

WATCH THEIR LANGUAGE: FEEDBACK PROVISION VIA AUDIO-VISUAL RECORDINGS

Abdallah Amin Terriche

Mr. Hassiba Ben Bouali University, Algeria, aminimosparta@yahoo.com

Abstract

In their attempt to learn a foreign language, learners make errors. Providing a feedback on this erroneous language output presents a multilevel dilemma. First, teachers must decide whether or not to respond. Second, if feedback is ever desperately required, who should do it and how should it be done? More important, overwhelmed by the sheer number of beginner and intermediate-level learners' errors, keeping a record and making notes of the important errors during interpersonal conversation such as role plays poses a serious challenge. Equally important, teachers are more inclined to interrupt constantly the flow of learners' conversation to provide corrective feedback, a practice that much dampens their enthusiasm to express themselves. In response, the current paper addresses two main questions: which teaching technique could teachers devise to organize their corrective feedback provision? Which technology toolkit could be brought into classroom use to help organize corrective feedback provision to learners' oral flawed output? The paper draws on the experimental use of audiovisual recordings of learners' oral output for the purpose of providing more adequate corrective feedback. With one objective in mind, the experiment is aimed to test the utility of using audiovisual recording to improve the quality of corrective feedback provision. Audiovisual recordings provide useful database for teachers to organize any remedial intervention and feedback provision. Moreover, the recordings will, in the long term, constitute a corpus that could be well exploited to build an explanatory theory for learners' errors.

Keywords: audiovisual-based corrective feedback, corrective feedback, oral errors feedback

1. INTRODUCTION

Attitudes towards foreign language learners' errors have evolved throughout the span of time. Until the late 1950's and 1960's, errors, from a behaviorist perspective, were seen as bad habits, signs of learning failure and prevent correct speech from being established. Intensive modeling and drilling, thus, were designed to eradicate the resurgence of errors (Rivers & Temperley, 1978). On the contrary, looking at language learning in itself as a creative construction process where learners actively construct rules and gradually adapt them in the direction of the target language system; errors are now seen as reflection of learners' stage of interlanguage (Hedge, 2000). A foreign language learner's speech is no longer viewed as a faulty version of the adult's. It is recognized as having its own underlying system which can be described in its own terms

(Rivers & Temperley, 1978). Last but not least, errors offer insights into learning strategies and mechanisms learners employ to reach correct target language output. With such a view, their speech provides a direct reflection of the rules which they have internalized, that is, their underlying “competence” in the second language (Littlewood, 1998).

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Correcting errors during learners’ oral output remains more than critical and happens to be a complex process. It is not enough to locate the errors then provide immediate corrective feedback or design further remedial work. Whenever a teacher’s response is required, a careful decision-making should be undertaken to determine what, when, who and how to correct.

2.1. What to Correct

There is a range of decisions teachers have to make in treating errors. Is it really necessary to respond to every error a learner makes when attempting to communicate in English? The answer often relates to the distinction made between error, mistake, a lapse (also slip) and attempt.

An error refers to a systematic deviation. That is, when a learner has not learned something or consistently gets it wrong (Venkateswaran, 1995). Errors are often seen as evidence of incomplete or faulty knowledge of English (Hedge, 2000). What is more, due to factors to do with carelessness, tiredness, distractions, or difficult circumstances such as talking on a faulty telephone line and having to respond to partly heard messages, learners turn unable to perform their knowledge in producing correct utterances; thus, falling out of the wagon and commit mistakes (Hedge, 2000). Adding to that, fatigue, shortness of memory and lack of concentration potentially lead learners to produce slips of the tongue identically recognized as lapses (Venkateswaran, 1995). Additionally, there are also occasions when learners are compelled to express themselves using language items not encountered yet and could be possibly beyond their current competence of the target language. Trying to put their ideas into words for the sake of responding to an ongoing conversation, learners are very likely to produce erroneous output. Julian Edge refers to such errors as “Attempt” (Pollard, 2008).

Another widely accepted strategy to reach decision over what to correct is to make one’s mind up about which errors hamper communication. Errors that impede understanding by the listener are referred to as global errors. Local errors, on the contrary, tend not to disrupt understanding for they can be easily adjusted in the mind of the listener. For example, “there are long trees on each side of my street” could be effortlessly interpreted as “tall trees” (Hedge, 2000).

2.2. When and How much to Correct

Research indicates that non-native teachers are more sensitive to errors. Given the fact that beginner level learners’ output could be described as erroneous most of the time, teachers, then, face a higher tension to balance between corrective feedback and encouragement. Too much corrective feedback often get learners frustrated not having enough room to express themselves without the teacher interrupting. On the other hand, providing enough green lights to encourage interpersonal communication allows errors to go uncorrected and serves to reinforce the persistence of such errors (Douglas, 2000). In the terminology of error analysis, such errors are often described as fossilized, meaning they become permanent and irreversible (Littlewood, 1998).

In the light of the above, teachers are called to pay close attention to the type of activity learners are about to start and separate lessons focused on accuracy from those aimed to achieve fluency (Rivers & Temperley, 1978). During accuracy activities, the learning outcome is a correct learners’ use of the language system including their use of grammar, pronunciation, and vocabulary. Fluency activities are contrastively aimed to get learners’ attention focused on the message that is being communicated and not the language forms (Nation, 1989). By way of explanation, fluency tasks are said to promote the ability to communicate ideas effectively needless to a perfect command of intonation, vocabulary and grammar (Guillot, 1999).

Thus, there is a range of options for teachers to choose from. Response to errors could be immediate. It is also sometimes best to bide your time until learners get done from talking. Teachers could also collect a sample of learners’ errors and turn them into teaching points for future lessons (Bailey, 2005).

2.3. Who and How to Correct

Given the fact that the teacher’s role always involves primarily providing feedback after learners’ oral or written output, it does not necessarily by implication suggest that error correction is solely the teacher’s

business. The drive towards other avenues to error correction like peer feedback or prompting self-correction comes in part due to recent development in second language acquisition research particularly considering sound findings about co-operative learning, learning styles differences and learning strategies. In an effort to make error treatment a less intimidating experience and overcome affective barriers such as high anxiety level, embarrassment, confidence loss, stress and no willingness to accept correction often associated with the teacher's error correction, educators have searched for less non-confrontational instructional alternatives to keep error correction a learning opportunity. Cooperative learning whereby learners work together in small groups and are rewarded for their collective accomplishment serves to minimize the sense of guilt often associated with committing errors. To illustrate, the team-versus-team competition is highly recognized for setting a game mood for error correction (Cruickshank, Jenkins, & Metcalf, 2002). More important, drawing upon findings from learning styles, not all teacher correction could be processed and employed to fix deviant forms. Learners may learn enough if teachers simply stop supplying the correct forms; thereupon, learners have time to think and correct themselves. On the other hand, if the learner has to work a bit at producing the correct format, doing so may be memorable and could promote actual learning (Bailey, 2005).

3. METHOD

The current paper draws upon the experimental use of audiovisual recordings of learners' oral output for the purpose of providing more adequate corrective feedback to help decide what to correct? Who corrects? When to correct? How much to correct? How to correct? The experiment represents, in its true essence, an extension of Allan's (1991) research framework which attempts to provide feedback through tape journals. Her procedure follows four stages: first, the student records a ten-minute talk, speaking from notes rather than reading a prepared text; then the student listens and tries to note any mistakes, recording comment on these at the end of the tape. Next the teacher listens and notes down errors for the student. And then the teacher records comments on a representative sample of these as well as making a personal response to the content of the tape (as cited in Hedge, 2000, p. 290). However, the current experiment introduces some innovative steps. A camera, Sony DSC-220 Model, is fitted into the classroom. Learners are set into smaller groups to respond to fluency-based role play activities such as sitting for a job interview, booking a hotel room or go shopping. The whole conversations are recorded. Then, sample conversations are turned into video scripts. Feedback on sample conversation scripts is supplied through three different options: teacher-centered feedback, peer review and learner-self correction. In peer review, learners function as detector entrusted with the task of finding one type of errors be it grammatical, lexical or relating to pronunciation. Next, video conversations are played again to supply comments on body language. Last, the same role play activity is again set out as an accuracy-based task where learners have to act out the conversation afresh so as to correct all their errors previously highlighted during the feedback. The sample population constitutes 75 learners who are first year undergraduate university students sitting for listening and speaking course.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Whenever learners engage into interpersonal conversations, be it accuracy or fluency based, providing feedback regarding what, when, who, and how to correct turns into a serious instructional challenge for most teachers in foreign language contexts. In a matter of few minutes, a bundle of information should be recorded in the first place. That same data will be processed and evaluated with a decision forthcoming on what the teacher is planning to do about each learner fallacious oral output (Douglas, 2000).

In fact, there are good reasons to use audiovisual recording of learners' oral performance in daily speaking courses as a means to provide more effective corrective feedback. Teachers need, in the first place, to record then identify the type of fallacy and which aspect of the target language it corresponds to such as lexical, phonological or grammatical. It is worth mentioning the fact that most university speaking courses in Algeria could be described as large classes in terms of attendees where it is not unusual to have forty to forty five students in one room. Given that fact, teachers, thus, experience difficulty in monitoring and keeping a record of all students errors involved in the speaking task. More critical issue to keep in mind, there are times when learners output is so erroneous and sounds "all Chinese". Audiovisual recording proves more than useful to keep a record of such data.

What is more, commonsense observation indicates that most teachers' response to errors remains superficial for the fact that little attention is given to identifying the sources of learners' flawed output. Oddly enough, even when learners are taught how to use particular language forms and functions, they just happen to keep getting it wrong. Such errors are often described as fossilized. Furthermore, not all errors seem to be produced by performance factors such as stress or ignorance of language forms. Some errors however suggest that learners are applying their own strategies through the way of learning the target language. Such strategies range from overgeneralization, transfer by applying previous mother tongue

knowledge to the foreign language learning task, and simplification by omission (Littlewood, 1998). There are many instances too where the source of some errors remain ambiguous. Unexpectedly, some errors are a direct result of faulty teaching or material. Therefore, due to the absence of previous learners oral output recording, it may be pointless to speculate on which process could be attributed as the major driving force for their errors. Alternatively, available audiovisual recording could be well employed for longitudinal error analysis purposes to determine the major forces assumed to cause errors. Equally important, identifying the source of errors is often, but not always, so useful in determining the way errors will be treated (Broughton, Brumfit, Flavell, Hill, & Pincas, 1980).

In their attempt to help learners progress and get closer and closer to target-like language system wherein fewer errors are committed; teachers have strived for ways to foster their learning subjects' language awareness. They have sought for teaching practices for metalinguistic purposes whereby learners talk and reflect about their own produced oral output so that they could watch their language before they spit it out on future occasion. By way of explanation, learners barely make notice of their errors once they start speaking. Their language, in this context, goes through little conscious monitoring whereby errors are spotted and their speech get polished to sound more correct and proper regarding their linguistic stage of development. The speaking courses, therefore, should cater for the need to build learners monitoring strategies of their own oral output particularly about self-correction during an ongoing conversation for instance through the use of time fillers to get time to think how to say things properly and correctly. Audiovisual recording could be well exploited for building learners' self-monitoring wherein learners are trained in useful micro- strategies to catch up with what they have already said and get it right.

The challenge of providing efficient corrective feedback or designing remedial work remains insurmountable as long as instructors take a back seat with a diary in hand and attempt to make notes of learners' deviations. In case of fluency practices which emphasize a more unconscious spontaneous language use; teachers' immediate correction, then, can potentially have a demotivating effect and distract learners' attempts to communicate. This suggests that it will be appropriate to correct errors only after learners finish the talking for the sake of maintaining the flow of communication. Harmer (1982) (as cited in Hedge, 2000) for example lists "no teacher intervention" among the features of fluency-based speaking courses. Having recorded their oral performance in the first place could be possibly the very first material to use so as to evaluate learners' success in interaction and design efficient feedback. Teachers will then use their knowledge of the areas of weakness of a number of students as a basis for special emphasis in instruction and review. Equally important, decisions regarding what, when, who and how to correct could only be made after sitting for a while reviewing their output.

Given the fact that, the lion's share of speaking courses time is devoted for learners to talk; less time is allowed for error correction. Deciding upon which deviant form worth treating is only the first part of effective feedback provision. A widely accepted strategy to distinguish between the different types of errors and decide which need to be corrected is to set four major criteria. Teachers' decision will be based on the learners' stage of linguistic development (competence), what they have been working on recently in class, what they should have mastered by now, and the pedagogical focus of the speaking activity the learners are engaged in. Putting that in practice, malformations in structure, vocabulary, pronunciation or speech acts that have been already covered in previous lessons or being practiced for the moment will be the focal target for corrective feedback. Additionally, slips of the tongue and mistakes which could be self-corrected whenever attention is drawn to should not appear on teachers' agenda. On the other hand, research suggests that correcting grammar points which are too advanced for the learners current level of linguistic development does not result in learning anyway (Bailey, 2005). Higher priority should be also given to correcting errors that impede comprehensibility and cause misunderstanding of the message being conveyed.

Nothing dampens enthusiasm and makes learners shut off their attempt to use the target language more than the teacher jumping in constantly to supply the correct form. In addition, treating errors in a punitive fashion could potentially maximize affective barriers and lower the chances for learners to plunge into communication for future occasions. Learners remain fragile and sensitive especially to peers and the slightest teachers' funny comments could be misinterpreted as mockery. The latter could constitute a block to learning. Learners' self-esteem and anxiety are central variables teachers need to cater for whenever feedback provision is under way. MacIntyre and Gardner (1991) (as cited in Richards & Renandya, 2002) conclude that the greatest anxiety seems to relate to negative experiences in speaking activities. In the same spirit, Krashen (1982) suggests the notion of affective filter in which learners emotional responses form a barrier and prevent the processing of teachers' input. It implies that feedback provision should build self-confidence and reassure learners' self- perception. Audiovisual recording prove to be of value to teachers in lowering affective barriers. Peer review and self-correction throughout the use of anonymous video scripts

renders feedback provision no longer an intimidating and a threatening experience.

5. CONCLUSION

Perhaps the most vital element in learning a foreign language is to get to speak it fluently and correctly in real life communicative situations. The role of the teacher is to craftily balance between maximizing as much practice as possible for learners using the target language and help them focus on what are problem areas for them as they learn from their mistakes. Rather than looking at error correction from a simplistic perspective which involves only locating errors then supplying correct forms; any attempt to respond to fallacious learners' output requires serious consideration to what, who, when and how to correct such errors. Conventional means such as keeping a diary wherein major errors are noted prove futile to help design and provide more effective corrective feedback. A more useful methodology for feedback provision will be to harness the use of technological advances and bring their use into the speaking classrooms. Audiovisual recordings of learners oral output in particular serve to encourage self-correction, change the confrontational nature of feedback provision, reassure learners' self-esteem, and provide more insights into how learners approach the learning process and internalize input.

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