

Error Correction in Language and Content Classes: Teachers' and Students' Views

Elina Tovmasyan, Kimyo International University in Tashkent, Uzbekistan

The Kyoto Conference on Arts, Media & Culture 2023
Official Conference Proceedings

Abstract

Errors are an integral part of the learning process. While learners see errors as something negative, for teachers errors can serve as a valuable source of information about the weak sides of the students and help shape the course content accordingly. The research on error correction focused on the types of oral feedback on language given by content and language teachers (English language in both cases). The researcher observed content and language classes focusing on the frequency and type of error correction used by the teacher. Content classes included university students' Literature and History classes, while language classes included Academic Reading and General English classes. The results of the lesson observation show that language teachers implement a variety of error correction techniques and use them more frequently than content teachers. The main argument of the content teachers for not applying error correction techniques is the factor of time. Though they notice their students' errors, they consciously do not correct them or use direct error correction for the sake of time. Students' survey results show that students prefer being corrected in both types of classes. Moreover, they indicate that teachers ignoring students' errors lose their reputation among the students as they consider the teacher's language proficiency low.

Keywords: Content, Error Correction, Recasts, Metalinguistic Feedback

iafor

The International Academic Forum
www.iafor.org

Introduction

What is an error? Errors have been defined by different dictionaries in different ways. For example, Cambridge Dictionary states that an error is “a mistake, especially in a way that can be discovered as wrong”. Collins Dictionary says that an error is “something that you have done which is considered to be incorrect or wrong or which should not have been done”. However, the definition that is used for this article is the one that is provided by the Oxford Dictionary, which states that an error is “a mistake, especially one that causes problems or affects the result of something”. For the given article, the terms *error*, *mistake* and *slip* are used interchangeably.

Talking about the definition of error correction, a website called unacademy.com defines error correction as “a form of feedback given to learners to help them improve” (Unacademy, 2023). The definition will be used later in the article to discuss the results of the research. Moving to the types of error correction, there are different ways teachers can correct students’ errors.

Lightbown & Spada offer the following types of error correction techniques:

- Explicit error correction
- Recasts
- Clarification requests
- Metalinguistic feedback
- Repetition

Explicit error correction is used when the teacher provides the correct form to the students directly, it can be called a direct error correction or “on-spot error correction”. The second type of error correction is recast, which is a reformulation of the student's utterance in the right way. For instance, if a student says “I goes to the cinema”, the teacher can say “So you went to the cinema.” The teacher reformulated student's incorrect statement by using the correct version. It is implicit because the teacher does not directly say that this is a mistake but students hear and understand it. Next is clarification requests and they happen in two cases where there is a problem with the content, the teacher does not understand what the student wants to say in terms of the content or there is a language issue. For example, a student may say “I am a cooker.” and the teacher can reply “Excuse me?” So the student will understand that the teacher did not understand the meaning of the utterance and will correct the utterance to “I'm a chef”. Meta-linguistic feedback is one more type of error correction, where the teacher again indicates that there is an error, but does not directly state what it is. However, the teacher elicits the right answer from the students in the form of meta-linguistic feedback, which involves the use of grammar terminology. For example, if a student says “We live in an flat”, the teacher can say “An flat”. What article do we use with consonants?” and the students will say the correct answer. Finally, there is repetition where the teacher repeats the student's utterance not correcting anything but highlighting the error or the problematic area with the intonation. If a student says “Mary likes cooks” the teacher may reply: “Mary likes **cook**?” (rising intonation.) which again indicates that there is an error (Lightbown and Spada 2013).

Research Method and Results

A. Lesson Observation

The research consisted of 10 lesson observations conducted by 4 teachers. There were five content classes and five language classes with two teachers observed for each stream. Content classes included Literature, Medieval History, Introduction to Literature, and Ancient Literature (Years 1-3). Language courses consisted of General English language and Academic Reading courses (Year 1).

The results of the research show that out of 100% of errors made by students during content classes, only 18.2% of errors were corrected by the teachers, while for the same number of classes, out of 100% of language mistakes, 51% of errors was corrected by language teachers.

Class	% of corrected errors	Class	% of corrected errors
Ancient Literature	30%	Academic Reading	60%
Introduction to Literature	50%	Academic Reading	55%
Literature	0%	English Language	40%
Literature	11%	English Language	50%
Medieval History	0%	English Language	50%
Total	18.2%		51%

Table 1: Percentage of errors corrected per class

The average number of error corrections for language classes was from a minimum of 40% to a maximum of 60% per class. For content classes, the maximum was 50% but it was only one case (Introduction to Literature) while there were two cases where there was 0% error correction in the whole class (History and Literature classes).

Content	%	Language	%
Recasts	71%	Recasts	35%
Explicit	29%	Metacognitive	30%
		Repetition	20%
		Explicit	15%

Table 2: Comparison of Error Correction Techniques

Comparing the types of error correction techniques used by the teachers, recasts were the most common type of error correction used by both language and content teachers. 71% of recasts were used by content teachers and 35% of language teachers used recasts as well. The only other error correction technique used by content teachers was explicit error correction (or on-spot error correction) where teachers directly correct the students' mistakes without any explanation. Meta-cognitive feedback is in second place among the error correction techniques used by language teachers, 30% of errors were corrected using this type of error correction. Technique number three is repetition and explicit error correction was the least common type of error correction used by language teachers.

Samples of error correction techniques noticed during the classes are presented below:

Content classes

1. S: It cost 15 000 *funts*.
T: Pounds. (explicit error correction)
2. S: It can be any irony.
T: Yeah, it can be any type of irony. (recast)
3. S: ...and then she *sign* /sign/.
T: Oh, signed /saɪnd/ (recast)

Language classes

1. S: What did you do? /wɒt did ju: du:/
T: /wɒ didʒə du: / (connected speech) (recast)
2. S: I like drawing when I was a child.
T: Do you still like or you liked in the past?
S: In the past.
T: What form do we use to make past tense?
S: -ed, I liked. (meta-linguistic feedback)
3. S: It was start in 1940.
T: Started. (explicit error correction)

4. S: I hate chemistry /tʃemɪstri/.
T: I hate chemistry?/tʃemɪstri/ (questioning intonation)
S:???
T: Who can pronounce this word correctly?
Several students: Chemistry /kemɪstri/ (repetition)

Moving to the outcomes of the research, it can be seen that the hypothesis that was stated before “Language teachers correct students’ mistakes more often than content teachers” was proved by the fact that only 18% of mistakes in content classes were corrected by teachers, while 51% of errors were corrected by language teachers for the same number of classes. The aim was also achieved because the researcher could check and identify what types of error correction techniques were used by teachers more often (recasts for both cases). Finally, moving to the definition of error correction again, it states error correction is “a form of feedback given to learners to help them improve”. While there was no formal interview with the teachers after the observations, there were some informal talks and content teachers indicated that they notice all language mistakes made by their students, but this is their conscious choice not to correct those mistakes in order not to spend time for that. This is their choice to focus on the improvement of their students’ content knowledge rather than language accuracy.

B. Student Interviews

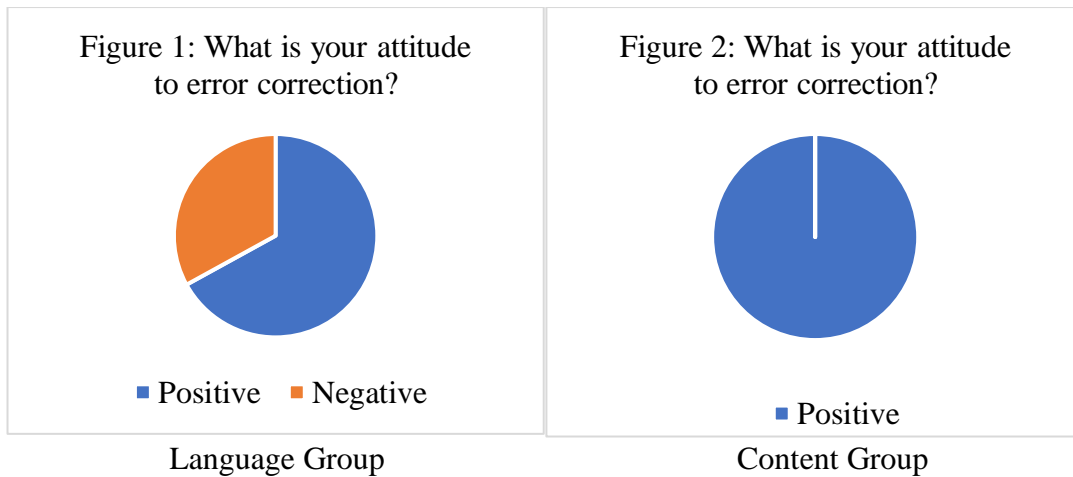
The second part of the research focused on the students' views on the presence or absence of error correction. The students were divided into 2 focus groups: Content and Language. The number of students in each group was 10; the interview was conducted once for each group. The Content group had the interview in English; while the Language group had their discussion in students’ L1- Russian and Uzbek. The Content group included students from Year 1 to 3, while the Language group was represented by Year 1 students only. The Content group contain students of English Education, whose major is English language teaching and they already have knowledge about methodology, ways and techniques of conducting classes as well as some information about error correction. The Language group consists of students from different schools- Business, Engineering, Education etc. They cover mainly General English and are not aware of the peculiarities of the teaching sphere, specifically error correction.

Each group was asked the same set of questions:

1. What is your attitude to error correction?
2. Do you pay attention to the teacher correcting students’ errors during the lesson?
3. What are the reasons for the teacher not to correct students' errors?
4. What types of error correction do you see as the most effective?
5. Should teachers in content classes correct students’ language mistakes? *

* Question 5 was given to the Content group only.

The results of the focus group interviews showed mainly similar views of the students on error correction in both Content and Language classes.

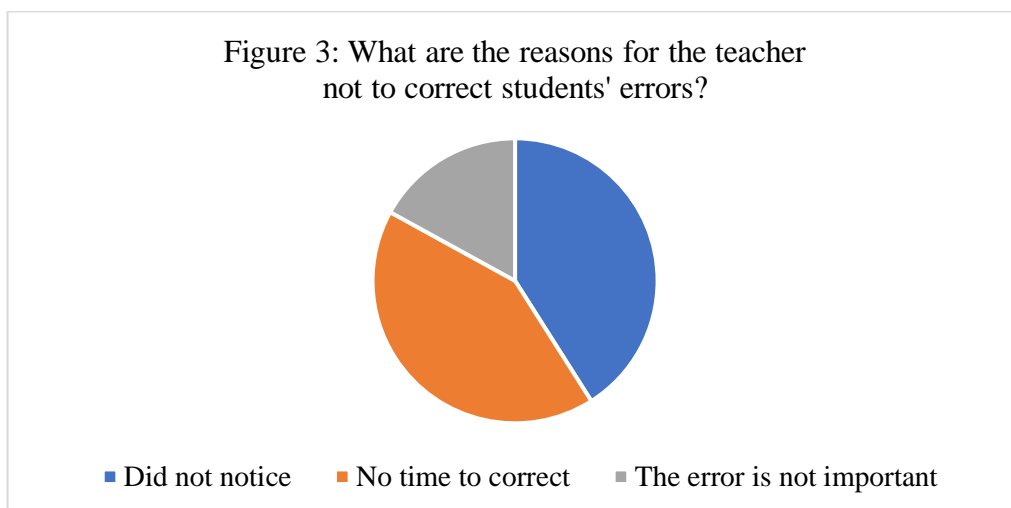


Question 1: What is your attitude to error correction?

100% of students in the Content group indicated that they have a positive attitude toward error correction. While the views of students in the Language group were not as uniform. 33% of students mentioned that they feel humiliated and embarrassed when the teacher corrects their errors (both on-spot and delayed error correction). Though they understand the necessity of the error correction they want it to be conveyed in another way.

Question 2: Do you pay attention to the teacher correcting students' errors during the lesson?

Here the answers differ based on the course of study. Year 1 students in both groups mainly replied that they did not notice error correction (70% for the Content group and 87% in Language). Most of Year 2 and 3 students replied that they notice whenever the teacher corrects errors. What is notable, students want their teachers to correct the errors. They indicated that when the teachers fail to correct students' errors they consider the teacher not to listen to the students carefully, ignore the errors or they may even consider the teacher's language proficiency not to be high enough to notice those errors.



Question 3: What are the reasons for the teacher not to correct students' errors?

The students gave several answers to this question:

The teacher did not notice the error;
The teacher had no time to correct the error;
The teacher considered the error unimportant.
The last point was given by the Content group students only; while the first two options were mentioned by both groups.

Question 4: Should teachers in content classes correct students' language mistakes?

This question was given to the Content group only as they have classes with English as a medium of instruction. In spite of those classes being focused on the Content rather than Language the students expressed strong views that error correction should be present in all classes.

Question 5: What types of error correction do you see as the most effective?

The lower-level students favoured recasts or any other form of immediate error correction as it saves time and directly shows the students the error. Nevertheless, higher-level students preferred such types of error correction as metalinguistic feedback. They point out that students do not always understand that they are being corrected- for example, using recasts- very often students perceive this type of error correction as the teacher simply echoing their utterance. Another point expressed by the students is that very often the students simply repeat the correct version after the teacher not really understanding what the mistake was and how it was corrected. To overcome these problems, the teacher may use metalinguistic feedback. Though it has the drawback of being time-consuming, the students selected it as the most effective for making progress. The teacher does not only correct the error (or asks other students to do it); they also explain what the error is and how to form the correct utterance. This makes the learning process more conscious for the students.

Conclusion

It is believed that content teachers are less concerned with the language mistakes that occur during their classes. The research aimed to compare the frequency and types of error correction techniques used by language and content teachers. The results prove the hypothesis that language teachers correct their students' language mistakes more often than content teachers. While the content teachers choose to omit language errors of students for the sake of the content, the students have a negative view of this situation and prefer to be corrected both in language and content classes.

References

Brown, H., & Douglas, B. (2000). *Principles of Language Learning and Teaching*. New York: Pearson, (Chapter 9).

Error Correction *Unacademy* (2023). Available from <https://unacademy.com/content/kerala-pssc/study-material/language-proficiency-english/error-correction/> [Accessed 23 March 2023].

Lightbown, P., & Spada, N., (2013). *How Languages are Learned*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, (Chapter 2).