corrective feedback can depend on different factors such as student anxiety (Allwright and Bailey, 1991), or the ambiguous nature of some types of correction (Mackey et al., 2000), the proficiency level of students and the degree of difference between the student's utterance and the target form (Philp, 2003). With regard to corrective feedback, a number of studies also investigated learners' and teachers' preferences for corrective feedback. One of the factors that has recently attracted the attention of researchers is the preferences of students as it might influence the learning and teaching.

Although previous literature on corrective feedback is bulky, most have just focused the uptake and the effectiveness of corrective feedback. Very few studies were conducted to find out about student and teacher preferences for corrective feedback, and corrective feedback provider in particular.

One of the studies on the topic is a study conducted by Yoshida (2010), which investigated the learners and teachers' perception of corrective feedback. The results have shown that teachers and learners both thought that self-correction (such as clarification request by the teacher or answer elicitation), was more effective for learning than recasts. They believed finding out the correct answers themselves gave them a sense of achievement and confidence. Learners preferred that teachers take some time to give explanation to make the feedback more effective. Lasagabaster and Sierra (2005) also have reported the same results of their study. They found that teachers and learners both perceived feedback more effective when teachers take more time, provide longer explanations and use different types of corrective feedback.

Another study (Zhang, Zhang, Ma, 2010) also tried to find the students and teachers' attitudes and preferences of feedback based on the model proposed by Chaudron (1998). The author designed a simple questionnaire mainly focusing on whether learner errors should be corrected or not, when errors should be corrected, what kinds of errors should be corrected, how errors should be corrected and who should correct learner errors. In this study, the author wants to explore whether there are any significant differences between students' and teachers' attitudes towards oral error feedback in classroom interaction.

The findings reveal that students and teachers think phonological, lexical, grammatical errors should be corrected, but their perceptions of whether different error types should deserve the same attention are significantly different. Students hold that lexical errors should deserve the most attention; grammatical errors rank the second and phonological errors rank the last. However, teachers report that they provide the most feedback to lexical errors; phonological and grammatical errors share the second. This reveals that the mean of each error type for students is much lower than the mean for teachers, which indicate that students expect more feedback from their teacher.

As to how to correct learner errors, there are significant differences between students and teachers. Students say they prefer explicit correction and only a few like metalinguistic clues better. But teachers provide different feedback types across different error types: to phonological errors, teachers like to use explicit correction and metalinguistic clues; to lexical errors, teachers like to use explicit correction; to grammatical errors, metalinguistic clues are preferred. Even to the same type of error, different teachers may employ different types of error feedback. The findings do not suggest significant differences between students' and teachers' attitudes towards who should correct learner errors. Most students and teachers hold that to phonological, lexical and grammatical errors, teacher-correction is better than self-correction or peer correction.

Liu and Hansen (2002) in a research concluded that learners trust the feedback from their teachers and tutors who are native English speakers, but not from other classmates, who were non-English speakers, they found their correction even discouraging and confusing. O'Brein (2004) also has stated that students prefer teacher feedback to peer-feedback, but this evidence does not show that learners have negative feelings or that they do not trust their peers. Ferris (2003) also contended that students are not good feedback providers to each other due to the limitations that have as both developing writers and second language learners.

Despite these drawbacks mentioned by some researchers about peer feedback, some others have found that peer feedback is beneficial. They (Mory, 2004; Ferris, 2003; Topping, 1998) think that peer feedback plays an important

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