

## A VIGNETTE OF A CLASSROOM OBSERVATION

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### ABSTRACT

*The article envisages the empirical-based-approach in ELT. It is a brief vignette of classroom research based on the evidences, which were collected during a class observation. This small research deems to reinforce the idea that whether ELT theories of feedback are practically implemented in the classrooms and give the same results as predicted by some linguistics. The observer focuses three main areas of feedback that 'when an error is made how repair is initiated and who repairs it: self or others, and how is it repaired? For data collection I have designed a chart based on two the theory of Allwright and Bailey (1991), which they adapted from Schegloff, et al (1977), and Chaudron (1988).*

**Key word:** error correction, error repair, peer correction, self-correction, repeated error and reformulated errors.

### OVERVIEW

The recent research in English Language Teaching (ELT) is not only depending on the theoretical aspects but the focus is turned to the empirical and action research in order to get the practical realities and the solutions of the problems which occur in the classroom. The concept of classroom research is matured in the current era where the solid focus is given to take steps to improve learning process and teachers' needs to research their teaching (Stenhouse, 1975). Therefore, the classroom observation is considered a major area which indicates the pedagogical as well as methodological concerns. It is used an apt tool for the learning and training the teachers' 'professional growth and development' (Wajnryb 1992: 2).

In recent years feedback has emerged as a prominent domain in the educational philosophy. It is an immediate help of the learners in their academic performance and 'the heart of effective learning' (Black and William, 1996: 2). Ur defines it as 'the information that is given to the learner about his or her performance of learning tasks, usually with the objective of improving this performance' (1991: 242). Chaudron opines that 'error-correction means the 'treatment of errors' (1988: 149) and Wajnryb considers it as the teachers' response to the learners' errors (1992), because the learners expect from their teachers to give them feedback on their performances (Harmer, 2004).

In the language class the feedback guides the learners to use the correct structure of the language on the spot in order to motivate their learning abilities; therefore, 'it would have to be appropriately pitched, so that the learners are not uselessly being harangued about their errors' (Allwright & Bailey, 1991:104). Vigil & Oller (1976) suggest the appropriate cognitive feedback and effective support because the purpose of the error correction is to develop the learners' interlanguage competence so that 'the learners move along with the interlanguage continuum' (Allwright & Bailey, 1991:99) and they modify 'their hypothesis about the language functions and linguistic forms' (Allwright & Bailey, 1991:99).

In the study of feedback three important questions are 'who would initiate error, who would repair the errors and how it would be repaired' (Hendrickson, 1978). The abundant researches present various results in this regard.

In ELT the questions 'who should initiate and who should correct' are the fundamental quires. Generally the scholars emphasis the self initiate and self-repair and consider it an ideal and effective way for error correction, because it raises confidence among the learners (Schegloff, 1977 and Allwright and Bailey, 1991).

How to correct the errors again an important area and many suggestions are given by various experts. Lyster, (1997) and Lyster and Ranta, (1997) suggested six methods of classroom feedback:

- *Explicit correction*: The teacher clearly points out the errors and provides the correct form;
- *Recast*: Without directly indicating the learner that his/her utterance was incorrect, the teacher implicitly reformulates the learner's error;
- *Clarification request*: The teacher conveys some messages to the student's error in utterance and asks for repetition or a reformulation;
- *Metalinguistic clues*: The teacher asks some questions or provides information related to the formation of the learners' utterance;
- *Elicitation*: The teacher asks direct questions to elicits the correct form;
- *Repetition*: The teacher repeats the learner's error to draw his/her attention.

Harmer (2001) also suggests the six ways of error correction which are similar to Lyster and Ranta, (1997):

- Asking the learners to rephrase;
- Emphasising phrase which contains mistake;
- Making polite statements;
- Using expressions and gestures;
- Giving hints;
- Last but not least reformulating the sentence.

Mackey (2006) recommends reformulation method of feedback. On the other hand Chaudron (1988) delineated a long list of thirty ways of error corrections and discourage the concept of repetition of error-correction. According to him, it can be used as positive approval by the teacher and final verdict by the teacher. Chaudron (1988) suggests that the teacher first gives a chance for self-correction and finally ask to reformulate and ask learner to repeat the correct sentences and emphasis on it.

Another appropriate method is peer-correction which involves many minds to find out solution (Scrivener 2005). According to Schegloff et al (1977) there is 'strong propensity for self-initiate and self repair', especially in conversation and other initiated and other repair is 'relatively rare in normal conversation' (Schegloff, et al (1977, in Allwright and Bailey, 1991:89). The study of Allwright and Bailey (1991) and Kasper (1985) suggested that in the non native conversation the findings are in contrast of Schegloff, et al (1977) and the errors are 'other initiated and other repaired' and mostly that 'other' is teacher (Allwright and Bailey, 1991). Chaudron (1988) also has shown the same findings.

### **Observation Task**

The focus of the observation is that the theories of feedback and its practical implementation in the classroom. The observer was investigating the questions that 'when an error is made in the language class, who initiated repair and who repairs: the teacher or learners and how error is repaired' (Hendrickson, 1976).

The data are analysed to investigate that to what extent the result of this research proves or disprove the findings of Schegloff, et al (1977) and Allwright and Bailey (1991).

In this research the role of the observer is an outsider, who watches with freedom the different perspectives of the classroom activities, teaching methodology and role of the teacher and learners in

tackling error correction. I believe that in this brief vignette, the reliable data of error-correction is collected and analysed in order to 'enable the teachers to discover the patterns and regularities which might otherwise have gone unnoticed' (Nunan, 1989: 81). Finally some suggestions are given for further improvement.

The observation took place in the higher intermediate class of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) in a college in Cambridge in March, 2010. The class was composed of mix nationality of 6 female and 5 males and were in their 20s, except two senior students. The lesson was based on integrated skills of listening, speaking, reading and grammar. Generally it is observed that the teachers do not focus feedback in the classroom but fortunately the teacher of this class was more dedicated to error-corrections; therefore, the observer was blessed to collect the satisfactory data.

The learners were given the task to listen an audio and note the adjectives used by the speaker, and give the meaning of those adjectives.

**Difficulties in observation**

The observation task was carried successfully pertains to the fact that it was a listening-speaking activity which facilitated the observer to collect sufficient data. The only problem occurred when twice the teacher used some gestures to help the learners for self-correction. They were brief gestures and the learners quickly corrected their errors. It was difficult for the observer to place that correction in the appropriate column of data but I considered it a self-repair.

**ANALYSIS**

Let me delineated the results through the chart and then I will explain it:

Initiation	Repair					Ways of correction		Echo	Ask Class	Expression/ Gesture	Hint
	S	OS	T	S	OS	T	RF				
	X		X				X				
	X			X			X				
		X			X	X					
		X			X	X					
		X			X		X				
		X	X				X				
		X			X		X				
		X	X				X			X	
	X		X			X				X	
		X			X		X				
0%	30%	70%	40%	10%	50%	30%	70%	0%	0%	20%	0%

(S=Students, OS=Other Students, T=Teacher, RF=Reformulated, RP=Repeated)

The first task of the observation was that the error-correction was self-initiated or initiated by others?

The interesting findings are investigated in this category. Mostly the errors were initiated by others. The role of the teacher remains active in this regards as 70% errors were initiated by the teacher and only 30% by other learners. Unlike research of Schegloff (1977) not a single error was self-initiated. The second task was that who repairs the errors: self repair, peer correction or the teacher? The chart shows that 40% corrections were self-repaired, while 10% by peer correction and 50% by the teacher. In the self-repair, twice the teacher helped the learners through some gestures of finger and hands. The third task of the observation was that 'how does teacher repair the errors?' In this part the data collection was difficult process because a number of techniques teacher applied. She used peer correction, gestures, reformulated and repetition. It was also difficult to record that whether the learners understood and distinguished the repeated or reformulated errors or not? The doubt is based on the level of the learners. The result of the final task shows the active role of the teacher. The teacher used repetition method 70% and 30% the errors were reformulated and twice she used hand and finger gestures. It shows teacher's strong preference for repetition of correction.

## DISCUSSION AND SUGGESTIONS

The findings of this brief vignette are quite interesting and the shortcomings can be considered for further investigations.

The results of this observation goes against the assertion of Schegloff, et al (1977) that the 'self-initiated and self-repaired' but on the contrary it supports the research of Allwright and Bailey (1991) that the mostly error-correction is 'other-initiated and other-repaired' and reflected that the teacher played an active role in this regard. The 70% initiated by the teacher and only 30% by other learners and not a single error was self-initiated. The finding shows that it was mostly other initiated. Chaudron (1988) and Kasper (1985) also reveal the similar results. In the language-centred classes generally the errors are identified by the teachers and repaired by the teachers (Kasper, 1985).

In task three of the observer was uncertain whether these errors were noticed by the learners or not and were the students able to distinguish that the errors are repeated or reformulated? The learners reformulated their errors on the nonverbal instructions of the teacher, which is common method or feedback. The repetition was quite confusing, even the observer could not understand that whether teacher endorses the learner's statement or wants him to correct his utterance. The observer agrees with Chaudron (1988) that this is an ambiguous instruction and need to be reinvestigated.

As a teacher of ELT and observer of the class, I consider that many reasons are responsible for the virtually contrasting results of this study from Schegloff et al (1977). I have summarized a few below:

First is the *area of research*. This is the most important reason that like Allwright and Bailey (1991) and Chaudron (1988) the present research also encompasses in a narrow area of research e.i. classroom activity.

The second reason, which I call it, is the *linguistic competence*. The study of Schegloff et al (1977) was based on the native speakers of the language learners, while this research is based on the classroom of the non native speakers. Therefore, there must be a glaring difference between the level of linguistic competence and linguistic knowledge, because the language experience varies in both situations. The observer noticed that the learners' linguistic competence and the language knowledge for the target language were almost equal to beginners. The learners were unaware of the errors and failed to initiate it and hesitant for self-correction. In such situations teacher find himself bound to play active role in error correction.

The other reasons are *institutional requirements*. The teachers always keep in mind the linguistic needs of the learners and want to provide him an appropriated feedback for the proper linguistic development, but generally they are in tremendous pressure of the institutional requirements. One of the major institutional requirements is to complete the syllabi in the given academic time. The classroom feedback generally consumes more time, and a lot of teachers consider it not only an encumbrance in the flow of classroom activities but a great impediment to complete the syllabi.

The other reason is the *syllabus needs*. As an ELT teacher I understand that generally the teachers dwells in confusion that whether to give importance to the syllabi, which is the basic requirement of

the institutions, or focus linguistic needs of the learners in the classrooms. This confusion is more augmented when at certain levels the syllabi is not based on the learners needs, rather it presents the syllabus designers' own assumptions about the learners, therefore, they generalised the needs. While the fact is that every learner has different needs. In such a situation the learners cannot coup up the level of syllabus and frequently make errors. In such situations the teachers' responsibilities are doubled as they have to make a balance between syllabus and learners' needs (Mager, 1962). To balance both ends, the teachers generalise the technique of errors correction and adapt the method to correct the frequently committed errors, rather to pay the attentions on the errors committed by individuals.

The teacher's *choice of correction* is an important issue in feedback. It also varies from teacher to teacher that which errors s/he consider to be corrected. Mostly the teachers; choice is based on the objectives of his/her lesson plan.

Apart from these important reasons of the different data from Schegloff, et al (1977), there are other findings which are revealed in brief findings and needs a thorough investigation. One is the objectives of the teacher, who is in action in the classroom, and the observer is a temporary intruder. The teacher may have colossal objectives to achieve in the classroom, such as needs of syllabus, time constraints, finish the tasks, teaching methodology, address the main and recurring errors and their correction etc, and while focus of the observer as an outsider was on the teaching methodology and learners' involvement in the class activities and their linguistic progress.

The observer considers vibrant and controlling role of the teacher in the error correction as high level intervenes in the classroom activities. Such role of the teachers cannot be recommended on the basis that it curbs the autonomy of the learners and discourage their learning process (Kasper, 1985) Lyster and Ranta (1997) also disagree with method on the ground that it may deny the learners' rights to use the opportunity for the self-correction. It would have been more appropriate to allow the learners for self-correction because 'it should be the goal of instruction to improve learner's ability to monitor their target language' (Chaudron, 1988:150).

The data of present research stresses the fact to the linguistics to reinvestigate that how the self-repair formula can be re-modified in order to give more time to the learners to correct their errors. It needs more research to determine the possible solution of self-correction.

One solution is that the teacher gives sufficient time or 'wait time' to the learners to think and wait for final reply from learners because 'the best answer to the question of when to intervene in learner talk is: as late as possible' (Lynch, 1997: 324).

One of the method of error correction is to use 'strategic competence' (Canale and Swain, 1980) which means the 'to overcome the linguistic deficiency by asking for help, using appropriate nonverbal signals' (Allwright & Bailey, 1991: 90). If the teacher realises any deficiencies in the linguistic competence of the learners, then h/she may use the cue in form of gestures by hands, facial expression or give some language clues to motivate and help them for self-repair or peer repairs. Such help activate linguistic competence of the learners in the proper direction. Moreover, the learners do not only get the chances to use the new language in the classroom but in peer repair they learn to help each other and use the target language in the classroom. It also shifts the focus from the teacher to the learners and transfer of roles from the teacher to the learners. Finally, the most important out comes the transfer of the role is that it provides the equal opportunities to the learners to be responsible for their own learning.

The teachers treat the errors according to gravity of error.

## CONCLUSION

The results can be used for future investigation in ESL to re-research the different areas of error-correction or feedback. It may be used for comparative study of error correction in the language-classes and other subjects, or data can be collected at the various levels in order to know the percentage of error-correction in the beginners as well as in advance classes.

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