Teachers’ Perceptions On Corrective Feedback In Turkish Primary Schools

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Abstract
Corrective feedback (CF) is an indication to the learners that his or her use of the target language is incorrect (Lightbrown & Spada, 1999: 171). With increasing attention to applications and effectiveness of CF in foreign language classrooms as well as beliefs and thoughts of practitioners and L2 learners about these applications, teachers and students’ perceptions of CF have become a notable research concern in SLA instruction. This study specifically deals with teachers’ perceptions on a variety of CF types used in EFL classrooms in Turkey, where English is offered as a compulsory part of the national curriculum. 36 teachers working with students of various grades in state primary schools were the participants of the study. Data were gathered through an interview conducted with these teachers to elicit their opinions about CF and CF types. The teachers were mainly asked how they treat learners’ errors, whether these errors should be corrected and when and how they should be corrected. The study is intended to suggest evaluation of the findings obtained through qualitative and quantitative methods and to conclude with some pedagogical implications in accordance with these findings.

Keywords: Corrective feedback (CF); CF type; teacher perception

1. Introduction

Feedback is conceptualized as information provided by an agent (e.g., teacher, peer, book, parent, self-experience) regarding aspects of one’s performance or understanding (Hattie & Timperley, 2007). It has been among the most significant phenomena in the field of education, and language education is no exception.
Feedback is defined as a type of interaction which can enhance second language acquisition by making non-native speakers aware that their usage is not acceptable in some way and it provides a model for ‘correctness’ (Saville-Troike, 2006: 110). Likewise, Ellis (2009) asserts that it is viewed as a means of fostering learner motivation and ensuring linguistic accuracy in both behaviourist and communicative approaches to language teaching. Voerman et al. (2012) define it as information provided by the teacher concerning the performance or understanding of the student, with reference to a goal which is aimed at improving learning. Hattie (1999) regards it as ‘one of the most influential factors in learning, as powerful as the quality and quantity of instruction’. According to Moreno (2004), it is crucial to improving knowledge and skill acquisition. Interactional feedback is an important source of information for learners and it provides them with information about the success (or, more likely, lack of success) of their utterances and gives additional opportunities to focus on production and comprehension (Gass & Selinker, 2008: 329). More specifically, Dlaska & Krekeler (2013) advocate that effective feedback is thought to require information about three aspects: (1) the quality of the current performance with regard to the desired goal; (2) the quality of the desired performance; and (3) the question of how to close the gap between present and desired performance. Not surprisingly, a great deal of research has been conducted on the use and role of feedback in training learners with various proficiency levels in second language. Lyster & Ranta (1997) remind us that the way competent speakers react to learners’ errors have been examined “in terms of negative evidence by linguists (e.g., White, 1989), as repair by discourse analysts (e.g., Kasper, 1985), as negative feedback by psychologists (e.g., Annett, 1989), as corrective feedback by second language teachers (e.g., Fanselow, 1977) and as focus-on-form in second language acquisition (e.g., Lightbrown and Spada, 1990; Long, 1991).

As the present study is intended to focus on corrective feedback (CF) and CF types, it is useful to introduce the concept, which has been defined in relatively similar ways by various scholars across decades. Schegloff et al. (1977: 363) define the term correction as “the replacement of error or mistake by what is correct”. Chaudron (1977: 51) defines it as “any reaction of the teacher which clearly transforms, disapprovingly refers to, or demands improvement of the learner utterance”. Lightbown and Spada (1999: 171) identify it as “any indication to the learners that their use of the target language is incorrect”. In a similar vein, Russell and Spada (2006: 134) suggest that it refers to ‘any feedback provided to a learner, from any source, that contains evidence of learner error of language form’. According to Ellis et al., (2006: 28) it is any response provided to learner utterance that contains an error. They propose that it takes the form of a response to a learner utterance that is linguistically deviant. It might consist of (1) an indication that an error has been committed, (2) provision of the correct target language form, (3) metalinguistic information about the nature of the error, or any combination of these. When used interchangeably with the term ‘feedback’, CF has been classified into two groups such as explicit feedback and implicit feedback (e.g., Carroll, 2001; Ellis et al., 2006) or negative feedback and positive feedback (e.g., Long and Robinson, 1998). As cited in Lyster et al. (2013), Lyster and Ranta (1997) identified six different CF types based on their descriptive study of teacher–student interaction in French immersion classrooms. About a decade later, these types were classified into two broad CF categories as reformulations and prompts. In 2012, they extended the types to include ‘paralinguistic signal’, as described and exemplified in Table 1.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CF type</th>
<th>Definition</th>
<th>E.g.</th>
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<tr>
<td>Clarification request</td>
<td>A phrase such as ‘Pardon’ and ‘I don’t understand’ following a student utterance to indirectly signal an error</td>
<td>S: She a student. T: What?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elicitation</td>
<td>Prompting the learner to self-correct, in the form of wh- question or fill the blank</td>
<td>S: I’ll do it if I will have time T: I’ll do it if I …..</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Explicit correction</td>
<td>Explicit provision of the correct form by a clear indication of an error</td>
<td>S: Go post office. T: Not ‘go post office’, go to the post office. We say ‘I will go to the post office tomorrow’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Metalinguistic</td>
<td>A brief metalinguistic explanation</td>
<td>S: She like reading book.</td>
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Harmer (1983: 63) maintains that correction techniques are used in order to give the students ‘a chance to get the new language right’. Mackey et al. (2007: 129) contend that language teachers use a wide range of CF in L2 classrooms to help learners identify problems in their L2 utterances. Lyster et al. (2012) draw our attention to the research concerning its role in L2 classrooms and its effects on L2 development suggesting that ‘CF plays a pivotal role in the kind of scaffolding that teachers need to provide to individual learners to promote continuing L2 growth’. They also advocate that learner and teacher preferences for CF have been investigated for two main reasons: learner preferences can influence learning behaviours (Grotjahn, 1991; Borg, 2003) and mismatches between teachers’ intentions and learners’ interpretations of those intentions may result in negative effects on learning (Nunan, 1989). They are of the opinion that research conducted on CF preferences is important, ‘as it informs practitioners of learners’ perspectives and, subsequently, may lead to more effective teaching practice when combined with results from the CF effectiveness research’. Ellis (2009), on the other hand, postulates that SLA researchers and language educators have mostly failed to agree about whether to correct errors and when and how to correct what kind of errors in L2 classrooms. Accordingly, he offers certain principles that should be taken into consideration in order to get positive outcomes while treating learners’ errors using CF strategies in language classrooms.

- Teachers and students should negotiate agreed goals for CF that are likely to vary in accordance with social and situational context.
- Both oral and written forms, CF functions with students’ errors in accuracy and fluency.
- Learners should be made aware that they are being corrected.
- Teachers should not start with an explicit form of correction; instead, they should simply inform them that there is an error. Subsequently, they should employ a more explicit form of CF unless learners are unable to self-correct.
- Teachers need to decide on timing of oral CF with experiment.
- Teachers should provide learners space to uptake the correction applied.
- Teachers do not necessarily to employ some CF strategies to treat all kinds of errors. Thus, they should take individual differences into account. Namely, they should use strategies in accordance with their cognitive and affective needs (who, when and who). They should use strategies that are not likely to cause anxiety.

In a quasi-experimental study, DeKeyser (1993) investigated the effect of error correction in SLA classrooms. He examined two French as a second language classes at a high school in Belgium and revealed that error correction did not have a significant effect on L2 proficiency of learners. However, the study indicated that learners with low extrinsic motivation perform better on oral tasks when they are corrected while those with high extrinsic motivation display a better performance on these tasks when their errors are ignored. As cited in Lyster et al. (2012), although learners are more likely to notice explicit CF than implicit CF (e.g., Mackey et al., 2007; Nassaji, 2009) and prompts more than recasts (e.g., Ammar, 2008), some researchers have tentatively suggested that the effects of implicit CF might be more robust (i.e. longer lasting) than those of explicit CF, which might be more effective in the short term (Mackey & Goo, 2007; Li, 2010). Research on CF types that are used in classrooms has displayed various results. The following section is intended to provide results of the studies carried out in classroom settings to reveal the distribution of CF types employed by the teachers.
2. Previous research

Simard & Jean (2011) investigated CF types used at high schools in Quebec where French is used as a second language and found that 46% of CF moves were comprised by explicit correction while approximately 30% were prompts (Clarification request, repetition, paralinguistic signal, elicitation and metalinguistic clue) and 25% were recasts. Some studies conducted in different settings indicated prompts as the mostly used CF types (e.g., Lochtman, 2002; Vicente-Rasoamalala, 2009; Simard & Jean, 2011; Yang, 2009) while recasts revealed the most prevalent CF type in other studies (e.g., Panova & Lyster, 2002; Lyster & Ranta, 1997; Ellis et al., 2001; Sheen, 2004; Tsang, 2004; Lyster & Mori, 2006; Lee, 2007).

Research on CF preferences is important, as it informs practitioners of learners’ perspectives and, subsequently, may lead to more effective teaching practice when combined with results from the CF effectiveness research (Lyster et al., 2012: 7). As cited in the same work, Schulz (1996) reported that the majority of questionnaire respondents in her study of eight different foreign language classes in the US thought that CF was imperative. Likewise, Chenoweth et al. (1983) revealed that ESL learners in the US needed CF in response to their errors. In a study conducted with high school students and teachers working with those students in Canada, Jean & Simard (2011) concluded that most of the students would like to ‘get their oral errors corrected all the time’. Comparing learners’ and teachers’ preferences for CF in the US and Colombia, Schulz (2001) found that learners and teachers in Colombia favoured CF in grammar instruction more than those in the US. Lyster et al. (2012: 8) attribute such kind of results to the fact that ‘ESL learners, in spite of their foreign language learning background, placed greater emphasis on communication than on grammar and CF, whereas the foreign language learners without opportunities to use the target language outside the classroom valued grammar instruction and CF more’. This particular study aims to elicit EFL teachers’ perceptions of CF and CF types in EFL classes at primary state schools in Turkey.

3. Research questions

In order to reveal teachers’ perceptions concerning CF and CF types, four research questions were developed on the use of CF applications in primary EFL classrooms.

1. Do teachers believe learner errors should be corrected? If so, when and by whom?
2. What kind of learner errors should be corrected?
3. What types of corrective feedback should be used by teachers in response to learner errors?
4. What types of corrective feedback are performed by teachers in response to learner errors?

4. Methodology

36 EFL teachers (26 Female; 10 Male) working at 20 different state primary schools located in Adana, Turkey were the participants of this particular study. Their ages range from 27 to 48 with a mean age of 37.5 and their experience in teaching English as a Foreign Language changes between 3 and 24 years with a mean of 14 years. Table 2 displays some details about the teachers in concern.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>School (N)</th>
<th>Teacher (N)</th>
<th>Teachers’ mean age</th>
<th>Experience in EFL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4th</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>38;1</td>
<td>14;1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5th</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>38;6</td>
<td>14;0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6th</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>38;2</td>
<td>14;8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7th</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>35;0</td>
<td>13;1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

At the time of the study, all participants were working at schools where English is offered as two-hour-a-week course as a compulsory part of the national curriculum administered to 4th, 5th, 6th, 7th and 8th graders. The participants reported that they were teaching to an average of 30 students in each class, where female students slightly outnumbered the male students. They were posed mainly six questions related to their views on CF and their preferences for CF types in their classroom.
1. Do you think spoken errors of EFL learners should be corrected?
2. When do you think these errors should be corrected? (If the answer is ‘yes’ to the previous question)
3. What types of spoken errors of EFL learners should be corrected?
4. Who do you think should correct these errors?
5. What types of corrective feedback do you mostly use?
6. What types of corrective feedback do you think is most effective in treating these errors?

The participants were videotaped during the interview sessions and subsequently, their responses were transcribed by the researchers. Section 5 is intended to offer findings elicited through these questions and the related discussion.

5. Findings and discussion

A total number of 36 teachers teaching English as a foreign language at 20 different state primary schools in Adana, Turkey were directed six questions identified in the previous section. The first question was posed in order to elicit their views as to whether spoken errors of EFL learners should be corrected and the second was asked only to those who responded positively to the first question. The related results are illustrated in Figure 1.

As indicated in Figure 1, no participants believe that spoken errors of EFL learners should be entirely ignored; namely, the majority are of the opinion that these errors should definitely be corrected and approximately 20% of them expressed that ‘it depends on the aspects of language focused at the time’ and added that ‘they should not be ignored at all; instead, they might be corrected in a follow-up session after the lesson. When they were asked about timing for correction of these errors, 56% of the participants favoured ‘immediate correction’ while 33% preferred ‘delayed correction’ and 4% advocate objects of the activities should be taken into consideration while correcting such kind of errors; that is, the activity is intended to help learners improve their phonological development in English, phonological errors committed by these learners should be ignored while they are speaking and corrected when the activity is completed.

Through the third and fourth questions, perceptions of the participant teachers on error types that should be corrected and who should correct these errors were investigated. Figure 2 displays the related results.
The results have shown that 22% of the teachers believe that errors committed by EFL learners should be corrected regardless of their type and a balanced distribution was observed among the teachers who thought misformation errors should be corrected and those who thought phonological errors should be corrected (39%). Not surprisingly, half of the participants suggested teachers should correct these errors while 33% of them favoured the errors corrected by the students who committed them. 17% of the teachers are of the opinion that teachers should provide students with the opportunity to correct their own errors and they should correct them if they fail to do so.

Finally, the teachers were asked what types of CF they mostly used when EFL learners produce spoken errors and what types of CF they think are the most effective in treating these errors. Distribution of CF types reported by the participants is depicted in Figure 3.

It is noteworthy that the participants were offered no options concerning CF types and they were not confined to a unique type in responding to these questions. In accordance with the results, explicit correction, recast and repetition revealed the mostly used CF types in response to spoken errors of EFL learners. Elicitation was the second mostly employed CF type and clarification requests and paralinguistic signals were the least frequented ones in this concern. An interesting finding of the study might be that elicitation was evaluated as the most effective CF type by the teachers. Repetition revealed the only type for which there seems to be consistency between the type mostly used in EFL classrooms and the one considered most effective to use in the settings in concern. The discrepancy between the CF types mostly used by teachers and those they found most effective in response to spoken errors of EFL learners is relatively less significant in explicit correction than those observed in clarification request, paralinguistic signal and recast. Another interesting finding of the study is concerning the perceptions of teachers on recast; namely, it was among the mostly used CF type even though only a few teachers reported it as the most effective type in EFL classrooms.
The following section offers evaluation of research questions and a few suggestions for further research.

6. Conclusion

6.1. Evaluation of the research questions

Our first research question investigated whether teachers think spoken errors of EFL learners should be corrected. Findings of the study have shown that the most of the teachers strongly believe that these errors should necessarily be corrected.

Accordingly, the second question was posed to reveal the teachers’ opinions as to when and by whom they should be corrected. Half of the participants favoured immediate correction while over 30% of them thought they should be delayed and a few participants they should be corrected in accordance with the objects of the classroom activities. Likewise, half of the participants expressed these errors should be corrected by teachers whereas 33% of them reported that they find it more beneficial for students to correct their own errors. It is significant that some teachers stated these errors should be corrected by teachers only when learners are unable to self-correct.

The third question was intended to determine what types of spoken errors committed by EFL learners should be corrected. 22% of the teachers are of the opinion that all types of errors should be corrected. Others reported that misformation errors and phonological errors should be corrected.

The fourth question was formed to find out what types of corrective feedback are performed by teachers in response to spoken errors of EFL learners. Teachers’ responses have suggested that explicit correction, recast and repetition were the mostly employed CF types in EFL classrooms. Elicitation revealed the second mostly used type in this category. Clarification request and paralinguistic signal were the least frequented types used by EFL teachers in response to learners’ spoke errors.

The last question aimed to discover what types of CF teachers think should be used in response to these errors. Elicitation appeared the type that teachers found most effective in treating spoken errors of EFL learners. Repetition is another CF type considered effective in this sense. Explicit correction was also reported among effective CF types by EFL teachers. Finally, clarification request and recast seem to be identified as effective by a relatively small number of teachers who participated in the study.

6.2. Suggestions for Further Research

Our study is limited to the perceptions of 36 EFL teachers working at state primary schools in Turkey on spoken errors of learners. It might be extended to include a larger number of teachers working at primary or secondary schools located in different countries. A similar study might be conducted with students attending these schools in order to reveal their perceptions on CF and CF types employed in EFL classrooms in response to their spoken errors. The study is also limited to elicit the CF types used in response to spoken errors committed by learners in EFL settings; so, a follow-up study might investigate perceptions of EFL teachers or learners on the use of CF types in response to written errors of EFL learners attending schools of various educational levels. Finally, the present study has indicated discrepancies between CF types used by primary school teachers in EFL classrooms and the ones considered most effective by the very same teachers. Hence, a further study might be carried out to explore underlying causes of this particular situation.

7. Acknowledgments

The authors would like to thank all EFL teachers who devoted their precious time to answer the questions posed to them during interview sessions.

References