

Comparison of Advanced Level Iranian EFL Learners Preferences for the Correction of Different Oral Error Types Considering Their Gender

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Abstract

One of these common problems is the students' and teachers' disagreement on the amount of error correction, type, and techniques of correcting errors. This study based on the findings of a questionnaire administrated to 60 male and female EFL students in Pardisan Language Institute investigates learners' preferences toward classroom oral error correction, learners' preferences for correction of different types of oral errors and learners' preferences for particular correction techniques. The results obtained, manifest that almost all of the female students preferred to have their grammatical and vocabulary errors always corrected over the other error types. Whereas the majority of male students preferred to have their vocabulary, phonology, and pragmatically errors which always be corrected in order of frequency and percentages. Students strongly showed positive preference toward correction of this type (grammar & vocabulary).

Keywords: error, mistake, error correction, learner preferences

INTRODUCTION

In the learner-centered curriculum, learners are viewed as the center of the learning-teaching process. According to Nunan (1999), the choices of what and how to teach should be made with reference to learners and the purpose of language teaching is to get learners actively involved in the learning process: learning by doing. This issue has triggered a number of studies on learner's beliefs and preferences towards classroom activities such as error correction and on comparing learner's and teacher's views. Most of these studies reveal a fact that teachers and students have different attitudes and preferences toward errors and error correction. Teachers, as Corder (1976, p.161) put it, are more concerned with how to deal with errors than with what causes them. Some of them think "if we were to achieve a perfect teaching method the errors would never be committed in the first place, and that therefore the occurrence of errors is merely a

sign of the present inadequacy of our teaching techniques". Therefore, such teachers try every means to prevent their students from making errors by constant correction which they believe, would help students recognize their errors and not repeat them. Some other teachers believe that the learning of the foreign language may be discouraged by the teacher who insists upon correction and grammatical accuracy. They also believe that continuous correction can raise learner's level of anxiety, and that this impedes learning (Krashen, 1982).

Also, some students like to be corrected every now and then by their teachers because they believe that frequent correction would improve the language they are learning. Cathcart and Olsen (1976) show that students want their oral errors to be corrected. Some students, however, find continuous correction very annoying, and discouraging. They do not like being corrected whenever they are speaking and some of them would even stop participating in the classroom interaction just because they do not want to be corrected (Hawkey, 2006).

Horwitz (1988), notes that any language teacher employing a communicative approach will have to satisfy those students who complain if teachers do not correct their every oral error. Students who value communicative effectiveness over accuracy have negative reactions to teachers who constantly correct their utterance (Hawkey, 2006). Numerous studies revealed mismatches between teachers' pedagogical practices and learner's learning preferences (e.g. Cathcart & Olsen, 1975 ; Hawkey, 2006 ; Peacock, 2007). Accordingly, teachers can benefit from discovering their students preferences in instructional practices. Although the literature on teacher's responses to student's errors is abundant, the literature on student's perceptions regarding oral error correction is limited in both ESL and EFL research (e.g., Cathcart & Olsen, 1976 ; Oladejo, 1993 ; Bang, 1999). Particularly, concerning the preferences of Iranian EFL learners at different proficiency levels for oral error correction, there is very little if any research in the literature. For this reason, the researcher conducted a survey to find out about the preferences of Iranian EFL learners at different proficiency levels preferences towards classroom oral error correction, the learner's general preferences for classroom correction of different types of errors (e.g. pronunciation and grammar) and their preferences for particular types of error correction techniques. It is hoped that the information from this study may be useful in evaluating the teacher's practice in the area of error correction and may be of pedagogic importance to Iranian teachers especially those who teach in English language Institutes in order to find out how they should treat their student's errors. However the role of gender is important in learning and teaching a foreign language. The study of both female and male learners in a comparative investigating of this kind can shed more light on how different or similar they are in their preferences toward their oral error correction types. More over the current study attempted to bring in to light the unknown concerning the advanced level Iranian EFL learners preferences for correction of different oral error types mainly focusing on the gender differences. It is hoped that through this study , contributions would be made to a better understanding of corrective feedback given to male and female learners at the advanced level and that the results of this comparative study

would provide EFL teachers in general and Iranian EFL instructors in particular with a higher awareness of the role of feedback. With regard to the stated problem, the following research question was formulated:

RQ-What are the Iranian male and female advanced learners' preferences for classroom correction of different types of oral errors? (e.g., pronunciation and grammar)

METHODOLOGY

Participants

To accomplish the objectives of this study, 60 male and female Iranian advanced learners of Pardisan Language Institute were selected and given a questionnaire. These students had been studying at the institute from the elementary level. Over all student participants were EFL learners with nearly the same background knowledge and their ages ranged from 18 up to 25 years old. The participants' native language was Turkish who could speak Farsi as well. It is worth mentioning that their differences were only in their gender.

Instruments

A questionnaire containing 5 items about how often do the students wanted to have their different error types corrected was developed based on a literature review of previous studies of learner errors and teacher feedback on errors (Katayama, 2007) and distributed to 60 male and female advanced level learners. The questionnaire contains just one section addressing Research question. The students were asked how often they wanted classroom oral correction of different types of grammar, vocabulary, pragmatics, and discourse. Instead of the term phonology, the words "pronunciation, accent and intonation", were used in the questionnaire. Errors in pragmatics were presented as, inappropriate expressions and discourse errors as organization of discourse". Participants rated each time on 5-point scale, with 1 representing *never* and 5 representing *always* with respect to frequency of correction.

Procedure

60 male and female advanced level learners at Pardisan Language Institute were selected and divided to two classes (30 male&30 female). During a semester their different oral error types had been worked out by the researcher whom had been the teacher of these two classes. At the end of the semester the students were gathered and supplied with the questionnaire. They were given 15 minutes to fill it out. The data reported were analyzed by SPSS software including percentages and frequencies.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results obtained, addressing the research question manifest that almost all of the female students preferred to have their grammatical and vocabulary errors always corrected over the other error types (Table 1).

Table1. Types of errors advanced female students wanted to have corrected

Item	N	Never 1 (%)	Often 2 (%)	Neutral 3 (%)	Sometimes 4 (%)	Always 5 (%)	Mean	SD
Grammar	30	0	3.3	0	23.3	73.3	4.6	0.66
Phonology	30	0	3.3	3.3	36.7	56.7	4.4	0.72
Vocabulary	30	0	0	6.7	26.7	66.7	4.6	0.62
Pragmatics	30	0	0	10	36.7	53.3	4.4	0.67
Discourse	30	0	0	13.33	40	46.7	4.3	0.71

Whereas the majority of male students preferred to have their vocabulary, phonology, and pragmatically errors which always be corrected in order of frequency and percentages (Table 2).

Table 2. Types of errors advanced male students wanted to have corrected

Item	N	Never 1 (%)	Often 2 (%)	Neutral 3 (%)	Sometimes 4 (%)	Always 5r (%)	Mean	SD
grammar	30	0	0	0	46.7	53.3	4.53	0.50
phonology	30	0	0	0	33.3	66.7	4.66	0.47
vocabulary	30	0	33.3	0	23.3	73.3	4.66	0.66
pragmatics	30	0	0	6.7	26.7	66.7	4.60	0.62
discourse	30	0	3.3	13.3	43.3	36.7	4.06	0.98

Students strongly showed positive preference toward correction of this type (grammar & vocabulary) in the present study is consistent with the result of a study by Ustaci (2011) about the students' preferences on the correction of their oral errors and the strategies they use in an EFL context.

However the findings of this study related to the female learners is in contrast with the findings of Katayama (2006, 2007) in Japanese EFL students preferences towards correction of oral errors. In her study 61.8% of the students wanted to have their errors always corrected in pragmatics. Also, justifying the Iranian learners strong positive preference toward the correction of grammatical and vocabulary errors might be explained by the Iranian educational system. The language education system mainly focuses on grammar teaching in schools as the students are supposed to take the university exam focusing on the form of the language rather than communicating in that language. From the guidance school where the Iranian students start to study English, they are taught the English language through the grammar-translation method and they continue learning this method up to the high school until they graduate. Graduates of this type of instruction, care only to have good knowledge of English grammar and also a wide range of vocabulary. Conversation is paid little if any attention at our schools and even at our universities.

Moreover, students' strong interest in the correction of grammar and vocabulary errors (both females & males) could also be explained by the education they receive. The English teachers in Iran are expected to prepare their students to pass university entrance examinations. In addition to complex grammatical knowledge, reading comprehension skills, and other skills, examiners of the entrance examinations are

expected to have a wide range of English vocabulary and enough grammatical knowledge. Therefore the students simply memorize words and phrases instead of learning them in meaningful contexts. Consequently, they may lack confidence about using appropriate words and phrases in a real-life setting and conversation that's why the male students preferred to have their pragmatic errors corrected as well. Phonology takes the third place in order of significance and preference for female Iranian advanced level students and the second place for males. Persian phonology does not share the same features as English phonology and students tend to transfer the pronunciation features of their native language. Therefore, the acquisition of English pronunciation, accent, and intonation patterns is difficult for many EFL learners. On the other hand females and males speeches differ from each other in many aspects. Such as phonological differences, differences in vocabulary, differences in style and females usually speak more fluent than males that are why males' second error correction type is selected as phonology. Even males communicate different with other males than they do with other females. Over all males and females tend to have a different type of humor. Therefore considering these gender-related differences the null hypothesis is rejected in this study.

CONCLUSION

The results obtained in the current study may provide useful insights regarding the Iranian male and female EFL advanced level learners' preferences toward their oral error correction types. Thus, the instructors or teachers at institutions or schools may focus on the preferences of the learners. Moreover, the Iranian female advanced level students are sensitive about the correction of grammar and vocabulary while the male students at the same level prefer vocabulary, phonology, and pragmatic error correction type. For this reason, the teachers should provide feedback about their oral grammatical, lexicon, pronunciation, and pragmatic errors in common without hurting the students' feelings. Also, it can be suggested that material developers, while writing Iranian school text books for different grades, can benefit from the findings of this study. They can develop the text books in a way that more attention should be paid to communication rather than strict grammar and lexicon. This indicates a significant change in our educational system and removing the entrance examinations of the universities. Therefore without only enhancing the students' grammar and vocabulary knowledge at schools, we can improve their abilities in communication, allowing them to be able to be good speakers in daily-life conversations.

Based on the limitations of the current study, further studies may be carried out with more participants including both male and female learners in different EFL contexts. It is recommended to extend such studies by involving EFL learners involved in schools or universities to see whether the same or different findings are resulted in that case it may make it easier to generalize the findings to larger contexts. Likewise the same research can be conducted to the other level students (elementary & intermediate) in order to find out their preferences toward the different oral error correction types. Furthermore, a questionnaire may be handed out to the Iranian male and female EFL

teachers in order to elicit information on their preferences toward the oral error correction types. In addition, teachers' preferences and students' preferences may be compared with each other to analyze the similarities and differences of their view points.

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