

The Relationship Between Gender and Corrective Feedback

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Abstract

As teachers, we try to provide different types of corrective feedback in our classes hoping that our students' errors will be eradicated on the spot. Nevertheless, most of the time it is never so. The learners' uptake, of course, depends on many factors some of which may be affective, cognitive, age, gender, time of correction, students' learning ability, developmental stage, their attention and so on. There are different strategies for error correction during communication activities in the classroom (Hedge, 2008; Brown, 2007) [5][1], but they can not be prescribed for every situation. As it was mentioned above, many factors will have an impact on the choice teachers make. This paper intends to investigate whether there is a relationship between gender and the choice of these strategies. The research question is: Do males and females prefer the same strategies of error correction in communicative activities? To this end, a questionnaire, consisting of 24 questions, was used as the research tool. There were 205 participants 48.8 of whom were girls and 51.2 were boys. They were all taking intermediate English course at Iran Language Institute, one of the most popular English schools with approximately 150000 learners all over the country. Chi-square and Cross-tab were applied to analyze the data. The results revealed significant differences ($p < 0.05$) between males and females in 6 items. This study can be invaluable for all ELT practitioners and English teachers, especially those who are managing mixed (boys and girls) classes.

1. Introduction

Even though Krashen's idea concerning the value of error correction raised a lot of questions and planted the seed of skepticism, research has proved it to be beneficial especially when it comes to adult learners. Besides, according to Hedge (2008)[5], due to lack of exposure to the input outside the classroom in foreign language situations, it is incumbent on teachers to provide negative as well as positive feedback to meet their students' needs and expectations. There are different types of error correction strategies from among which teachers may choose to provide feedback in the classroom: (Hedge, 2008; Harmer, 1999) [4][5]

1. By frowning and saying directly that it was not right and having someone else to correct it.
2. By raising the intonation up to the point of the mistake, and waiting for the student to self-correct.
3. If the student gives a present tense answer to a past form question, the teacher emphasizes the past form by repeating the past form and tries to elicit the right answer from her/him.
4. If there is a problem with intonation, the teacher has the class provide the right form. Then she has them repeat chorally and individually and consequently returns to the original student.
5. By looking confused and asking for clarification. She might ask 'what did you say?'
6. By pointing to the error, the teacher provides the right form herself and has the student repeat it.
7. Activating the students' prior knowledge by hinting.

8. By reformulating the incorrect form without making a big issue of it.

It is up to the teacher to use anyone of these strategies in the right place for the right person and at the right time. These on the spot decisions depend on many factors one of which is going to be discussed in this paper.

1.1 Significance of the Study

In order for learning to happen, it requires teachers to be aware of their students' needs

and expectations. One of the expected roles for an ELT teacher is to raise the students' consciousness toward the quality of their output; however, they need to be equipped with different techniques to fulfill this complex task, for they always have to cope with unpredictable situations. This paper may provide teachers with some information to deal with error correction for different students in the class.

1.2 Purpose of the Study

This study aims to explore whether male and female students respond in similar or different ways to corrective feedback offered in the classroom. Therefore, the null hypothesis of this paper can be put as follows: Both male and female EFL learners prefer the same correction strategies.

2. Method

2.1. Participants

To accomplish the objectives of this study, 100 female and 105 male Iranian Intermediate learners of English at Iran Language Institute, some of whom had been studying at the institute from Basic 1, and some others had joined by taking a placement test, were selected and given questionnaires about error treatment strategies.

2.2. Instruments

A questionnaire containing 24 items about whether the students wanted their errors to be treated, what kind of errors, when and how they wanted their errors to be treated was distributed to 205 intermediate learners. They were asked to respond to the questions on a five-point Likert-scale. The questionnaire was the modified form of one used by Fokuda (2003a, cited in McKay, 2006) [7]. In her study she examined Japanese high school students' and teachers' attitude toward the treatment of errors in oral communication classes.

2.3. Data collection procedure

All intermediate classes in the girls and boys' department at Iran Language Institute were selected. They were provided with the instructions by the teacher and given 30 minutes to fill them out. Having been collected, each individual item was analyzed and compared through chi-square and cross-tab in order to discover whether or not there was a significant difference between males and females.

3. Data Analysis and Results

As it was already mentioned there was a significant difference among males and females in 6 items which will be discussed one by one in this section.

Question 1: I want my spoken errors to be treated.

			gender		Total
			male	female	
A	Count		46	72	118
	%		44.2%	72.0%	57.8%
B	Count		42	24	66
	%		40.4%	24.0%	32.4%
C	Count		14	1	15
	%		13.5%	1.0%	7.4%
D	Count			2	2
	%			2.0%	1.0%
E	Count		2	1	3
	%		1.9%	1.0%	1.5%
Total		Count	104	100	204
		%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
Chi-Square Tests		Value	24.169		
		p-value	0.000		

Table 1. comparing frequency of answers in question 1 between males and females

The results in table 1 show 44.2% of males and 72% of females strongly agree with error correction. As the results of chi-square tests reveal there is a significant difference between male and female students in their tendency toward error treatment ($p < 0.05$).

Question 2: How often do you want your teachers to treat your spoken errors?

		gender			Total
			male	female	
	A	Count	40	58	98
		%	38.5%	58.0%	48.0%
	B	Count	35	31	66
		%	33.7%	31.0%	32.4%
	C	Count	22	11	33
		%	21.2%	11.0%	16.2%
	D	Count	5		5
		%	4.8%		2.5%
	E	Count	2		2
		%	1.9%		1.0%
Total		Count	104	100	204
		%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
Chi-Square Tests		Value	14.14		
		p-value	0.007		

Table 2.comparing frequency of answers in question 2 between males and females

The results in table 2 reveal that 38% of males and 58% females expect their error to be always treated; on the other hand, 1.9% of males and 0% of females expect their error to be *never* treated. . The Chi-square results prove a significant difference between males and females in this item, too.

Question 10: How often do you want the infrequent spoken errors to be treated?

			gender		Total
			male	female	
	A (always)	Count	24	25	49
		%	23.1%	25.0%	24.0%
	B (usually)	Count	25	37	62
		%	24.0%	37.0%	30.4%
	C (often)	Count	25	27	52
		%	24.0%	27.0%	25.5%
	D (sometimes)	Count	25	9	34
		%	24.0%	9.0%	16.7%
	E (never)	Count	5	2	7
		%	4.8%	2.0%	3.4%
Total		Count	104	100	204
		%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
Chi-Square Tests		Value	11.16		
		p-value	0.025		

Table 3.comparing frequency of answers in question 10

As the table shows, there is a high frequency of B, C, D (24%) in males and low frequency of E (4.8%). While in females, there is a high tendency toward B (37%) and a low tendency toward E (2%).The Chi-square test reveals a significant difference between males and females ($p < 0.05$).

How would you want your teacher to correct your error when you make the following error?

Teacher: Where did you go yesterday?

Student: I go to the park.

.No correction strategy			gender		Total
			male	female	
A v.effective	Count	23	11	34	
	%	22.1%	11.0%	16.7%	
B effective	Count	22	9	31	
	%	21.2%	9.0%	15.2%	
C neutral	Count	15	9	24	
	%	14.4%	9.0%	11.8%	
D ineffective	Count	16	33	49	
	%	15.4%	33.0%	24.0%	
E v.ineffective	Count	28	38	66	
	%	26.9%	38.0%	32.4%	
Total		Count	104	100	204
		%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
Chi-Square Tests		Value	18.52		
		p-value	0.001		

Table 4

Table 4 shows a high frequency of E (26.9%) and a low frequency of C (14.4%) among males whereas it shows a high frequency of E (38%) and a low frequency of C and B (9%) among females. Chi-square test reveals a significant difference between males and females.

Metalinguistic feedback			gender		Total
			male	female	
very effective	A	Count	15	28	43
		%	14.6%	28.0%	21.2%
effective	B	Count	24	28	52
		%	23.3%	28.0%	25.6%
neutral	C	Count	23	23	46
		%	22.3%	23.0%	22.7%
ineffective	D	Count	18	10	28
		%	17.5%	10.0%	13.8%
very ineffective	E	Count	23	11	34
		%	22.3%	11.0%	16.7%
Total		Count	103	100	203
		%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
Chi-Square Tests		Value	10.71		
		p-value	0.031		

Table 5

Table 5 indicates a high frequency of B (23.3%) and a low frequency of A (14.6%) among males and high frequency of A (28%) and B (28%) and low frequency of D (10%) among females. Based on the information revealed through chi-square, there is a significant difference between males and females in this strategy.

Recast			gender		Total	
			male	female		
	A v.effective	Count	15	4	19	
		%	14.9%	4.0%	9.5%	
	B effective	Count	18	23	41	
		%	17.8%	23.2%	20.5%	
	C neutral	Count	32	22	54	
		%	31.7%	22.2%	27.0%	
	D ineffective	Count	15	24	39	
		%	14.9%	24.2%	19.5%	
	E v.ineffective	Count	21	26	47	
		%	20.8%	26.3%	23.5%	
	Total		Count	101	99	101
			%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
Chi-Square Tests		Value	11.42			
		p-value	0.022			

Table 6.

Table 6 shows a high frequency of C (31.7%) and a low frequency of A (14.9%) among males and high frequency of E (26.3%) and a low frequency of A (4%) among women. As a result chi-square test proves a significant difference between two different sexes.

4. Discussion/conclusion

Clearly then, there are differences between boys and girls in the choice of some correction strategies. Therefore, it can be said with caution that the null hypothesis can be rejected in this respect. However, in the other strategies, there are not significant differences between the two sexes.

The results in table1, 2 and 3 indicate the females' higher tendency toward error correction than the males even if when the error is not a frequent one. There are many factors at work some of which may be: the females' scrupulous attention to details, their tendency toward perfectionism, their overdependence on teacher's help to learn and sociocultural factors (their lack of self-confidence which is not improved in the families as well as male children), which should be discussed in a different research paper. As table 4 shows, there is no special reaction from the males when there is no correction, whereas the females find it ineffective which again indicates their expectation of correction from the teacher. Based on the information obtained from table 5 and 6, the female students find direct grammatical explanations more favorable than the male students ;as a result, the teacher's reformulation of the student's utterance does not fulfill their expectation. This might be attributed to the fact that, male students prefer meaning- based approach to learning form while females like analytic approach better.

To put it in a nut shell, error correction should be an indispensable part of every teaching program especially if it is taught as a foreign language. This idea has been supported by researchers consistently; according to Ellis (2008)[4] corrective feedback can be both input-providing and out-put promoting and as Merrill Swain (cited in Ellis,2003,p.49)[3] has argued , " Output can serve a consciousness-raising function by helping learners to notice gaps in their interlanguages." Doughty and Valera (1998) [2] find corrective feedback beneficial because it is noticed by the learners, and they make use of it in their acquisition. Willis and Willis (2007)[8] believe corrective feedback prevents fossilization and motivates learners. With all this evidence available, while providing corrective feedback, it is up to the teacher to make the right decision in the classroom by taking different factors, one of which was discussed in this paper, into consideration.

This study can certainly provide ELT teachers and practitioners with invaluable experience. The choice of these strategies is context-specific because it depends on several factors. In this paper, the variable of age in two groups was not considered because it was beyond the scope of this paper. It will be discussed in the future study.

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