To correct or not to correct? That is still the question.

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English language teachers spend much of their time providing corrective feedback on students' writing in the hope of helping them improve their grammatical accuracy. However, they may often wonder whether the feedback provided is effective and if not why not. In this talk, I address the five fundamental questions posed by Hendrickson, which are still as relevant today as they were in 1978: (1) Should learner errors be corrected? (2) If so, when should learner errors be corrected? (3) Which learner errors should be corrected? (4) How should learner errors be corrected? (5) Who should correct learner errors?

Should learner errors be corrected?

Empirical research on error correction (henceforth, corrective feedback [CF]) revealed significant effects for CF on second language development. These studies examined not only the effectiveness of CF in general (e.g., Chandler, 2003; Ferris & Roberts, 2001) but also the effectiveness of different types of CF (e.g., Bitchener & Knoch, 2008; Suzuki, Nassaji, & Sato, 2019). Although there is now a consensus that CF is beneficial for second language learning, there is still controversy on what type of feedback is most effective and why (Ellis, 2017; Lira & Nassaji, 2020).

When should learner errors be corrected? During or after a communicative task?

The answer to this question is supported by different second language acquisition theories. The interaction hypothesis theory (Long, 2015), for example, stipulates that CF must be embedded in interaction and provided immediately after errors are made during a communicative task. In the same vein, the skill acquisition theory states that CF aims to facilitate the proceduralization of the knowledge used in communication; therefore, CF must be provided during the communicative tasks (DeKeyser, 2015). Likewise, the sociocultural theory claims that the CF must be tailored, graduated, and contingent (Aljaafreh & Lantolf, 1994) and can only be provided in the learner's zone of proximal development.

Although second language acquisition theories support the utility of immediate feedback, delayed feedback has an advantage over immediate feedback in certain respects. For example, those teachers who embrace communicative approaches to language teaching worry that immediate feedback may disrupt the flow of communication and affect the development of fluency (Harmer, 2007; Hedge, 2000).

Which learner errors should be corrected?

There appears to be a consensus among many language educators that correcting the following three types of errors can be quite useful to second language learners: errors that impair communication significantly; errors that have highly stigmatizing effects on the listener or reader; and errors that occur frequently in students' speech and writing (Hendrickson, 1978).

How should learner errors be corrected?

CF can be delivered through a number of strategies. For example, CF can be focused (i.e. when CF is provided on one or some preselected target forms) or comprehensive (i.e., when CF is provided on a range of target forms). CF can also be provided through

direct feedback (which includes correcting the error if there is an erroneous form or crossing out superfluous words or phrases) or indirect feedback (which may occur in forms such as circling, underlining) (Lira & Nassaji, 2020).

Tables 1 and 2 below show different strategies and examples used to provide oral and written CF respectively.

Table 1. Oral feedback provision strategies (Sheen, 2011, p. 2-4)

Strategy	Example
Recasts	S: How many people in your picture? T: How many people **are there** in my picture? Er, three people.
Didactic recasts	S: Women are kind than men. T: Kinder. (partial recast)
Conversational recasts	S: How much weigh? T: What? S: How weight are you? T: **How much do I weigh?**
Explicit correction	S: I'm late yesterday. T: **You should say** 'I was late', not 'I'm late'.
Explicit correction with metalinguistic explanation	S: Fox was clever. T: The fox was clever. You should use the definite article 'the' because fox has been mentioned.
Clarification requests	S: Why does he taking the flowers? T: Sorry?
Repetition	S: Mrs. Jones travel a lot last year. T: Mrs. Jones travel a lot last year?
Elicitation	S: Once upon a time, there lives a poor girl named Cinderella. T: Once upon a time, there. . .
Metalinguistic clue	S: He kiss her. T: You need past tense.

Table 2. Written feedback provision strategies (Adapted from Guénette, 2009)

Strategy	Example
Direct error correction without comment	He go**(1)** to school (1) Goes
Direct error correction with comment	He go**(1)** to school (1) Goes: You need to add an S in the third person singular in the simple present tense)
Direct error correction with metalinguistic explanations	He go**(1)** to school (1) Goes: Third person singular (Simple present tense)
Clarification requests	Everyday he goes to school yesterday. Do you mean yesterday or everyday?
Indirect error identification	He **go** to school
Indirect error identification with error code	He go**(VF)** to school
Indirect error identification with comment	He go (1) to school Third person singular (Simple present tense)

Although both direct and indirect CF are said to improve the overall accuracy of oral and written productions, less clear is which of these feedback types is more effective. Research shows, however, that direct correction appears to be more appropriate for beginners and indirect to intermediate and advanced students (Lira-Gonzales & Nassaji, 2020).

Who should correct learner errors?

Hendrickson (1978) suggested that learners should be encouraged to correct their own errors. Learner self-correction, however, can be problematic since learners prefer the teacher to make correction for them; in addition, if learners lack the necessary linguistic knowledge they may not be in a position to self-correct (Sheen, 2011).

One alternative to overcome this challenge is peer feedback. Recent studies show that peer feedback is not merely helpful for the receiver, but also for the provider. This because peer feedback allows the provider an opportunity to critically self-evaluate and subsequently work to improve their own written or oral production (Lundstrom & Baker,

2009; Lira & Nassaji, 2020). In addition, learners tend to gain confidence and feel motivated when they can provide peer feedback (Alavi & Kaivanpanah, 2007; Lin & Chien, 2009).

To conclude, it is important to consider that error correction is a multidimensional practice influenced by a variety of factors (Ellis, 2008; Kormos, 2012) including the category of error (syntax, spelling, or vocabulary), the nature of the feedback, learner specific variables (motivation, aptitude, skill level, learning disabilities, and age) and the context of instruction (Lira & Nassaji, 2020).

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