A Study on the Preference for Oral Error Correction in College English Classrooms

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ABSTRACT

In order to improve college students' oral proficiency, this study explores their preference for oral error correction in college English classrooms. The study found that non-English majors have a positive attitude towards teachers' oral error correction feedback in pronunciation, intonation, vocabulary, grammar and pragmatics. They hope that all oral errors can be corrected in class. Their preference for error correction types is pragmatic errors, pronunciation errors, grammar errors and lexical errors in turn. The preferred form of error correction feedback is recast, explicit correction, and prompts. College English teachers can choose different forms of oral error correction feedback that are suitable for students based on their specific situation in the classroom.

Keywords: College English classroom, Oral error correction, Preference.

1. INTRODUCTION

In the process of second language acquisition, language learners are bound to make mistakes in pronunciation, vocabulary, grammar, and pragmatics. Correcting or not correcting these errors in spoken language has always been a controversial topic. As is well known, error correction feedback plays a very important role in language teaching, because it reflects learners' errors and enables them to gradually eradicate these errors and express themselves correctly over a long period of time in the future. Before the 1960s and 1970s, due to the influence of behaviorist learning theory, it was generally believed that errors were taboos in their discourse and that these errors should be immediately corrected (Brown, 2007; Larsen Freeman, 2000; Richards & Rodgers, 2001), while others such as Krashen (1981a; 1981b) and Truscott (1999) claimed that error correction was not only unnecessary but also harmful to language learning. The emergence of communicative methods in the 1980s made advocates of communicative teaching methods aware of the necessity of fluency, which also made teachers realize that not all oral errors must be corrected (Saeed Rezaei, Ali Hatef, 2011). In recent decades, scholars have conducted extensive research on oral error correction feedback (Lyste r& Ranta, 1997; Lyster, 2004; Ammar&Spada, 2006; Lyster & Saito, 2010; Shu Dingfang, 2014; Shi Guang, Liu Xuehui, 2008; Li Shaofeng et al., 2016). These studies have paid high attention to the forms of oral error correction feedback from different perspectives.

2. RESEARCH ON ORAL ERROR CORRECTION

The classification of error correction by Lyster & Ranta (1997) is the most widely accepted and classic. They divide error correction feedback into six forms: explicit correction, recast, metalinguistic feedback, elicitation, clarification request, and repetition. Due to the fact that the latter four feedback forms are all aimed at encouraging learners to correct errors by themselves, error correction is further divided into three categories: explicit correction, recast, and prompts (Lyster & Mori, 2006). Explicit correction means the teacher clearly indicates what the student is saying is incorrect and provides the correct form; Recast refers to the implicit way in which a teacher reconstructs all or parts of a student's discourse; Prompts only provide learners with some clues to trigger self-correction and include several strategies such as induction, meta language feedback,

clarification requests, and repetition (Fan Yumei, Xu Jinfen, 2016).

Researchers have conducted much research on the impact of these error correction forms on language learning, and recast is the most common form of error correction feedback in foreign language classrooms. The teacher's preferred choice for correction is recast, which is closely related to learner factors, teacher beliefs, and teaching contexts (Roothooft, 2014). Loewen & Philp (2006) argue that recast not only saves communication time but also does not interrupt communication, thus it does not pose a potential threat to students' face or affect the fluency of language expression. Han Zhaohong (2002) found that recast not only improves second language learners' language awareness, but also improves their tense consistency in oral and written language output. Although recast is more favored by teachers, its effectiveness is not as good as people's expectations. Lyster (2004) compared the effects of recast and prompts on French grammar acquisition. The results show that prompts are more effective than recast, especially in written language. The research findings by Lyster & Ranta (1997) and Lyster (1998) indicate that although repetition is repeatedly used by teachers in the classroom, it is not very effective in triggering students' self-correction. Yang & Lyster (2010) investigated the effects of recast and prompts on the acquisition of regular and irregular form verbs in English past tense. Their conclusion is that these two error correction types have the same impact on irregular verbs, and prompts are more effective than recasting regular verbs. However, some other studies have found there was no significant difference in the role of recasting and prompts in the classroom (Loewen & Nabei 2007; Lyster & Izquierdo 2009; Gu Shanshan, Wang Tongshun, 2008). Norris & Oretaga (2002) found that explicit error correction is more effective when dealing with grammar and structural errors related to the target language. Therefore, recast, explicit correction, and prompts have a positive impact on oral error correction. Nonetheless, non-English majors are weaker in oral proficiency, and most opportunities for them to communication are in the classroom. When expressing themselves orally, they often make mistakes in four aspects: pronunciation, grammar, vocabulary, and pragmatics. Therefore, the focus of this study is on correcting college students' oral errors based on their preferences for of error correction types and error correction feedback forms to improve their oral proficiency.

3. RESEARCH DESIGN

This part involves research questions, subjects, instruments and data collection.

3.1 Research Questions

According to the classification of error correction by Lyster & Ranta (1997), this study investigates the following three questions about students' preference for oral error correction in four aspects: pronunciation, intonation, vocabulary, grammar, and pragmatics:

Question 1: The attitudes of students towards the teacher's oral error correction feedback in four aspects: pronunciation, vocabulary, grammar, and pragmatics.

Question 2: Students' preferences for the teacher's oral error correction types in four aspects: pronunciation, vocabulary, grammar, and pragmatics.

Question 3: Students' preferences for feedback forms of oral error correction in four aspects: pronunciation, vocabulary, grammar, and pragmatics.

3.2 Research Subjects

This study selected 249 non-English major college students from a university in Sichuan for a questionnaire survey. The questionnaire was issued online through the Questionnaire Star, and the students were then asked to complete the survey online. And 10 college students were selected from 249 students for interviews.

3.3 Research Instruments

Two instruments were used in the study: a questionnaire and an interview. The questionnaire refers to the questionnaire of Shi Guang and Liu Xuehui (2008), which includes a total of 10 questions. The purpose of the questionnaire is to understand college students' attitudes towards English classroom oral error correction and their error correction preferences. Questions 1-5 are about students' attitudes towards teachers' error correction feedback. The options for each question are multiple-choice questions in the form of the Likert 5-level scale, with options being completely agree, agree, uncertain, disagree, and completely disagree. These 5 questions include: (1) It is necessary for teachers to correct language errors (pronunciation, intonation, vocabulary, grammar,

and pragmatic expression errors) in the classroom; (2) In the classroom, the teacher's oral correction of my language errors is helpful for my learning; (3) In class, the teacher should try to correct all my language errors as much as possible; (4) The teacher only needs to correct errors that affect successful communication, as long as they do not affect communication or hinder understanding, they may not need to correct them; (5) In class, too much oral error correction by the teacher can make me feel embarrassed, lose face, make me lose confidence, and cause frustration. Question 6 is about the students' preference for the types of error correction that they often make in oral English, such as phonetic errors, lexical errors, syntax error and pragmatic errors. Questions 7-10 are about students' preferences for six different types of oral error correction feedback. The purpose of the interview is to supplement the questionnaire and to better understand students' preferences for oral error correction feedback and their reasons. There are a total of 5 questions in the interview, which are about students' attitudes towards error correction feedback and error correction preferences.

3.4 Data Collection

This questionnaire was distributed to non-English majors through online questionnaire star, and 249 copies were collected. At the same time, 10 students were interviewed and the interview answers were recorded. All collected data will be analyzed by SPSS27 software (N represents the number of people, P represents the percentage, M represents the mean, and SD is the standard deviation).

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

What follows is the results of the study and discussion.

4.1 Student Attitudes Towards the Teacher's Error Correction Feedback

Questions 1-5 investigate students' attitudes towards teachers' oral error correction in the classroom. ("Table 1") According to the statistical data analysis, 93.62% of students believe that it is necessary for teachers to correct language errors (such as pronunciation, intonation, vocabulary, grammar, and pragmatics) in the classroom (M=4.52, SD=. 773); 94.38% of students believe that teachers' oral correction of language errors in the classroom is helpful for their learning (M=4.51, SD=. 719); 80.32% of students believe that teachers should try their best to correct all language errors they make in the classroom (M=4.03, SD=. 946); Regarding whether to correct language errors that do not affect communication and errors that do not hinder understanding, 46.19% of students believe that such errors should be corrected, while 38.15% of students believe that there is no need to correct them (M=2.99; SD=1.200); Most students hold an opposing attitudes towards the issues of embarrassing and losing confidence caused by error correction in class (M=2.90, SD=1.184). The 10 students interviewed all believe that error correction in the classroom is necessary and has a positive impact on English learning. Therefore, students have a positive attitude towards the teacher's correction of pronunciation, intonation, vocabulary, grammar, and pragmatic errors in the classroom. Shi Guang (2008) and Ananda (2017) found that students have a more positive attitude towards error correction. So, the findings of this study are consistent with theirs.

Table 1. Students' attitudes towards the teacher's error correction feedback

Questions	N	Mean	SD
1	249	4.52	.773
2	249	4.51	.719
3	249	4.03	.946
4	249	2.99	1.200
5	249	2.90	1.184

4.2 Students' Preference for Error Correction Types

The sixth question of this study is about the students' preference for the correction of phonetic errors, lexical errors, syntax error and pragmatic errors that are often made in oral English. According to the statistical data, students believe that the first errors to be corrected are pragmatic errors (38.15%), followed by grammar errors

(24.1%), phonetic errors (22.49%), and vocabulary errors (15.26%). Out of the 10 interviewed students, 7 hoped to correct all language errors, while only 3 students believed that it was not necessary to correct all errors but necessary to correct language errors that affected communication. 6 interviewees believed that pragmatic errors should be corrected first, then syntax error, phonological errors and lexical errors, because pragmatic errors would affect communication, and lexical errors could be recognized by themselves. Only 2 interviewees hold the view that the teacher should correct pronunciation and syntax error first, because pronunciation and vocabulary errors would affect communication. Therefore, based on this data analysis, it can be found that when choosing the types of error correction, students prefer correct pragmatic errors, followed by grammar and pronunciation errors, and finally vocabulary errors. The research of Shi Guang (2008), Katayama (2007), Zu Xiaomei and Ma Jiali (2015) found that students' preference for error correction types was first syntax error, and then phonological errors. This finding is slightly different from theirs: first, they studied the correction of syntax error, phonological errors and lexical error types, but did not study pragmatic errors. However, this study added one error type — pragmatic errors. If this study did not add pragmatic errors, these research findings would be consistent with their findings; secondly, in this study the students' preferences for choosing error correction types are related to

whether they are non-English major students. Students generally believe that non-English majors are weaker in language expression, and syntax errors and lexical errors can be corrected by themselves.

4.3 Students' Preference for Error Correction Feedback Forms

"Table 2" shows that in terms of the choice of feedback forms for correcting language errors, vocabulary errors, grammar errors and pragmatic errors, students prefer to use recast to correct errors in turn: language errors (47.39%), vocabulary errors (28.51%), grammar error (28.11%) and pragmatic errors (30.12%); then, recast is followed by explicit correction and prompts. 8 of the 10 interviewees prefer to use explicit correction and recast to correct all errors. In addition, all the interviewees believe that the teacher should choose different error correction feedback forms for different oral errors, such as explicit correction for vocabulary and pronunciation errors, and recast for grammar errors, because non-English majors are weaker in pronunciation and grammar. Therefore, they prefer recast, explicit correction, and metalinguistic feedback. Juan Yang (2016) found that learners generally tend to correct almost all types of errors through recast, meta linguistic feedback, and explicit error correction. The results of this study are consistent with the findings of Juan Yang (2016).

Table 2. Students' preferences for error correction feedback forms

	Pronunciation errors		Vocabulary errors		Grammar errors		pragmatic errors	
	N	P	N	P	N	P	N	P
explicit correction	39	15.66%	59	23.69%	57	22.89%	58	23.29%
Recast	118	47.39%	71	28.51%	70	28.11%	75	30.12%
metalinguistic feedback	33	13.25%	43	17.27%	60	24.1%	56	22.49%
elicitation	36	14.46%	45	18.07%	45	18.07%	40	16.06%
clarification request	9	3.61%	10	4.02%	6	2.41%	6	2.41%
repetition	14	5.62	21	8.43%	11	4.42%	14	5.62%

5. CONCLUSION

This study investigated 249 non-English majors' preferences for oral error correction in college English classroom and conducted an interview with 10 students. The research findings indicate that college students have positive attitudes towards the teacher's oral error correction feedback in four aspects: pronunciation, intonation, vocabulary,

grammar, and pragmatics in the oral classroom. They hope that all oral errors can be corrected in the classroom. Their preference for error correction types is pragmatic errors, phonological errors, grammar errors and lexical errors in turn. Their preference for error correction feedback forms is in the order of recast, explicit correction, and prompts. College English teachers can choose different forms of oral error correction feedback that are

suitable for students based on their specific situations in the classroom. This study only selected 249 college students from a general university in Sichuan Province for research, and the sample size is not large enough. Therefore, it is hoped that future research can expand its scale and conduct larger sample size studies in different universities to further validate the findings of this study.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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