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ERRORS IN THE CLASSROOM: DILEMMAS AND PRACTICES

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Abstract: Human learning is fundamentally a process that involves the making of errors. But the issue of error and how errors are treated in the classroom is still dilemma for many teachers. One learning approach stated that error correction was avoided, because it makes learners shut off their attempts at communication. However, other learning approaches stated that correction was highly valued, to increase students' motivation in learning. For the best decision, teacher can use five key questions dealing with errors' treatment: (1) should learners' errors be corrected ?; (2) when should learners' errors be corrected?; (3) which errors should be corrected?; (4) how should learners' errors be corrected; and (5) who should do the correcting?

Keywords: error, dilemma, error treatment.

Learning a foreign language is not easy, especially English. Besides it has different rules, it also has different structures with learners' mother language. That is why many students make errors in learning English. It has long been known that learners from very diverse linguistic backgrounds almost universally have difficulty with certain things, whether they existed or not in their mother tongue.

Clearly it is inevitable that learners make errors. But is this a good or bad thing? At first sight it appears self-evident that errors are a bad thing and signal a breakdown in teaching and learning situation. Certainly it was the accepted view for many years. Behaviorist claims that language learning is a habit. The behaviorist psychologists emphasized the importance of manipulative practice of language to ensure correctness. The drills were structured in such a away that is difficult for the students to make many mistakes. Hence it heard only good model for producing acceptable English sentences all the time.

More recently, the mentalists have different view of errors. They argue that a learner must make errors as an unavoidable and necessary part of learning process, so errors are not the bad thing. It is an evidence that learning is taking place. When the students learn a new language, often they do not know how to express what they want to say. So they make a guess based on their knowledge of their mother tongue and on what they know of the foreign language. Here, they will learn to develop their competence in the language from the errors they make before. They move from ignorance to mastery of the language through transitional stages, and the errors they make are to be seen as a sign that learning is taking place.

One of the major issues concerned with language classroom is correction of errors. The issue of error and how errors are treated in the classroom is still dilemma for many

teachers. Natural Approach stated that error correction was avoided. Too much negative cognitive feedback- such as interruptions, corrections-often make learners shut off their attempts at communication. They think that so much is wrong with their language production that there is little hope to get anything right. On the other hand, too much positive feedback-willingness of the teacher-hearer to let the errors go uncorrected-serves to reinforce the errors of the speaker-learner. The result is the persistence of such errors. However, the audiolingual approach stated that correction was highly valued. (Krashen and Terrell in Hall, 2011:13). In line with audiolingualism, skill-learning approaches states that the learner needs feedback on how well he or she is doing. Humanistic method states that assessment should be positive or non – judgemental in order to promote a positive self- image of the learner as a person and language learner (Ur, 1996:243).Hence should learner's errors be corrected are still dilemma for most teachers. Most people agree that making mistakes is a part of learning and people also agree that correction is part of teaching. So, how do two of them go together?

WHAT IS AN ERROR?

The process of language learning involves the making of errors. Errors are the flawed side of learners' speech or writing (Dulay et al, 1982: 138). The learners tend to produce inappropriate sentences. This phenomenon is actually something which is normal as Dulay believes that anyone cannot learn language without first systematically committing errors.

Corder (in Ellis, 2008:971) differentiated between errors and mistakes. Errors happen when learners get something wrong because their developing internal second language system is not complete or because of the influence of the learner's L1 on their L2, that affect the L2. Errors, then, are systematic representations of a learner's L2 development and can therefore help teachers (and learners) discover how far the learners' knowledge the L2 has progressed. In contrast, however, mistakes are the result of slips of the tongue (where learners actually know the right language but fail to produce it). Mistakes occur when learners fail to perform to their competence (Ellis, 1985 in Johnson, 2008:335) and, in theory, can be self-corrected by learner.

Corder (in Ubol, 1981:5) states that errors are divided into two kinds. They are systematic error and unsystematic errors. Systematic errors are caused by a lack of knowledge of the language, whereas unsystematic errors are caused by memory lapses, physical states such as tiredness, and physical condition such as strong emotion. Richard further also classifies learner's error into error of performance and error of competence. Errors of competence resulted from the application of rules which do not correspond to the target language norm is characteristically systematic, whereas errors of performance which are the result of mistake in language and manifest themselves as repeats, false starts, correction or slips of the tongue is characteristically unsystematic.

ERROR TREATMENT

The matter of how to correct errors is complex. Hendrickson (in Hall, 2011:14) offers five key questions for teachers dealing with errors: (1) Should learner errors be corrected?; (2) If so, when?; (3) Which errors should be corrected?; (4) How?; (5) And by whom?

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Should learner errors be corrected?

Whether or not an error should be treated is still controversy. Harmer (1983:44) argued that when students are engaged in a communicative activity, the teacher should not intervene by 'telling students that they are making mistakes , insisting on accuracy and asking for repetition etc'. Correcting errors should be largely restricted to accuracy work.

Truscot (in Ellies, 2009:5) claims that correcting learners' errors in a written composition may enable them to eliminate the errors in a subsequent draft but has no effect on grammatical accuracy in a new piece of writing (i.e., it does not result in acquisition). In the contrary, Ferris (in Ellies, 2009:5) disputed this claim, arguing that it was not possible to dismiss correction in general as it depend on the quality of the correction-in other words, if the correction was clear and consistent it would work for acquisition.

SLA researchers also disagree about the role of corrective feedback in L2 acquisition. Krashen (1982:74) states that error correction is 'a serious mistake' because it puts learners on the defensive and because it only assists the development of 'learned knowledge' and plays no role in 'acquired knowledge'. But error correction directed at simple and portable rules, such as third person –s is useful because it helps monitoring. In line with Krashen, Van Patten (1992:24) arguing that correcting errors in learner output has a negligible effect on the developing system of most language learners. However, in later position Van Patten (in Ellies, 2009:5) proved that corrective feedback facilitate language acquisition. Van Patten acknowledged that corrective feedback in the form of negotiating for meaning can help learners notice their errors and create form-meaning connection, thus aiding acquisition.

When should learner's errors be corrected?

There are some possibilities of when to treat errors in the language classroom. Long(1977:288) suggested that the question of when to treat an error has no simple answer.

> Having noticed an error, the first (and, I would argue, crucial) decision the teacher makes is whether or not to treat it at all. In order to make the decision the teacher may have recourse to factors with immediate, temporary bearing, such as the importance of the error to the current pedagogical focus of the lesson, the teacher's perception of the chance of eliciting correct performance from the student if negative feedback is given, and so on. Consideration of these ephemeral factors may be preempted, however, by the teacher's beliefs (conscious or unconscious) as to what a language is and how a new one is learned. These beliefs may have been formed years before the lesson in question.

Hedge (in Ellies 2009:11) states that teachers have the option of either correcting immediately an error occurs or making a note of the errors and delaying correction until later. He suggests doing immediate feedback in accuracy activities and delayed feedback in fluency activities. Moreover he states that teacher notes accompanying course books frequently instruct teachers to leave correction until the end of fluency activities. Immediate

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feedback is extremely valuable to a student. This often follows the pattern of the teacher pointing out the mistake, explaining what is wrong, and attempting on the spot to give some extra practice. Another strategy is to postpone some items to another date and, after adequate preparation, make a teaching point of them in another lesson. Immediate feedback is used in accuracy activities and delayed feedback is used in fluency activities.

Hedge's opinion is supported by Harmer (2000:104) states that during communicative activities, however, it is generally felt that teachers should not interrupt students in mid-flow to point out a grammatical, lexical, or pronunciation error, since to do so interrupts the communication and drags an activity back to the study of language form or precise meaning. Teacher intervention in such circumstances can raise stress levels and stop the acquisition process in its tracks. In addition, Lynch (1997:324) argues that when teacher intervene, not only to correct but also to supply alternative modes of expression to help students. In such situation teacher intervention may sometimes be necessary, but it is nevertheless unfortunate- even when we are using 'gentle' correction. In Lynch's words,'….the best answer to the question of when to intervene in learner talk is: as late as possible'.

Based on the explanation above, it can be concluded that there are times during communicative activities when teachers may want to offer correction or suggest alternatives because the students' communication is at risk. It means, not reacting to every mistake that a student makes if this will de-motivate that student. It means judging just the right moment to correct.

Which errors should be corrected?

There are two issues regarding with this question: which specific errors should be corrected; and whether corrective feedback should be unfocused (address all or most of the errors) or focused (address just one or two error types).

Regarding with the first issue, Corder (in Ellies, 2009:6) distinguished "errors' and "mistakes". He suggested to correct "errors" but not "mistakes". Another expert, Burt (in Ellies, 2009:6) suggested that teachers should focus on global rather than local errors. Global errors are errors that effect overall sentence organization. Examples are wrong word order, missing or wrongly placed sentence connectors, and syntactic overgeneralization. Local errors are errors that effect single elements in a sentence (for example, errors in morphology or grammatical). It is supported by Hendrickson (in Hall, 2011:15) prioritizing those errors that affect communication and meaning (i.e., global errors rather than local errors).

Hendrickson recommended that local errors usually need not be corrected since the message is clear and correction might interrupt a learner in the flow of productive communication. Global errors need to be treated in some way since the message may otherwise remain garbled. Johnson (in Hall, 2011:15) suggests, teachers may evaluate the seriousness or gravity of the error. It is supported by Krashen, Ferris and Ellis. Krashen (in Ellis 2009:6) states that corrective feedback should be limited to features that are simple and portable. Ferris (1999:6) suggested that written corrective feedback be directed at "treatable

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errors". Ellis (2009:6) suggested that corrective feedback be directed at marked grammatical features or features that learners have shown they have problems with.

The second issue relating to the choice of errors to correct, all experts generally advise teachers to focus attention on a few error types rather than try to address all the errors learners make. Some studies such as Bitchener, Young and Cameron, Sheen, Ellis (in Ellis 2009:6) have shown that when written corrective feedback is "focused" it is effective in promoting acquisition.

How should errors be corrected?

According to Harmer (2000:104) there are variety of strategies for correcting errors:
1) Feedback during oral work. Decision about how to react to performance will depend upon the stage of the lesson, the activity, the type of mistake made, and particular student who is making that mistake. Teacher needs to decide whether a particular activity in the classroom is designed to expect the students' complete accuracy – as in the study of grammar, a pronunciation exercise or some vocabulary work for example – or whether the teacher asking the students to use the language as fluently as possible. The teacher needs to make a clear difference between 'non-communicative' and 'communicative' activities.
2) Feedback during accuracy work. Showing incorrectness can be done in a number of different ways: (a) Repeating: the teacher simply asks the student to repeat what he has just said. (b) Echoing: the teacher may echo what the student has just said with a questioning intonation. e.g. Flight 309 GO to Paris? (c) Statement and question: teacher can simply says That's not quite right or Is that correct? to indicate that something has not quite worked. (d) Expression: a simple facial expression or a gesture can be used to indicate that something does not quite work. This needs to be done with care as the wrong expression or gesture can, in some circumstances, appear to be mocking or cruel. (e) Hinting: a quick way of helping students to activate rules they already know (but which they have temporarily 'disobeyed'). Teacher might just say the word 'tense' to make them think that perhaps they should have used the past simple rather than the present perfect. (f) Reformulation.
3) Feedback during fluency work. The way in which the teacher responds to students when they speak in a fluency activity will have a significant correlation not only on how well they perform at the time but also on how they behave in fluency activities in the future. The tolerance of error in fluency sessions will be much greater than it is during accuracy sessions. There are times when the teacher may wish to intervene during fluency activities. Some techniques of giving feedback during fluency work such as: (a) Gentle correction: if communication breaks down completely during a fluency activity, the teacher may have to intervene. If the students cannot think of what to say, the teacher may want to prompt them forwards. If this is just the right moment to point or a language feature the teacher may offer a form of correction. Gentle correction can be offered in a number of ways. Teacher might simply reformulate what the student has said in the expectation that they will pick p the reformulation, even though it hardly interrupts their speech, for example:

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> Student: I am not agree with you…
> Teacher: I don't agree…
> Student: I don't agree with you because I think…

It is even possible that students can learn something new in this way when they are making an attempt at some language they are not quite sure of. Teacher can also use a number of other accuracy techniques of showing incorrectness too, such as echoing and expression, or even say *I shouldn't say X, say Y, etc.* (b) Recording mistakes: Teacher is an observer. He or She always watches and listens to the students so that he or she can gives feedback afterwards. Such observation allows teacher to give good feedback to his/her students on how well they have performed. One of the problems of giving feedback after the event is that it is easy to forget what students have said. Therefore, teacher can write down points he/she wants to refer to later or teacher can use charts or other forms of categorization to help him/her to do this. Teacher can also record students' language performance on audio or videotape. (c) After the event: when the teacher has recorded student performance, teacher should give feedback to the class.

Teacher can do this in a number of ways. Teacher can put some of the mistakes the teacher has recorded up on the board and ask students firstly if they can recognize the problem, and then they can put it right. Or, teacher can write both correct and incorrect words, phrases, or sentences on the board and ask the students decide which is correct. When you do this, do not say who made the mistakes since this may expose them in front of their classmates, just concentrate on those mistakes were made by more than one person. Another possibility is for teacher to write individual notes to students, recording mistakes he/she heard from those particular students with suggestions about where they might look for information about the language – in dictionaries, grammar books, or on the internet.

4) Feedback on written work. The way the teacher gives feedback on writing will depend on the kind of writing task the students have undertaken, and the effect the teacher wishes to create. When students do workbook exercises based on controlled testing activities, teacher can mark their efforts right or wrong, possibly penciling in the correct answer for them to study. However, when teacher gives feedback on more creative or communicative writing (such as letters, reports, stories, or poems) teacher will approach the task with circumspection and clearly demonstrate the teacher interest in the content of the students' work.

There are two techniques to give feedback on students' written work: (a) Responding: one way of considering feedback is to think of it as 'responding' to students' work rather than assessing or evaluating what they have done. When the teacher responds, it means the teacher shows to the students how the text could be improved. Such responses are vital at various stages of the writing process cycle. Firstly, students show the teacher a first draft of their work; then, the teacher gives response about how it is progressing and how it can be improved. It can be done on the students' work or a separate piece of paper. This type of

feedback takes time, of course, but it can be more useful to the student than a draft covered in correction marks.

However, it is designed specially for situations in which the student will go back and review the draft before producing a new version. Another constructive way of responding to students' written work is to show alternative ways of writing through reformulation. Instead of providing the kind of comments, teacher might say *I would express this paragraph slightly different from you*, and then rewrite it. Such reformulation is useful for students since by comparing their version with teacher's, they discover a lot about the language. (b) Coding. Here, teacher uses codes, and puts these codes either in the body of the writing or in a corresponding margin. This makes correction much neater, less threatening, and more helpful than random marks and comments. Frequently used symbols of this kind refer to issues such as word order, spelling, or verb tense. Teacher can decide on the particular codes and symbols the teacher use with the students, making sure that they are quite clear about what the symbols mean through demonstration and example.

Methodologists and SLA researchers have identified a number of different ways in which errors can be corrected. They have developed hierarchical taxonomies of strategies based on a theoretical view of how corrective feedback works for acquisition.

Table 1.A taxonomy of corrective feedback strategies

	Implicit	Explicit
Input-providing	Recast	Explicit correction
Output-prompting	Repetition	Metalinguistic explanation
	Clarification request	Elicitation
		Paralinguistic signal

Source: Ellis (2009:8)

So, there are many strategies can be used by teachers to correct the student's errors. Teacher can use a variety of those corrective strategies. Use strategies that require learners to correct their own errors. Because the object of using correction techniques is to give the students a chance to get the new language right, the teachers must be careful to do such correction as Ur's statement , "Correcting students is seen as potentially dangerous because it can damage learners' receptivity to learning. It needs to be given in an atmosphere of support and warm solidarity" (Ur, 1996:255). It means that when a teacher does corrections, it should be done nicely and kindly.

Table 2. Corrective feedback strategies

Corrective feedback strategy	Definition	Example
1. Recast	The corrector incorporates the content words of the immediately preceding incorrect utterance and changes and corrects the utterance in some way (e.g., phonological or lexical)	L: I went there two times T: You've been. You've been there twice as a group?
2. Repetition	The corrector repeats the learner utterance highlighting the error by means of emphatic stress	L: I will showed you T: I will SHOWED you L: I'll show you
3. Clarification request	The corrector indicates that he/she has not understood what the learner said.	L: What do tou spend with your wife? T: What?
4. Explicit correction	The corrector indicates an error has been commited, identifies the error and provides the correction.	L: On May T: Not on May, in May We say,"It will start in May"
5. Elicitation	The corrector repeats part of the learner utterance but not the erroneous part and uses rising intonation to signal the learner should complete it.	L: I'll come if it will not rain T: I'll come if it........?
6. Paralinguistic signal	The corrector uses a gesture or facial expression to indicate that the learner has made an error	L: Yesterday I go cinema T: (gesture with right forefinger over left shoulder to indicate past)

Source: Ellis (2009:9)

Who should do the correcting?

Teachers are often advised to give students the opportunity to self-correct and, if that fails, to invite other students to perform the correction (Hedge in Ellis, 2009:7) There are, however, a number of problems with learner self-correction. *First*, learners typically prefer the teacher do the correction for them. *Second*, learner can only self-correct if they possess the

necessary linguistic knowledge. That is in Corder's terms, they can correct their "mistakes" but not their "errors". Other (typically teacher) will be necessary to enable learners to identify forms that are not yet part of the interlanguage.

According to Doughty and Varela (in Ellis, 2009:7) teachers responded to learner errors by first repeating the learner utterance highlighting the error by means of emphatic stress and, then, if the learner failed to correct, reformulating the utterance, as in this sample:

Learner: I think that the worm will go under the soil.
Teacher: I *think* that the worm *will* go under the soil?
Learner: (no response)
Teacher: I *thought* that the worm *would* go under the soil
Learner: I *thought* that the worm *would* go under the soil

In written or oral work, students should be responsible in the first instance for their own errors. Written work must always be read through and carefully checked before handing in. This is good for developing an awareness of one's own errors.

Correction might also come from another source apart from the student himself and the teacher. The other members of the group can correct both written and oral work. It is possible, for instance, for the better students to work with the weaker ones in pairs, and for them to suggest improvements and corrections. The teacher can go round checking. In oral work, a class can be trained to listen closely for mistakes in a talk, and should be given the chance to discuss them with the speaker and teacher afterwards.

CONCLUSION

Error treatment is a complex phenomenon. This complexity is reflected in the controversies that surround such issues as whether to correct, what to correct, how to correct, and when to correct. There are some general guidelines for conducting error treatment, such as: (1) Teachers need to carry out correction sensitively to avoid a negative emotional response in learners; (2) Teachers should delay correction in oral fluency work; (3) Teachers need to be selective in the error they correct; (4) Teachers should be careful to choose the suitable strategies in correcting such errors; and (5) as far as possible, it is the students who should do the correction not the teacher.

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