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# The Role of Oral Self Correction to Enhance Kurdish High School Student's Performance in Learning English as a Foreign Language

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**Abstract:** The role of corrective feedback in language learning has become an extremely debateable issue throughout the world. Unfortunately, this hot subject has not attracted the attention of researchers and educators in Iraqi Kurdistan region. In contrast, there appears to be a growing compromise among the majority of researchers and language practitioners in the world regarding the importance of the role played by corrective feedback in the second language learning process. This paper was about Kurdish high school students. Many secondary school students of about sixteen and seventeen years of age learn English as a foreign language in Kurdistan. Corrective feedback has a great role to play in learning a second language and has been considered a key factor in language learning. The aim of this paper is to explore the significant of self-correction as better means of feedback compared to other types. Differing opinions exist as to the best way to correct learners. Moreover, this paper seeks to explore the place of oral self-correction for EFL secondary students in a non-English speaking country. Might this type of feedback (self-correction) help Kurdish high school students to learn or will it hinder their English development.

**Keywords:** Corrective Feedback, Oral Self Correction & EFL

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## 1. Introduction

In the last few years, the role of corrective feedback in language learning has become an extremely debateable issue. There appears to be a growing compromise among the majority of researchers and language practitioners regarding the importance of the role played by corrective feedback in the second language learning process. Results show that learners have positive attitudes towards the correction of all errors by their teacher, and they prefer their teacher to correct them mostly with regard to errors in grammar and phonology. The role of feedback has a great place to play in second language learning theories and language pedagogy. For example, in terms of behaviourist and cognitive theories of second language learning, feedback is considered as a significant factor in language learning (Ellis, 2009). In 1977, the concept of self-correction was the subject of an article by Schedgloff, Jefferson and Sacks entitled, "The Preference for Self-Correction in the Organization of Repair in Conversation", marking the beginning of serious research on the subject of oral self-correction in the fields of linguistics, foreign language education and language acquisition. This

paper was about Kurdish high school students. Many secondary school students of about sixteen and seventeen years of age learn English as a foreign language in Kurdistan. Corrective feedback has a great role to play in learning a second language and has been considered a key factor in language learning. Corrective feedback is when, in face-to-face interactions, the partner in a conversation with the learner suggests a correction for errors. Generally this has been considered the role of the teacher in the classroom. Oral self-correction is the ability of the learner to recognize that he or she has made a spoken error, and is then able to self-repair.

The aim of this paper is to explore the significant of self-correction as better means of feedback compared to other types. Differing opinions exist as to the best way to correct learners. Moreover, this paper seeks to explore the place of oral self-correction for EFL secondary students in a non-English speaking country. Might this type of feedback (self-correction) help Kurdish high school students to learn or will it hinder their English development?

## 2. Definitions of Corrective Feedback

In order to have a good understanding of feedback, it is better to have the definition of feedback and then of self-correction.

Feedback as a regular term can be defined as "Information given to learners which they can use to revise their inter-language" (Ellis, 1999, p.702). Self-correction is the method a learner uses when correcting an error on his/her own. Self-correction is also called self-repair or re-formulation.

Self-repair is considered the umbrella category for self-correction and self-editing, and may mean using pauses, reformulations and/or false-starts (Doughty and Long, 2003).

"According to the research, basic repair structure consists of a three-step sequence: the production of the trouble source, the initiation of the repair, and the completion of the repair. Both the initiation and the repair can be made by either the trouble source or another party" (Lin, 2009, p.1).

Self-correction is a type of corrective feedback (CF) that must be considered as a key factor in language learning; "trouble source" is "problematic talk" that "can be defined as an utterance or part of an utterance that is perceived as problematic by at least one of the interlocutors" (Rabab'ah, 2012, p.124).

Self-corrective feedback in oral situations is when partners engage in face-to-face interactions such as practicing a conversation. In a face-to-face oral interaction when the learner shares a self-repair for a verbal error without a verbal cue from their speaking partner, they have self-corrected.

"Self-correction may be a learning strategy in a foreign language, but we also correct ourselves not infrequently when using our native language, which we have already learned. So, self-correction is a part of our psychological make-up belonging to the attentional processes which accompany procedures that are not fully automatic." (Green and Hecht, 1993, p.152).

In general, corrective feedback has been considered to be part of the role of the teacher in the classroom. However, the ability of a student to self-correct may be more helpful in a classroom situation.

## 3. Literature Review

Models of second language learning have been developed by researchers. Ellen Bialystok (2006) published A Theoretical Model of Second Language which offers details of her model, as well as examples of strategies to use with different learners in several different situations. Bialystok has noted that learning abilities are unique to each learner. Meanwhile, Ellis (1994) has discussed the concepts of self-correction in learning. Ellis noted that (a) when non-natives are speaking to other non-natives or (b) during native speaker and non-native conversations, the strategy of self-correction is preferred (1994: p.262). Ellis notes other research that demonstrates that native speakers have a tendency to not correct non-native mistakes unless there is a factual error. Native speakers only rarely correct non-native speakers when

language errors are made (1994: 262). Therefore, self-correction in daily oral interactions would seem to be not only very important, but also necessary.

Chaudron (1988) underscored the idea that feedback that elicits self-correction is more likely to improve students' ability to monitor their own utterances. Corder (1967) supported the position that encouraging students to rely on their own resources is more useful than simply providing them with the correct form. The majority of earlier studies of error treatment such as those of Allwright (1975), Corder (1967), Hendrickson (1978) and Vigil and Oller (1976) accurately made the point that pushing students in their own output is preferable to simply providing them with the correct form. These studies recommend that providing students with the time and opportunity for self-repair clearly benefits second language development. Moreover, Pica, Holliday, Lewis and Morgenhaler (1989) share this idea that clarification requests and elicitation and confirmation checks leading to modified output and self-repair, are more likely to improve a student's ability to learn the language.

### 3.1. Monitor Theory

In 1982, Stephen D. Krashen published a still classic book entitled Principles and Practice in Second Language Acquisition (SLA) where he describes Monitor (error) Theory and its relationship to learning. "Learning comes into play only to make changes in the form of our utterance, after it has been produced by the acquired system. This can happen before we speak or write, or after (self-correction)" (Krashen 1982, p.15). Krashen makes a point that self-correction is the opposite of "...other correction or correcting someone else's output" (p.105).

Learning about motivational factors for primary school students and the importance of the role of self-consciousness is key in preventing them from self-correcting in corrective situations. In a survey of adult learners of a second foreign language in America, Lightbown and Spada (2006, p.67) have noted that the students were dissatisfied with the "...absence of attention to language form, corrective feedback, or teacher-centred instruction." Each of these complaints suggests not only a need for self-correction, but also a motivation for using self-correction.

Cook (2008: p.167) has explained that "...central to the idea of interaction is what happens when it goes wrong – the organization of repair". Bialystok has noted that learning abilities are unique to each learner. Obviously the dynamics of evaluating language attributes such as self-correction are complex in terms of the theoretical organization of repair and with regard to the personal experiences and talents of each learner. Therefore, a comparison of the advantages and disadvantages of correction feedback can be a challenge.

This controversy has reached a point of negotiated agreement on some points, but debates still remain as to how self-correction is to be encouraged in face-to-face interaction. One type of correction is elicitation (in the form of a prompt) which can vary in degrees from being implicit to being explicit. Panova and Lyster (2002) suggest there are three

suitable corrective feedbacks in the category of elicitation when corrective communication is face-to-face. Those are (a) ask the learner to repeat the mistake in order to make the necessary correction, (b) ask the learner open-ended questions until the correction has been made or (c) pause long enough for the learner to self-correct. Lyster and Mori (2006) have suggested that prompts are useful. Prompts are a way of encouraging a student to self-correct by pausing, or in another appropriate way. Prompts can be anything that indicates to the student that a correction is needed. Prompts that invite self-correction include "...elicitation, a meta-linguistic clue, a clarification request, and repetition" (Lyster and Mori, 2006: p.13) A long pause allowing the learner to self-correct can be very effective. Similarly, Lyster's study of corrective feedback in a French immersion situation suggests that learners benefit more from feedback that pushes them to self-correct than from feedback that provides the correct form. Although many studies have been conducted, the results are usually based on a fast response time by the learner. Therefore, allowing a long pause has not been adequately researched. The ability to encourage a learner to self-correct, and to do so with confidence, could improve learning time and perhaps even retention of knowledge.

### 3.2. Sociocultural

Rod Ellis (2012) has cited an important study in the form of the research by Aljaafreh and Lantolf (1994) who carried out a sociocultural study of corrective feedback. Their research on EFL writing ability "...demonstrated the advantages of fine-tuning the feedback to enable learners to gradually achieve self-regulation" (p.10). Lockhart (2007) published research which resulted in a comparison of feedback types in relation to a group of 394 participants; initiations to self-correct were reported at 47 percent as measured by test comprehension, and 2.3 percent in relation to grammar exercises (Lockhart, 2007, p.280). The largest amounts in terms of text comprehension were 29.1 percent for elicitation, 17.2 percent meta-linguistic feedback, 0.7 percent clarification and 0 percent for repetition (Lockhart, 2007, p.280). The feedback types were measured as involving recasts for 39.6 percent of the time and for explicit corrections for 13.4 percent of the time (Lockhart, 2007, p.280). The disadvantage is especially prominent in the findings of some researchers such as Long (1996) who consider that Foreign Language Correction (FLC) analysis does not necessarily recognize recasts as meaningful, but instead as pseudo-recasts which are similar to explicit corrections (Lockhart, 2007, p.281). Lyster and Ranta (1997) also point out another disadvantage in terms of repetition is that simply repeating a teacher's corrective feedback "...does not necessarily imply that the feedback has been noticed or understood as such" (PAGE?). On the other hand, Lockhart (2002) accurately makes the point that recasts could be more successful than uptake and other strategies, but only serious when the recast was not due to repetition on the part of the teacher.

A consideration of the time involved on the part of the

learners can be useful as a measurement for best practices for teaching. Self-correction leads to a type of fragmentation because learner's engaged in self-correction stop speaking to think, and they may fill in the resulting silence with repetitive phrases such as 'I mean. . . , Just a moment . . . ' or something similar, or fillers such as "er, eh, ahh, like . . ." (Rabab'ab, 2013 ). Ghaleb Rabab'ab from the Humanities and Social Science Department at Alfaisal University in Saudi Arabia researched the oral discourse repair strategies of German and Jordanian students learning EFL. The methodology for his research project was to measure the "...frequencies and percentage of self-repair and repetition strategies" (Rabab'ab, 2013, p.126). His results demonstrated that the two types of repair - (a) repetition and (b) self-initiated repair - were used by both the European (German) and Arabic (Jordanian) students. There were differences however between the two groups in terms of the frequency of use; "...the Jordanian learners utilized significantly more repetition and self-initiated repair strategies in the story retelling and task when compared to the German learners' performance" (Rabab'ab, 2013, p.129). Professor Rabab'ab (2013, p.129) makes an interesting suggestion of a variable that could be at play, in that the Jordanian's produced about twice as many words as the Germans "...which could be attributed to mother tongue influence, since Arabic is described as a verbose language." The researcher noted that repetition was used as a postponement strategy in order to think of the corrected item, but the amount of time was not measured or alluded to in his journal article in English Language Teaching (Rabab'ab, 2013, p.129).

### 3.3. Learner's Perspective

Ali S. Azar, a Professor of Applied Linguistics, shared a paper on the research he did on the subject of students' attitudes towards self-correction in the classroom at the Third International Conference (2012) on Education and Educational Psychology (ICEEP) in Antalya, Turkey. Thirteen undergraduate students of TEFL at the Islamic Azad University in Iran were participants in a survey to learn about their attitudes and perceptions with regard to correction feedback. Azar (2012, p.43) reported that the participants had "...strongly positive attitudes toward correction of all errors by their teacher (but) they preferred correction of phonology and grammar errors more than others and they would rather self-correct" when given a choice. Researchers at Ferdowsi University of Mashhad, Iran also found that Persian "EFL learners prefer self-correction to teacher and peer correction when they themselves notice a mistake in their utterances" (Pishghadam, Hashemi and Kermanshahi, 2011, p.957). This is similar to the attitude of Kurdish students based on my own experience.

Macaro (2003) accurately makes the point when he offers a summary of self-correction research resulting in a consensus that teachers should not interrupt the self-correction process, but allow the student time to reformulate the error into a corrected form. Lyster, Saito and Sato (2013, p.14) have a table describing reformulation in terms of both

Implicit and Explicit reformulation. When reformulation is implicit, the student attempts to "...resolve a communication breakdown", and when it is explicit, the reformulation may take place without any communication breakdown having occurred (Lyster, Saito and Sato, 2013, p.14). Therefore, self-correction in the form of reformulation can enhance communication whether or not a communication breakdown has occurred. On the other hand, a conundrum for teachers is called the "...logical problem of language acquisition (LPLA)" (p. 938). The concept refers to the finding that children do not necessarily pay any attention to input in the form of corrective feedback on the part of their parents or teachers. Although the learning of language differs between young children, older children and adults, the concept is an important reminder that input is not enough. The general possibilities support the concept that self-corrective behaviour is the learner's own ability to repair an error.

#### 4. Implications

A study by Madsen and Petersen (1983) explains that the need for corrective feedback is not debatable, but what is debatable is the method and the extent to which corrective feedback is provided with regard to the learner. If the learner of a second language is able to identify and correct his or her mistakes in either oral or written communication, then such feedback can be said to be effective in the SLA process.

Although all the possible implications cannot be addressed with regard to the effect as to how oral self-correction can help EFL students more easily accumulate knowledge and more successfully use the knowledge in real life situation, a development of our knowledge of such implications will be of great benefit to the learner.

With regard to this specific context – the focus on Kurdish students - it is very significant to let the students self-correct. As teachers, we sometimes feel an urge to rush in with the correct answer before students have had sufficient time to process the information. If teachers provide sufficient time and appropriate cues for students to self-repair, more often than not the students will come through. The least effective technique for correcting a student's error is to simply to give them the answer.

On the other hand, teachers need to be able to implement a variety of strategies with regard to oral CF and to adapt these specific strategies to the specific student they are working with. One way to do this is to start with a relatively implicit form of correction. For example, this can be done by indicating that there is an error, and encouraging the student to try to correct it him/herself and giving him/her enough time to do the self-correction. If the student is unable to self-correct, then the teacher may move to a more explicit form such as a direct correction. This requires that teachers have to be responsive to the "feedback" they get from students in terms of their own corrective feedback.

The teachers must be able to consider the context in which student language use and errors occur. Kormos (1999) dealt with self-repair, and showed that error detection is dependent

on the social context. For example, students will self-correct according to the interlocutor and the social context. Then, if teachers assume that students' self-correction improves learning, context is very significant in understanding what is and what is not learned. The types of corrective feedback techniques that elicit student-generated repairs are clearly more suitable for the more cognitively mature and second language learners. Moreover, as part of practicing a variety of feedback techniques, teachers might try to use different oral error feedback techniques in terms of a specific error. Good teachers realise that one size does not fit all. Using different kinds of corrective feedback that seem to yield student-generated repairs will increase the chance of achieving a greater degree of self-correction for an increasing number of students.

#### 5. Conclusion

The prompts that teachers use to motivate oral self-correction on the part of EFL learners do not seem to be as necessary in relation to older students (secondary school age and above) as discussed here. The reviewed research suggests that learners are comfortable in terms of using self-correction and, in many cases, prefer self-repair to other types of correction feedback. No published research on the use of oral self-correction on the part of Kurdish secondary ESL students has been found. The effect of pause/waiting time has not been investigated nor has any research on the attitudes and abilities of Kurdish secondary school students towards self-correction. Therefore, this area of research needs to be pursued.

The concept of self-correction has been intensively and specifically explored. Self-correction plays a vital role in the learning process. Student learning is improved by using self-correction. In addition, prompts are very useful. They encourage students to self-correct by pausing. Prompts that invite self-correction include elicitation, a meta-linguistic clue and a clarification request. A long pause lets the student self-correct, and can be very effective. Students from different contexts such as Iran and Germany prefer different levels of self-correction. Self-correction in the form of reformulation can enhance communication, whether or not a communication breakdown occurs.

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