

HOW TEACHERS IN AN INFORMAL ENGLISH TRAINING INSTITUTION TREAT YOUNG LEARNERS' ORAL ERRORS

Ihsan Nur Iman Faris¹ and Dian Budiarti^{2*}

¹Universitas Pendidikan Indonesia, Indonesia

²UIN Sunan Gunung Djati Bandung, Indonesia

ihsan.nif@upi.edu¹ and dianbudiarti@uinsgd.ac.id²

*correspondence: dianbudiarti@uinsgd.ac.id

<https://doi.org/10.24071/llt.v26i1.5341>

received 7 November 2022; accepted 5 April 2023

Abstract

Corrective feedback needs to be used carefully to treat young learners' oral errors as it should not inhibit learners from communicating. This study aims to investigate the use of corrective feedback strategies by informal English training center teachers in Bandung. Classroom observation and coding were used to collect and categorize data regarding errors committed by students and teachers' use of corrective strategies. The study found that pronunciation errors (49%) were most frequently committed, followed by grammar (27%), vocabulary (20%), and the use of L1 (4%) errors. To treat those errors, the teachers apply corrective feedback strategies, which mostly were in the form of recast (46%) and elicitation (35%). Other corrective feedback strategies such as explicit correction (11%), metalinguistic feedback (6%), repetition (1%), and paralinguistic signal (1%) were found less frequently. This study suggests teachers consider several factors such as types of errors, learning factors, and learners' factors when deciding the corrective feedback strategies.

Keywords: considerations, oral errors, teachers' corrective feedback

Introduction

English for young learner programs should aim mainly to encourage children to speak English more confidently (Alakrash & Razak, 2021; Harmer, 2007). Since the improvement of fluency should be prioritized over accuracy, error correction should not be conducted excessively. Nevertheless, corrective feedback needs to be given to boost learning and prevent repetitions of errors (Ellis, 2009; Gebhard, 2009; Li, 2018). To ensure the provision of feedback does not inhibit learners from speaking, teachers need to understand how to give proper feedback to children.

Corrective feedback should not be addressed to every oral error made by learners since it may hinder the flow of communication or fluency which is the main objective of language learning (see, for example, Chu, 2011; Ok & Ustact, 2013; Shahini & Shahamirian, 2017; Widiati & Cahyono, 2006). Hilliard (2014) suggests that spoken languages are not as rigid as written languages. The focus on grammar is viewed as secondary as grammar acquisition will follow automatically when students are fluent enough to speak and able to formulate the rules by themselves

(Gordon, 2007). However, some experts see correction as necessary even in the early stages of learning as it can boost learning when given appropriately according to children's affective and developmental stages (see for example Ellis, 2009, 2017; Harmer, 2007; Lyster & Saito, 2010; Panova & Lyster, 2002). This notion is also supported by Ellis (2017) and Chu (2011) suggesting giving corrective feedback to avoid fossilization. Ellis (2017) further emphasizes that some errors, called global errors, should be treated since it hinders the understanding of messages, while others, local errors, can be ignored. The explanations show the intricacy and complexity of the giving corrective feedback process for children. Teachers need to understand various factors such as children's English learning levels, children's characteristics, types of errors, and types of corrective feedback before deciding to give corrective feedback.

The unique and complex situations in the classroom require teachers to understand various types of corrective feedback to treat errors. In general, corrective feedback is categorized into explicit and implicit feedback (Ellis et al., 2006). Lyster & Ranta (1997) further categorize corrective feedback into (1) recast (2) explicit correction (3) clarification request (asking for reformulation) (4) error repetition (5) elicitation (eliciting the reformulation directly), and (6) metalinguistic feedback. Panova & Lyster (2002) and Ellis (2009) add translation and paralinguistic signals to the list of corrective feedback strategies. Of the strategies mentioned, metalinguistic feedback, elicitation, paralinguistic signal, and explicit correction belong to explicit corrective feedback strategies, while the rest belong to implicit corrective feedback strategies.

Some reports suggest that teachers favor the use of explicit feedback to correct children's oral errors (Choi & Li, 2012; Maolida, 2013). The preference might be due to the effectiveness of explicit corrective feedback in correcting and improving learners' grammar understanding (Ellis et al., 2006; Rezaei & Derakhshan, 2011) and their noticeability of students' errors (Granena & Yilmaz, 2019; Sheen & Ellis, 2011).

Research on the use of oral corrective feedback to treat learners' errors has been conducted in various contexts in Indonesia. Yusuf et al. (2017) found that the use of multimodal feedback effectively improves students' understanding of the lessons. In terms of the type of corrective feedback used, Fathimah (2017) found that implicit feedback, especially recast, was used more frequently by teachers to treat adolescent students' oral errors. She further explains that the teachers use recast due to the type of errors, learning objectives, and learners' relatively low proficiency level. Input-providing strategy in explicit correction is viewed as effective in improving teenage learners speaking skills, especially when given in the scaffolding process since it indicates learners' incorrect production while giving the correct ones at the same time (Tersta, 2017). Interestingly, despite students' low proficiency, teachers in young learner English programs also use explicit corrective feedback to address kindergarten students' oral errors. Maolida (2013) suggests that young learners can understand grammar concepts better when grammatical errors are corrected explicitly. Nevertheless, the research does not explain what specific types of corrective feedback are used to treat errors. Further research needs to be conducted to investigate what types of corrective feedback are suitable for treating young learners' errors as an inaccurate use of corrective

feedback types can inhibit learners from speaking and hinder the achievement of fluency which is the main objective of English for young learner programs.

Research investigating the types of corrective feedback teachers use to treat errors needs to be conducted as the findings can help teachers determine the appropriate strategy to correct their students' errors (Russell, 2009). Much research has been conducted to reveal what general types of feedback teachers use to treat young learners' errors, but research investigating how specific types of corrective feedback are used to treat particular errors is relatively scarce. This research aims to fill the lacuna by revealing what types of errors are committed by young learners and what corrective feedback strategies the teachers use.

Method

This research was conducted in three English for young learner classes in one English training center in Bandung. Observations were conducted to collect the data from the site. The study observed the use of corrective feedback of three classes in the institution, namely 'Class A', 'Class B', and 'Class C'. Each teacher in each class holds a bachelor of English education or English literature degree and has been teaching English at the site for at least six months. The class consisted of four to five students aged 7-12 years old. The class which lasted for 100 minutes per meeting was observed three times, making the number of classroom observations 12 or 1200 minutes in total. The instruments used to collect the data from the observation were video recording, audio recording, and field notes.

After the data were collected, the data analysis process was conducted to interpret the sets of data. This study categorizes students' errors based on Lyster & Ranta (1997) and Yang (2016), classifying language production errors into pronunciation errors, grammar, vocabulary, and use of L1 errors. As for the corrective feedback strategies, this study categorizes the strategies mainly based on Lyster & Ranta (1997), Ellis (2009), and Panova & Lyster (2002). They categorize corrective feedback strategies into recast, explicit correction, translation, clarification request, metalinguistic feedback, elicitation, repetition, and paralinguistic signals. The findings then are displayed in frequency and percentages.

Findings and Discussion

Types of errors committed by young learners

This study found that the types of errors the young learners committed the most frequently were pronunciation, grammar, vocabulary, and use of L1 errors, respectively. The details are as follows.

Table 1. Distribution of students' oral errors

Types of Errors	Number of Occurrences in Each Class			Total	
	Class A	Class B	Class C	F	%
Pronunciation	23	18	51	92	49%
Grammar	15	12	24	51	27%
Vocabulary	11	13	13	37	20%
Use of L1	4	2	2	8	4%
Total	53	45	90	188	100%

The table above shows that among the three classes observed, Class C's students committed more errors compared to Class A and Class B's students, while the fewest average number of errors was found in Class A's class. The most frequent oral errors that the students commit are pronunciation errors with 92 occurrences (49%), followed by grammar errors, vocabulary errors, and use of L1 errors, which occurrences are 51 (27%), 37 (20%), and 8 (4%), respectively.

This finding corroborates several experts (see, for example, Aktuğ, 2015; Brown, 2016; Choi & Li, 2012; Yang, 2016) stating that phonological or pronunciation errors were committed the most frequently by young English learners. Gordon (2007) suggests that the focus of most young learners' classes on fluency and confidence development might correlate with the tendency of pronunciation errors to appear frequently in the class. Moreover, the L1 transfer process might also influence pronunciation learning (Gass & Selinker, 2008). Bahasa Indonesia, students' L1, is a phonetic language whose spelling and pronunciation tend to be similar (Karlina et al., 2020). The habit of using the L1 might interfere with English pronunciations as English, a non-phonetic language, usually has spelling different from the pronunciation (Gass & Selinker, 2008).

Regarding grammar errors, they might occur frequently in young learners' classes as teachers may ignore this type of error depending on the objectives and perspectives of the teachers on the importance of grammar. In general, EFL young learners' classes mainly aim to encourage students to communicate fluently and confidently (Cameron, 2001; Gordon, 2007); thus, grammar has not been viewed as the main objective of EFL young learners' classes since the learning of the abstract concept might inhibit students to speak openly. Furthermore, Gordon (2007) suggests that children will learn grammar eventually, after formulating the grammatical rules on their own and when their cognitive ability to understand the concept is ready. He (Gordon, 2007) warns that the use of corrective feedback tends to be ineffective, or even harmful when they are given too frequently.

The finding of vocabulary errors as the third most frequently found errors in this study is quite interesting as the limited numbers may imply that the students possess the understanding of grammatical behavior, collocations associations, registers, and associations of the vocabulary required to use the vocabulary accurately (Nation, 1990; Tilev & Rentler, 2022; Young-Davy, 2014). The students may have enough opportunities to practice the words communicatively. Considering that the students only learn in the classroom for about three hours a week, which in general is quite short, they may also use English outside the training, making their vocabulary use relatively accurate.

The use of L1 error in this study is the least frequently found. Firstly, this finding might be because not all L1 use in the class was considered an error. L1 errors were counted only when the use is unsolicited or responded to by the teachers. In other words, the categorization of L1 as an error depends on the commitment or requirement to use English in classroom activities. A discussion and casual conversation not relevant to the objective of the lesson might not be categorized as errors. Therefore, the low frequency of L1 errors found in the study might be encouraged by the strict application of commitment to using English during the main activities. Nevertheless, the use of L1 during activities in the classrooms might be due to students' limited vocabulary (Lyster, 1998; Lyster & Ranta, 1997; Shin et al., 2020).

Teachers' corrective feedback strategies

This study categorizes teachers' corrective feedback strategies into recast, translation, explicit correction, clarification request, metalinguistic feedback, elicitation, repetition, and metalinguistic feedback (Ellis, 2009; Lyster & Ranta, 1997; Panova & Lyster, 2002). The frequency and percentage of each corrective feedback strategy are as follows:

Table 2. Distribution of teachers' corrective feedback strategies

Feedback strategy	Ms. Rini	Mr. Adi	Ms. Dwinda	F	Total %
Recast	18	16	54	88	46%
Elicitation	24	19	25	68	35%
Explicit correction	17	0	5	22	11%
Metalinguistic feedback	6	2	3	11	6%
Repetition	0	2	0	2	1%
Paralinguistic signal	0	0	2	2	1%
Translation	0	0	0	0	0%
Clarification request	0	0	0	0	0%
TOTAL	65	39	89	193	100%

Of eight corrective feedback strategies, six categories were used to address students' errors. Recast was the most frequently used strategy, followed by elicitation, explicit correction, metalinguistic feedback, repetition, and paralinguistic signal. The finding echoes several experts (see, for example, Ahangari & Amirzadeh, 2011; Brown, 2016; Panova & Lyster, 2002; Sauro, 2009) reporting the predominant use of recast in the class for addressing students' errors. A detailed discussion of each corrective feedback strategy is presented below.

Recast belongs to input-providing strategies giving learners the correct versions of their erroneous utterances. This study found recast to be the most frequently used with 88 occurrences (41.9%). The data also indicate that all teachers in the classes observed that recast is favored. However, being the most favored corrective feedback strategy does not make recasting the most effective in addressing the errors. Sheen & Ellis (2011) suggest that students tend to ignore recast as corrections as this strategy is often mistaken as confirmation of students' correct utterances. Lyster & Saito (2010) suggest teachers be more explicit in using recast as a correction strategy to encourage students to notice their errors.

Elicitation is a corrective feedback strategy that encourages learners to correct their errors (Lyster & Ranta, 1997). This strategy belongs to explicit correction since it demands learners to stop and think about the correction. This study found elicitation as the second most frequently used corrective feedback with 71 occurrences (33.8%). The teachers mostly use completion, asking for students to pause before continuing their speech, as elicitation. Unlike recast, elicitation is viewed as more effective in addressing students' errors (Behroozi & Karimnia, 2017). This study found that 90% of the use of elicitation can encourage responses from students. According to Ahangari & Amirzadeh (2011), elicitation encourages students' notice, which is an essential element in language acquisition. Similarly, Ellis et al. (2006) support the use of elicitation to address students' errors as it can draw students' attention to their erroneous language production.

Explicit correction is similar to recast as it provides inputs. However, it belongs to a different category than recast as it explicitly indicates that students commit errors by saying “no” or “incorrect” (Lyster & Ranta, 1997); thus, unlike recast, explicit correction can interrupt the flow of communication (Sheen & Ellis, 2011). Interestingly, even though the explicit correction strategy requires students to stop and repeat the correct forms given by teachers, not all explicit correction in this study was followed by students’ uptakes (Yilmaz, 2016). Further investigation needs to be conducted to find the exact reasons, yet the possible explanation for the absence of uptakes despite the provision of correct inputs is that students do not understand the correction or see the urgency of repeating the teachers’ correction as the communication has been understood. Moreover, students might not give uptake since they are inhibited to speak after realizing that they commit errors (Krashen, 1982).

Metalinguistic feedback is an explicit correction and output prompting strategy which requires teachers to give comments, information, or questions that can serve as clues for students to correct their errors (Lyster & Ranta, 1997). This strategy might be more suitable to correct grammar errors as they can act as mini-lessons (Hashemian & Farhang-Ju, 2018). Nevertheless, this strategy might not be suitable for correcting young learners’ errors as the grammar explanation is too abstract (Cameron, 2001). In this research, metalinguistic feedback was used only 11 times, but it generated almost 90% correct answers from students. The finding confirms Taipale (2012) suggesting that output-prompting strategies such as metalinguistic feedback are effective in addressing students’ oral errors.

Repetition as a corrective feedback strategy is different from recast as it does not provide correct forms as inputs (Lyster & Ranta, 1997). Teachers attempt to draw students’ attention to their errors by rising and stressing the intonation when repeating the errors. As for paralinguistic signals, the corrective feedback strategy uses gestures and facial expressions to indicate that students have committed errors (Lyster & Ranta, 1997). These two strategies were not used frequently by teachers most probably because they were considered ineffective. Katayama (2006) suggests that repetition and paralinguistic signals are ambiguous; thus, students rarely take them as forms of feedback and input.

Panova & Lyster (2002) suggest that translation is specifically used to treat the use of L1 error. The use of this corrective feedback strategy is easy to notice as it uses a different code. This corrective feedback strategy might be suitable for young learners whose vocabulary is still limited. Nevertheless, teachers should not overuse this corrective feedback strategy since it might discourage learners from using the target language. Storch & Wigglesworth (2003) suggest that teachers sharing L1 background with students might indicate that the use of L1 is acceptable when using this corrective feedback strategy.

Conclusion

This study investigated the oral errors committed by young learners and what corrective feedback strategies teachers use to correct the errors. The study found that students committed pronunciation, grammar, vocabulary, and the use of L1 errors. Of all the types of errors committed, pronunciation errors were found the most frequently, followed by grammar, vocabulary, and the use of L1 errors.

The teachers in this research used six of eight types of corrective feedback strategies: recast, elicitation, explicit correction, metalinguistic feedback, repetition, and paralinguistic signal. Of all the corrective feedback strategies, recast was used the most frequently due to its non-intervening and input-providing nature.

From the findings on the oral errors committed by the students, the teachers can reflect on their own students' oral errors and then plan the corrective feedback strategies which are suitable for treating the most-frequently errors committed by their students. Teachers then can consider the findings of corrective feedback strategies used by the teachers in this research to reflect on their efficacy in addressing the students' types of error. The rate of uptake on certain types of error can be used as the basis for determining which corrective feedback is suitable for each teacher's condition.

This research did not investigate which particular strategies were effective in addressing certain oral errors. Thus, future research needs to analyze what corrective feedback strategies should be used to treat certain errors. More investigation on reasons why teachers prefer a certain type of corrective feedback strategies also needs to be conducted to get a clearer picture of which corrective feedback strategies should be used to treat learners' oral errors.

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