BELIEF SYSTEM TOWARDS EXPLICIT CORRECTIVE FEEDBACK IN EFL CLASSROOM: THE CASE OF FOUNDATION STUDENTS OF OMAN COLLEGE OF HEALTH SCIENCES

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Abstract:

Explicit corrective feedback has always been a topic of huge interest among educators. While various studies have investigated on certain types of error treatment methods, there has been little research conducted to look into explicit corrective feedback. The current research was designed to investigate the belief system of students on explicit corrective feedback in ESL classroom, particularly in speaking classes. The sample of the study consisted of 30 Omani EFL foundation learners which were randomly selected. In this study a series of qualitative survey tasks were conducted to determine the attitude of the respondents towards the method, the impact to respondents' speaking fluency and the type of error treatment in which they are at ease most. Results revealed that respondents have positive attitude towards the method as they perceived it as instrumental in improving their speaking errors in grammar, diction, pronunciation and intonation. Additionally, majority of them opined that ECF is on top of all other corrective types when it comes to efficacy and value owing to its retentive effect. These emphasize the need to foster this method in EFL environment where teacher's feedback is the most important step through which learners improve their language proficiency.

Keywords: explicit corrective feedback, belief system, instrumental, retentive effect, speaking skill

1. Introduction

Teaching speaking is a tedious process for English teachers handling Arabic students taking into account the multifaceted dimension of second language acquisition. The fact that the students are nonnative speakers adds up to the challenge and responsibility of the English teachers to look closely into meaning, form and substance, and occurrence

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of errors in students' speaking output. At this rate, the need for a deeper understanding of the students, the subject matter and the target language is highly demanded, just as firm grounding on strategies and techniques that are effective in speaking class are deemed essential.

The range of explicit corrective feedback in second language acquisition has been an area that creates a lot of arguments, but also a great number of research ideas and topics. Since English language classroom is a speaking-oriented classroom, it is a shared thing that errors in oral form occur frequently, especially among demotivated students. In order to prevent mistakes and blunders from happening and to improve their students speaking skills, teachers use corrective feedback, also known as negative feedback or negative evidence.

According to Osijek (2014), corrective feedback produces a lot of negative meanings and people usually look at it as a hint that something is not right, and for this reason might feel disheartened by it. However, CF is a great tool for improvement of language knowledge because it helps the learner to focus on the correct language forms. Dealing with errors made by learners tends to be one of the most important, but also one of the most difficult jobs a teacher has to fulfill, especially because there are a lot of things one has to keep in mind while correcting them. CF is important for both the learner as well as the teacher. It gives the learner the opportunity to become aware of his/her errors because it draws the attention to the error and makes the learner aware that the correction is needed and that the utterance is not correct. On the other hand, it gives the teacher the opportunity to see how his/her teaching methods work and to see in which way learners learn and which areas of their language knowledge have to be improved.

This study was conducted to examine the attitude of the students towards the use of explicit corrective feedback by English teachers in speaking classes at Oman College of Health Sciences- Sohar campus. It also aimed to explore its acceptability to the students and its impacts to their fluency in speaking. Ultimately, this is directed to explore both gaps and improvement opportunities for the development of a community of effective strategies.

2. Objectives and Goals of the Study

Explicit Corrective Feedback has been applied as a strategy in teaching speaking classes by English teachers at the Foundation Center of the college since time immemorial. But up to date, there has been no qualitative or quantitative study in the college evidencing its impact to the students. This study intended to examine how the students welcome and deal with this kind of reinforcement strategy by particularly looking into the following questions:

    a. What is the attitude of the students towards explicit corrective feedback strategy?
    b. How does the strategy impact on their fluency in Speaking?
    c. What types of corrective feedback is best according to their perception?

3. Literature Review

Corrective feedbacks are teachers' responses to the learner utterance that contains an error. In Lyster and Ranta's study (1997), corrective feedback is described as either negative or positive evidence provided by the instructor to the students who make an error in their utterance. The responses can consist of (1) an indication that the utterance has an error; (2) a reformulation of the sentences with error; (3) metalinguistic information about the nature of the error (Ellis, Loewen & Erlam, 2006). Corrective feedback encourages not merely comprehensibility, but also learners' repair involving more accurate and precise production. In Lyster and Ranta' study (1997), learner uptake is defined as a student's utterance that immediately follows the teachers' feedback, and that constitutes a reaction in some way to the teacher's intention to draw attention to some aspects of the student's initial utterance.

According to the Noticing Hypothesis, noticing is a necessary and sufficient condition for converting input to intake. Although no research has been done to find out whether explicit demonstration of uptake is an oral manifestation of noticing, it is reasonable to speculate that there are some noticed linguistic features involved in learners' uptake. For this reason, it is worthwhile to examine uptake as a possible indicator of language development (Suzuki, 2004). Following these theoretical frameworks, a number of empirical studies have looked for different kinds of negative feedback produced in response to learners' non-standard utterances, including negotiation moves such as clarification requests and confirmation checks. Some observational studies probed into the occurrence and effect of negative feedback in L2 classroom. Among them Lyster and his colleagues' researches contribute substantially to the understanding in the area.

Lyster and Ranta (1997) conducted a study in a Canadian immersion context. They noted that recasts were by far the most common type of feedback (55%), followed by elicitation (14%), clarification requests (11%) metalinguistic feedback (8%), explicit correction (7%), and repetition (5%). However, recasts were much less likely to lead to immediate self-correction by the students than are other feedback types. Lyster (1998) further studied the same recorded lessons and found that the kinds of negatives feedback provided by the teachers were much more likely to respond to lexical errors with some kind of negotiation, while they typically responded to both grammatical and phonological errors with recasts. Similar evidence was offered by a study of a communicatively-oriented adult ESL classroom (Panova & Lyster, 2002) in which learners had been examined to find out which feedback types lead to the greatest amount of uptake. In the study, the researchers examined the range and types of feedback used by the teacher and their relationship to learner uptake and immediate repair of error. The database consisted of 10 hours of transcribed interaction, comprising 1,716 student turns and 1,641 teacher turns, coded in accordance with the categories identified in Lyster and Ranta's (1997) model of corrective discourse. The

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The findings of the above studies showed that while recasts may offer valuable negative evidence, students were not necessarily under pressure to attend to them, at least in communicatively-oriented classroom settings. Lyster and his colleagues suggested that more corrective feedback modes may be more effective in pushing classroom learners to amend their hypotheses about L2 grammar and vocabulary. To test this hypothesis, Lyster and Mori (2006) conducted a study to compare the distribution of feedback type in two different instructional settings: Japanese immersion and French immersion. They found that pervasive type of feedback was recast regardless of the variations in the two classroom settings. Although the Japanese classes were far less communication-oriented with the total number of recast at 169, which was half less than the number of recasts in the French classes, recasts accounted for 65% and 54% in Japanese and French classes, respectively. Moreover, the frequency of recasts in the Japanese classroom was higher and students seemed more receptive to recasts. In the Japanese classes, 61% of students' uptakes followed the recasts, while in the French classes, 62% of the uptakes occurred after the prompts. Lyster and Mori attributed these results to the difference in the communicative orientations. Japanese immersion classrooms were more attentive to forms, which led to more recasts for correction. French classes, on the other hand, paid more attention to language functions, which led to the ambiguity of recasts in the class, that is, the students probably took the corrective functions of recasts as the pragmatic functions in the classroom interactions. Based on these findings, they proposed the "counterbalance hypothesis", which supposed that L2 learners from a wide range of instructional settings were likely to benefit from a balanced provision of feedbacks.

Fu (2012) examined teacher feedback, learner uptake, and feedback perceptions in an adult CFL context. A 200-level Chinese reading course was observed for data collection. Participants included 13 students and one teacher. Thirteen class sessions (10 hours) were videotaped. A short survey, given at the end of each of the last six class sessions, was designed to elicit the teacher's and the students' perceptions of feedback frequency. Video-recorded data was fully transcribed and coded using Panova and Lyster's (2002) feedback categorization. The teacher's response to the survey was compared to that of the students' regarding perceptions of feedback frequency. The results showed that the teacher provided feedback to 68.1% of all students' errors. On average, there was one feedback move every 2.4 minutes. All feedback types in Panova and Lyster's model were present, and there were a few new moves, namely "asking a direct question," "directing question to other students," and "using L1-English." A total of 245 teacher feedback moves occurred during the observation. Recasts accounted for 56.7% of all feedback moves, followed by metalinguistic feedback that accounted for 10.6%. Elicitation moves achieved the highest uptake rate (94.1%). Next, explicit correction and metalinguistic feedback had 88.9% and 53.8% uptake rate respectively.

4. Methodology

The participants of this study were 30 randomly selected students currently enrolled in English Speaking 1 class at the Foundation Center of school year 2017-2018. These participants were briefed on the purpose of the study particularly on the questions to help them provide reliable responses, enabling the researcher to get accurate data.

During the data gathering phase, the researcher simplified the questions in order to reach the respondents' understanding that they could respond freely. For example, question number 1 was rephrased as "How do you like being corrected when you commit mistakes in our speaking activities/", question number 2 as "Do you think the correction helps you improve your speaking skills, how, in what way?" for the third question, "What types of corrective feedback is best according to your perception?" For the third question however, the respondents were given 6 choices to choose from where each choice was explained intensively. They were given an hour utmost to write their responses to the questions freely in any intelligible writing style.

Data analysis was done few days after. Qualitative approach particularly thematic strategy was used to analyze their responses and to establish the general trend, themes and facts of their responses. Trends were then organized and framed in answer to the research questions. Corroboration with previous studies also played significant role in establishing the facts and themes.

5. Results and Discussion

Explicit Corrective feedback is a strategy being used nowadays by English teachers around the world to reinforce linguistic input among second language learners in any

learning environment. This has also been viewed as an important secondary approach in teaching syntax, semantics and phonology which form part of the major components in developing speaking abilities. In fact it is even a topic of huge interest among academicians, tutors and researchers considering the issues surrounding it. This study addressed three major questions on the use of explicit corrective feedback in a speaking class at the expense of students' views and opinions which are interwoven into generalizations, themes and trends.

A. Attitudes of students towards Corrective feedback strategy in Speaking Class

Analysis shows that all of the respondents have positive attitude towards the strategy. They are inclined to believe it is an essential method for treating errors and that they welcome it openheartedly. They have similar responses which could be generalized as openness to immediate correction by the teacher at the time of commission of errors in grammar and pronunciation. It is also further observed on their responses that immediacy of correction is appreciated and preferred over the "private one-on-one style" since they tend to be forgetful.

Conforming results have been conveyed by Sheen (2007), who studied the effects of direct correction on the acquisition of English articles by intermediate-level students, as well as Varnosfadrani and Basturkmen (2009), who found that explicit correction resulted in better scores on individualized posttests, with the caution that its contribution was mediated by the participants' developmental readiness.

Zohrabi (2017) investigated whether explicit corrective feedback has any significant immediate effect on reduction of segmental word-level pronunciation errors committed by low proficient EFL learners. As the results of covariance analysis exposed, there is significant difference between the scores of explicit group and control group in immediate posttest. Therefore, it can be concluded that explicit corrective feedback is effective in reduction of segmental word-level pronunciation errors in short term. This apparently supports the belief of the students on the essentiality and helpfulness of the said ECF.

On the other hand, four respondents have noted that while they welcome the strategy and while they believe on its effectiveness, they have reservations against its preemptive effect on their confidence and ideation process, citing specifically that they usually get lost as they get corrected outright in front of their classmates. Also, it hinders organization of thought and expression. One respondent has also noted that she gets low self-esteem whenever he gets a direct feedback out of her mistakes. This is congruent to the study of Marzan (2011) who revealed that an explicit correction has a "chilling effect "on learners' initiative. He cited that fear and shame are infused among learners when correction is done publicly which results reservation and passiveness.

B. How ECF impacts fluency in Speaking

Respondents have varying responses as regards the second question but are all directed to an enormous theme that ECF is a big leap toward English language fluency. Since

this study is focused on speaking, only surface issues about speaking are touched such as: grammar, pronunciation, intonation and diction. They have insinuated that the ECF promotes self-awareness of unlearned rules in grammar and self-reinforcement of common grammar rules which they have learned previously. They have also hinted that ECF creates indirect instruction on pronunciation, acquisition of speech registers and vocabulary which are essential in attaining fluency and accuracy on the target language. The respondents believe that episodes of explicit correction on their errors in structure, pronunciation and word choice as they operationally engage in oral communication activities helps in their assimilation of important linguistic features as the situation leaves an unforgettable experience to them.

This touches the issue of language acquisition in which important distinction are made by linguists between language acquisition and language learning. Haynes (2005) has opined that children acquire language through a subconscious process during which they are unaware of grammatical rules. This is similar to the way they acquire their first language. They get a feel for what is and what isn't correct. In order to acquire language, the learner needs a source of natural communication. The emphasis is on the text of the communication and not on the form. Young students who are in the process of acquiring English get plenty of "on the job" practice. They readily acquire the language to communicate with classmates.

Language learning, on the other hand, is not communicative. It is the result of direct instruction in the rules of language. And it certainly is not an age-appropriate activity for your young learners. In language learning, students have conscious knowledge of the new language and can talk about that knowledge. They can fill in the blanks on a grammar page. Research has shown, however, that knowing grammar rules does not necessarily result in good speaking or writing. A student who has memorized the rules of the language may be able to succeed on a standardized test of English language but may not be able to speak or write correctly.

C. Which type of corrective feedback is best according to their perception?

Six different corrective feedback strategies were discussed intently with the respondents in view of this third question. Examples for each strategy through cases and situations were even highlighted in aid of comprehension and grasp of the context. Subsequently, the respondents were asked to choose which one they believe is best. Twenty four of the respondents said that explicit is the best approach they could deal with while six of whom said recast. None of the respondents chose the other strategies. Respondents have insinuated the retentive effect as their reason for choosing the approach. Accordingly explicit correction leaves indelible experience and instrumental opportunity for learning. The respondents so implied the psychological aspect of explicit correction as a reinforcing springboard to an urgent reconstruction of the error.

6. Conclusion

Explicit corrective feedback is found to be an instrumental approach in correcting errors and in reinforcing lessons that are misused in oral practice by students. In short it is contributory to the improvement of ESL learners in the target language. This study has established that EFC is a highly acceptable method inside English classrooms especially those that involve speaking. It is therefore highly recommended to be used under certain conditions in schools, colleges or universities.

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