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# ARE IRANIAN EFL LEARNERS' OPINIONS ABOUT ORAL CORRECTIVE FEEDBACK STRATEGIES IN LINE WITH THEIR TEACHERS' ACTUAL CLASSROOM PRACTICES?

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## ABSTRACT

The aim of this study was to investigate Iranian EFL learners' opinions about their teachers' error correction practices and also to see what kind of feedback (direct or indirect) their teachers applied during oral error correction in this research context. To this end, a self-reporting corrective feedback questionnaire and an observation checklist were used to collect the related data in this regard. The rating scale of the questionnaire was a five point Likert scale. The results indicated that Iranian EFL learners' opinions about oral corrective feedback were not in line with their teachers' actual error correction practices, i.e. they wanted to receive corrective feedback indirectly, but their teachers used direct corrective feedback strategies. Therefore, the implication of this study can be that EFL teachers should take into account their learners' opinions about oral corrective feedback strategies that they use during classroom interaction.

**Keywords:** Iranian EFL learners; opinion; oral corrective feedback; teachers' practice.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The role of corrective feedback in language acquisition has been a highly controversial issue. Some believe that exposing learners to naturally occurring samples of a target language is the only way that they need in order to develop their second language, and error treatment is harmful rather than helpful (Krashen, 1981; Truscott, 1999).

Oral correction of learners' errors is a controversial issue in the context of second or foreign language learning process because of the disparity that exists between the actual practices of teachers and learners' perceptions and attitudes towards the role of errors in a language learning context. Therefore, correction of learners' errors during an oral communication activity has not reached adequate efficiency. Learners are the second side of the learning/teaching coin, if teachers are considered as the first side of this coin. Although teachers' opinions regarding the role of errors and error correction is a very important and determining factor, learners' opinions are crucial too. Gass and Selinker (2008) argued that "in any learning situation, not all humans are equally motivated to learn languages, nor are they equally motivated to learn a specific language" (p.165). So if we want to see the success of teaching/learning process, it is necessary to understand and cater for their opinions in this regard.

The significance of studying oral corrective feedback can be more revealing when real discourse events of a foreign language classroom are closely taken into consideration. Most of the interactions taking place between interlocutors during foreign language lessons are guided by teachers, and thus they play a crucial role in how learners learn and react to different classroom activities regarding their affective factors such as opinion. Considering correction feedback, there are different methods of oral error correction which learners can benefit from them. Every learning process has two sides: teachers and learners. Therefore, there are two types of opinions regarding each aspect of language learning and teaching. Learners are diverse in their learning styles and preferences towards instructional practices. Considering the provision of corrective feedback, teachers should be concerned with the opinions and preferences of their learners about error correction and should provide corrective feedback in a way that motivates them to engage more in classroom interactions.

## 2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

### 2.1 TYPES OF CORRECTIVE FEEDBACK

In their study to explore focus on form instruction in content-based context of French immersion classrooms, Lyster and Ranta (1997) identified different types of corrective feedback. According to the findings of this study, they

identified six types of CF: explicit correction, recast, clarification requests, meta-linguistic clue, elicitation and repetition of error. These types are classified into two major categories on the basis of whether they are explicit or implicit in nature. As Ellis et al. (2006) argue, in explicit feedback types there is an overt indication that an error has been occurred; while in implicit ones there is no overt indication that an error has been occurred. Lyster (1998) categorized these types of feedback found in his previous study as recasts, explicit correction and negotiation of form which involves the elicitation, metalinguistic clue, clarification request and repetition. In the case of recasts and explicit correction the teacher gives the correct form of the error. But in the first case correction is done implicitly and in the second one it is done explicitly. With regard to negotiation of form, it can be seen that the TL form is not given and the teacher simply give a hint that the utterance of student includes an error and therefore prompts the correct form. That is why this category is also called prompts.

### 2.1.1 RECAST

According to Lyster and Ranta (1997), recast can be defined as "the teacher's reformulation of all or part of a student's utterance, minus the error" (p. 46). Different researchers have used different terms with terms with the same meaning. For example, Spada and Fröhlich (1995) used the term "paraphrase" and Chaudron (1977) used the term "repetition with change" to refer to this concept. According to Nicholas, Lightbown and Spada (2001), recast in many of researches do not just refer to a reformulation of incorrect utterances but also includes elements like stress on the erroneous part (p. 749).

Although in most of the studies recast has been defined as the most implicit type of feedback, Ellis and Sheen (2006) concluded that recasts in fact ranges on a continuum from implicit to explicit and claimed that "recasts cannot be viewed as a purely implicit form of negative feedback. In many cases, their illocutionary force as corrections is quite transparent and, therefore, they should be seen as a relatively explicit form of negative feedback."(p. 585)

Example:

S: she has 20 years old.

T: she is 20 years old.

### 2.1.2 EXPLICIT CORRECTION

According to Lyster and Ranta (1997), explicit correction, like recast, affords the language learners with the correct forms of their ill-formed target utterances. Furthermore, it encompasses more information to specify that the learners' utterance was ill-formed; therefore, it is explicit in comparison with recast which is implicit.

From a theoretical point of view, as Hampl (2011) argues, "it may be assumed that because of its explicitness, this feedback type would be very informative as it directly tells the learners about the incorrectness of their utterance" (p. 36), but Carroll and Swain (1993) argued that explicit feedback may result in "serious problems of interpretation" (p. 365).

Example:

S: He go to school every day.

T: It's not "he go", but "he goes".

### 2.1.3 CLARIFICATION REQUEST

According to Lyster and Ranta (1997), clarification request is defined as an indication to learners either that the teacher has misconstrued the utterance or that it was ill-formed and accordingly "a repetition or reformulation is required" (p. 47). They maintain that this kind of feedback relates either to problems of "comprehensibility or accuracy, or both".

Example:

S: How many years does she have?

T: Pardon me?

#### 2.1.4 METALINGUISTIC CLUES

In metalinguistic feedback, according to Lyster and Ranta (1997), the teacher does not give the correct form but “comments, information, or questions related to the well-formedness of the students' utterance”. These metalinguistic comments are usually explicit signs that there is an error in learner's utterance. As they argue, metalinguistic information involves either some grammar explanation which refers to the nature of the error or a lexical category (p. 47).

Example:

S: There are many policeman on the street.

T: You need plural.

#### 2.1.5 REPETITION

Repetition denotes to the technique of repeating the student's ill-formed utterance in isolation. Usually teachers use a rising intonation to highlight the error (Hampl, 2011, p.38).

Example:

S: She eated her lunch.

T: She Eated her lunch.

#### 2.1.6 ELICITATION

Elicitation involves three strategies which teachers use to directly elicit the correct form from the learner. First elicits the completion of his own utterance by “pausing to allow students to fill the blank” (Lyster & Ranta, 1997, p. 48). They state that such moves in which completion is elicited may appear together with a preceding metalinguistic comment or with a repetition of the erroneous part. The second technique is to use a question to elicit the correct form. The third strategy is using questioning or intonation to show that the student should reformulate his utterance.

Example:

T: The child found his mother after a small time.

S: After a ...

#### 2.2 EXPLICIT OR IMPLICIT FEEDBACK

Corrective feedback can be explicit or implicit. In explicit correction the teacher corrects errors with an overt emphasize on the incorrect utterance, while in the implicit one the teacher corrects errors without interrupting the flow of conversation. Yoshida (2008) argues that implicit CF is not an abrupt or sudden reaction of the teacher and carries less danger of frightening or embarrassing the learners. Suzuki (2004) claimed that explicit CF will lead to repair more than implicit CF.

Ellis, Basturkmen and Loewen, (2001) used the term treatment to refer to corrective feedback and classified treatment into two groups:

Direct treatment: an explicit attempt by teachers to deal with spoken errors including provide (explicit information in the form of definition, example, explanation) and prompt (clues designed to help students to correct the erroneous utterances), and

Indirect treatment: various implicit responses by teachers to the spoken errors including recast, requests clarification, repeat and elicit solution (Cited in Othman, 2010, p. 90).

### 3. MATERIALS AND METHODS

#### 3.1 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The present study tries to find the answers to the following questions:

1. What are the Iranian EFL learners' opinions about oral corrective feedback strategies that their teachers use in correcting their errors?
2. What kind of oral corrective feedback (direct/indirect) do the teachers commonly employ in correcting learners' oral errors?

#### 3.2 PARTICIPANTS

The participants of this study were English foreign language learners from two language institutes in Ardabil, Iran. English is taught at six levels in these institutes at beginners, elementary, pre-intermediate, intermediate, upper-intermediate, and advanced levels. In this study the total number of participants was 200 EFL learners who were selected from among adult EFL learners in these two language institutes whose proficiency level varied from intermediate to advanced level. Both male and female learners participated in this study (100 male and 100 female). The ages of the learners ranged from 15 to 25 years old. In this study, opportunity or convenience sampling (non-probability sampling) was selected because of the easy accessibility to samples by the researcher and the willingness and the availability of participants.

#### 3.3 INSTRUMENTS

A corrective feedback strategy questionnaire adopted from Fukuda (2004) (Appendix A), and a classroom observation checklist (Appendix B) were used collect the related data about the subject of this study. The questionnaire had two sections. The first section was designed to collect demographic information of participants such as their age, gender, and proficiency level. Its reliability was 0.88 which was deemed appropriate for this study. The Persian version of this instrument was given to three experts on translation in order to be sure of its validity.

In order to pilot classroom observation checklist, a preplanned checklist was used before conducting the research. In doing so, the researcher attended two EFL classes from two institutes in order to see what kinds of errors occurred in EFL classes, and what kinds of corrective feedback strategies were used by teachers. In addition, two teachers were asked to provide the necessary information in this regard. By obtaining feedback from classroom observations and teachers' comments, the finale chick-list was structured.

### 4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

#### 4.1 CORRECTIVE FEEDBACK STRATEGIES

Items 1-7 asked the learners about their attitudes towards methods of error correction. Types of corrective feedback are clarification request, repetition, implicit feedback, explicit feedback, elicitation, metalinguistic feedback, no corrective feedback, and recast. The learners were required to rate each of these statements on a five-point scale form "very ineffective" worth 1 point to "very effective" worth 5 points.

**Table1.** Learners' responses regarding the types of corrective feedback

Feedback strategies	N	1(%)	2(%)	3(%)	4(%)	5(%)	Mean	SD
Clarification request	200	6.0	8.5	10.0	44.0	31.0	3.87	1.13
Repetition	200	6.5	17.5	17.5	37.5	21.0	3.49	1.18
Implicit feedback	200	2.5	3.5	6.5	36.5	51.0	4.30	.91
Explicit feedback	200	5.0	21.0	12.0	39.5	22.5	3.54	1.19
Elicitation	200	3.0	4.5	7.5	52.0	33.0	4.08	.92
No corrective feedback	200	27.0	41.0	15.0	14.5	2.5	2.25	1.08

Metalinguistic	200	5.0	8.5	7.0	49.0	30.5	3.92	1.07
<b>Recast</b>	<b>200</b>	<b>4.5</b>	<b>13.0</b>	<b>10.0</b>	<b>44.5</b>	<b>28.0</b>	<b>3.79</b>	<b>1.12</b>

Table 1 shows that with regard to “clarification”, 75% of the learners considered this method of corrective feedback very effective or effective, 10% of them were neutral regarding this way of error correction, and only less than 10% of them considered this method of corrective feedback very ineffective or ineffective.

Table 1 shows that 58.5% of the learners rated “repetition” as very effective or effective, 17.5% of them had no opinion regarding this method of error correction, and 24% of them regarded it as very ineffective or ineffective.

Considering implicit correction of errors, Table 1 shows that 87.5% of the learners regarded this method of error correction as very effective or effective, 6.5% of them were neutral, and 6% of them considered this way of corrective feedback as very ineffective or ineffective.

Table 1 illustrates that regarding explicit corrective feedback, 62% of the learners rated this way of error correction as very effective or effective, 12% had no idea in this regard, and 26% of them regarded explicit correction of their oral error by teachers as very ineffective or ineffective.

Regarding the category of “elicitation”, Table 5 indicates that 85% of the learners rated this method of corrective feedback as very effective or effective, 7.5% of them were neutral and only 7.5% of them considered this strategy of corrective feedback as very ineffective or ineffective.

Regarding the category of “no corrective feedback”, Table 1 illustrates that 17% of the learners regarded it as very effective or effective, 15% of them were neutral, and 68% of them considered this method of error correction as very ineffective or ineffective. Considering the first question “I want to receive corrective feedback”, there was no discrepancy between the results of these two statements, i.e. the learners wanted to receive corrective feedback most of the time.

In the case of “metalinguistic feedback”, Table 1 indicates that 79.5% of the learners agreed that the teachers gave a clue or a hint without pointing out their spoken errors and regarded this kind of error correction as very effective or effective, 7% of them had no idea about this method of corrective feedback, and 12.5% of them considered it as very ineffective or ineffective.

Considering the category of “recast: the teacher repeats the students’ utterance in correct form without pointing out their errors”, Table 1 represents that 68.5% of the learners regarded this way of error correction as very effective or effective, 10% of them were neutral, and 17.5 % of them considered this method as very ineffective or ineffective.

#### 4.2 Direct or Indirect Feedback

The classification of errors was based on Lyster and Ranta’s (1997) descriptions regarding error types:

**Grammatical errors:** the use of wrong determiners, preposition, pronouns, grammatical genders in tense, verbs, auxiliaries, and negations.

**Lexical errors:** the wrong lexical items, prefixes and suffixes.

**Phonological errors:** the mispronunciations, pronunciations of silent letters, etc....

Twelve classrooms were observed and recorded. 906 oral errors were identified during classroom interaction between teachers and learners. 387 errors were coded as grammatical errors, 287 were coded as lexical errors, and 232 errors were coded as phonological errors. Table 7 represents the distribution of these errors.

**Table 2.** Distribution of errors among three categories

Type of Error	Frequency	Mean	Percentage
Grammatical	387	2.87	46%
Lexical	287	2.60	34%
Phonological	232	2.45	20%

According to Table 2, grammatical errors with the highest mean and frequency ( $M = 2.87$ ,  $F = 387$ ) were the most frequent errors, phonological errors with the lowest mean and frequency ( $M = 2.45$ ,  $F = 232$ ) were the least frequent errors that were observed, and lexical errors ( $M = 2.60$ ,  $F = 287$ ) were the second most frequent errors that happened during oral communication.

**Table 3.** Types of corrective feedback teachers used to treat grammatical errors

Types of Feedback	Frequency	Percentage
Recast	80	25.3%
Explicit Correction	84	22.8%
Elicitation	65	19.0%
Metalinguistic	42	13.5%
Clarification Requests	36	11.0%
Repetition	30	8.4%

Table 3 indicates that recast with the highest frequency was the most frequently used corrective feedback strategy in treating grammatical errors followed by explicit correction, elicitation, metalinguistic, clarification requests, and repetition (with the lowest frequency), respectively.

**Table 4.** Types of corrective feedback teachers used to treat lexical errors

Types of Feedback	Frequency	Percentage
Recast	51	30.5%
Explicit Correction	48	28.7%
Elicitation	23	13.8%
Metalinguistic	20	12.0%
Clarification Requests	11	6.6%
Repetition	14	8.4%

As the results show, recast was the more frequent strategy that teacher used and repetition was the less frequent one. Regarding explicitness or implicitness of error correction in the case of lexical errors, Table 4 indicates that the frequency of explicit methods is higher than that of implicit methods. Therefore, lexical errors were treated directly or explicitly, that is, learners received direct correction when they committed lexical errors.

**Table 5.** Types of Corrective Feedback Teachers Used to Treat phonological Errors

Types of Feedback	Frequency	Percentage
Recast	35	34.3%
Explicit Correction	35	34.3%
Elicitation	9	8.8%
Metalinguistic	12	11.8%
Clarification Requests	4	3.9%
Repetition	7	6.9%



Considering phonological errors, Table 5 indicates that these types of errors were corrected directly, i.e. teachers provided direct corrective feedback when learners made phonological errors during classroom interactions.

The criterion to classify the results of this observation into direct or indirect (explicit or implicit) feedback was the taxonomy of Lyster and Ranta (1997) which distinguish between explicit and implicit types of corrective feedback as: implicit (recast, repetition, clarification request) and explicit (explicit correction, elicitation, metalinguistic feedback, paralinguistic signal).

Using this taxonomy as the criterion for directness or indirectness of error correction, the results show that teachers used direct corrective feedback strategies to treat the EFL learners' oral errors. Although recast has the highest frequency among these types of feedback, its explicitness or implicitness is not clear-cut, that is, depending on the context it can be used implicitly or explicitly. Furthermore, the total frequency of explicit types of feedback (explicit correction, elicitation and metalinguistic) is more than that of implicit types of feedback (recast, repetition, clarification request). Therefore, the overall frequency shows that direct corrective feedback strategies were used by teachers to correct learners' spoken errors.

Considering the methods of corrective feedback, "implicit correction" was the most favored method and "no corrective feedback" was the least favored one. These findings were unlike the findings of Ur's (2012) and Tomkova's (2013) studies, in both of which explicit correction was the most favored corrective feedback strategy.

Regarding directness or indirectness of corrective feedback, the results showed that direct corrective feedback were commonly practiced in this research context (see Tables 8, 9 and 10). These findings were keeping with the findings of Othman (2012), where direct correction was most often used; however, unlike the findings of Panova & Lyster (2002) and Yoshida (2008), where indirect correction was the commonly feedback type.

## 5. CONCLUSION

Regarding types of corrective feedback strategies, the learners preferred to receive corrective feedback as indirectly as possible. That is, strategies of elicitation, implicit correction, and recast were the most frequent ones. Considering directness or indirectness of corrective feedback that was commonly practiced in this context, it was found during classroom observations that direct feedback was commonly practiced in this research context. This was in contrast to the learners' opinions, i.e. they wanted to be corrected implicitly (indirectly), while teachers provided them with direct corrective feedback.

Several guidelines can be suggested regarding correction of learners' oral errors. In providing corrective it is incumbent upon the teachers to use different corrective feedback strategies to cater for differences in their learners' opinions and preferences, and to be more facilitative instead of being debilitating.

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## Appendix A

## Feedback Questionnaire

## Personal Information:

Gender: Male \_\_\_ Female \_\_\_ Age \_\_\_

Proficiency level: Intermediate \_\_\_ Upper-intermediate \_\_\_ Advanced \_\_\_

Please circle the information that applies to you. Make sure to mark only one.

▪ How would you rate each type of spoken error correction below?

Teacher: Where did you go yesterday?  
Student: I go to the movie.

## 1. Could you say that again?

Very Effective      Effective      Neutral      Ineffective      Very Ineffective

## 2. I go? (Repetition: The teacher highlights the student's grammatical error by using intonation.)

Very Effective      Effective      Neutral      Ineffective      Very Ineffective

## 3. I went to the movie, too. (Implicit feedback: The teacher does not directly point out the student's error but indirectly corrects it.)

Very Effective      Effective      Neutral      Ineffective      Very Ineffective

## 3. "Go" is in the present tense. You need to use the past tense "went" here. (Explicit feedback: The teacher gives the correct form to the student with a grammatical explanation.)

Very Effective      Effective      Neutral      Ineffective      Very Ineffective

## 4. Yesterday, I..... (Elicitation: The teacher asks the student to correct and complete the sentence.)

Very Effective      Effective      Neutral      Ineffective      Very Ineffective

## 5. Really? (No corrective feedback: The teacher does not give corrective feedback on the student's errors.)

Very Effective      Effective      Neutral      Ineffective      Very Ineffective

## 6. How does the verb change when we talk about the past? (Metalinguistic feedback: The teacher gives a hint or a clue without specifically pointing out the mistake.)

Very Effective      Effective      Neutral      Ineffective      Very Ineffective

## 7. I went to the movie. (Recast: The teacher repeats the student's utterance in the correct form without pointing out the student's error.)

Very Effective      Effective      Neutral      Ineffective      Very Ineffective

❖ اطلاعات شخصی:

❖ جنسیت:      مذکر  مؤنث  سن ❖ سطح مهارت در زبان انگلیسی:      متوسط  متوسط به بالا  پیشرفته 

❖ شما هر نوع از شیوه های اصلاحی زیر را چگونه ارزیابی می کنید؟

❖ Teacher: Where did you go yesterday?

❖ Student: I go the movie.1. Could you say it again? (می توانید جمله تان را تکرار کنید)  بسیار مؤثر  مؤثر  خنثی  غیر مؤثر  بسیار غیر مؤثر2. I go? (تکرار: معلم خطای دستوری زبان آموز را با استفاده از آهنگ جمله (Intonation) برجسته می کند.)  بسیار مؤثر  مؤثر  خنثی  غیر مؤثر  بسیار غیر مؤثر3. I went there yesterday, too (باز خورد تلویحی: معلم به طور مستقیم به خطای زبان آموز اشاره نمی کند بلکه به طور غیر مستقیم خطای او را اصلاح می کند.)  بسیار مؤثر  مؤثر  خنثی  غیر مؤثر  بسیار غیر مؤثر

4. "Go" is in the present tense. You need to use the past tense "went" here  
(بازخورد صریح: معلم شکل صحیح فعل را با یک توضیح دستوری در اختیار زبان آموز قرار می دهد.)  
 بسیار مؤثر  مؤثر  خنثی  غیر مؤثر  بسیار غیر مؤثر
5. Yesterday, ...  
(جستجو و استنباط: معلم از زبان آموز می خواهد تا جمله را اصلاح و تکمیل کند.)  
 بسیار مؤثر  مؤثر  خنثی  غیر مؤثر  بسیار غیر مؤثر
6. Really? What did you do?  
(بدون بازخورد: معلم درباره خطای زبان آموز بازخورد اصلاحی ارائه نمی دهد.)  
 بسیار مؤثر  مؤثر  خنثی  غیر مؤثر  بسیار غیر مؤثر
7. How does the verb change when we talk about the past?  
(بازخورد فرازبانی: معلم بدون اینکه به خطای زبان آموز اشاره کند، کمک یا راهنمایی می کند.)  
 بسیار مؤثر  مؤثر  خنثی  غیر مؤثر  بسیار غیر مؤثر
8. I went to the movie  
(بازگویی: معلم گفته و جمله زبان آموز را به شکل صحیح تکرار می کند، بدون اینکه به خطای او اشاره کند.)  
 بسیار مؤثر  مؤثر  خنثی  غیر مؤثر  بسیار غیر مؤثر

## Appendix B

## Checklist for Class Observation

Activity		Frequency
<b>Types of Students' Errors:</b>	<i>Grammatical</i>	
	<i>Lexical</i>	
	<i>Phonological</i>	
<b>Types of Corrective Feedback:</b>	<i>Explicit correction</i> S: He go to school every day. T: It's not "he go", but "he goes".	
	<i>Recast</i> S: she has 20 years old. T: she is 20 years old.	
	<i>Clarification request</i> S: How many years does she have? T: Pardon me?	
	<i>Metalinguistic feedback</i> S: There are many policeman on the street. T: You need plural.	
	<i>Elicitation</i> S: The child found his mother after a small time. T: After a ...	
	<i>Repetition</i> S: She eated her lunch. T: She Eated her lunch	
<b>Provider of corrective feedback:</b>	<i>Teacher</i>	
	<i>Classmates</i>	
	<i>Student (himself)</i>	