The Efficacy of Oral Grammar Error Correction in Classroom

Dongmei Zhou[1,*]

[1]College of Foreign Language Education, China West Normal University, Nanchong, Sichuan 637002, China
Corresponding author. Email: 1501672903@qq.com

ABSTRACT

Oral grammatical error correction is a complicated process in language learning. When learners' errors should be corrected is a controversial debate. This paper analyzes the timing of oral grammar error correction and discusses the three choices in correcting errors — immediate correction, delayed correction and postponed correction. When deciding to correct oral grammar errors, teachers should be clear that the focus of the classroom activities is on accuracy of fluency and should take into consideration students' affective and cognitive factors and their actual language level so that the goal of oral grammar correction can be achieved.

Keywords: oral grammatical errors, efficacy, correction

I. INTRODUCTION

In the EFL learning process, it is inevitable for learners to make errors, especially oral grammatical errors. Whether it is necessary to correct learners' oral grammar errors in the classroom varies from one teacher to another, which is a reflection of different attitudes towards oral grammatical errors. Some teachers attempt to correct all the oral grammatical errors while others choose to be more tolerant. Also, some choose to ignore the errors. Oral correction, in fact, is a complicated issue. It is controversial about whether or not students' oral grammatical errors should be correct.

On the one hand, many language teachers admit that mistakes or errors are inevitable in learning, but on the other hand, they seldom let students' mistakes go. In fact, error correction is inseparable from foreign language classroom. In the traditional classroom, teachers regard oral grammatical error correction as one of their teaching tasks and attempt to help language students produce error-free utterances. If students continue to make errors after the teacher adopt the stimulus-response method to correct, it should be attributed to inadequate teaching skills or inordinate teaching materials. There are many studies about oral error correction. Generally, oral error correction is studied from the following five fundamental questions (Hendriekson, 1978: 389):

- Should learners' errors be corrected?
- If so, when should learners' errors be corrected?
- Which learners' errors should be corrected?
- How should learners' errors be corrected?
- Who should correct learners' errors?

Wang Qiang (2011: 86) holds the belief that language errors cannot be self-corrected no matter how much attention is given. It is necessary for teachers to know clearly about the oral grammatical errors if teachers want to achieve the goal of effective error correction. Also, teachers need to clear about the following three error types: errors that seriously affect communication; errors that have a highly stigmatized effect on listeners; and errors that often occur in students' speaking. Only when teachers are clear about the types of errors, the extent to which oral grammatical errors hinder communication and which errors students often make in speaking, oral grammatical error correction can be effective. There is no doubt that it is one of the most difficult tasks for teachers to correct oral errors in classroom. So how to deal with oral grammatical errors and how to achieve the goal of oral error correction are what teachers should be considered. In the following this paper will discuss the efficacy of oral grammatical error correction in classroom.

II. ORAL GRAMMAR ERROR CORRECTION

Language errors are an inevitable universal phenomenon in the language learning process and oral errors are generally made in pronunciation, grammar and communication strategy. There are two purposes

for teachers to correct students' mistakes/errors in class: one is communication, and the other is language acquisition. Teachers' correction of students' oral errors in grammar is for language acquisition. So in this case, it is necessary in classroom for teachers to conduct correction. Of oral errors, grammatical correction in classroom is a form of feedback given to students when they make mistakes or errors in grammar rules in speaking.

Oral grammatical error corrective feedback in classroom by the teacher is a kind of response that the teacher tries to correct the students' utterances with grammatical errors which may result in misunderstanding. Teacher can provide corrective feedback to students' wrong utterances by: i) pointing out the place the errors happen; ii) providing the correct structure of the wrong utterances (Ellis et al., 2006). In dealing with the errors, teachers need to know whether tasks or activities in classroom focus on accuracy or fluency and then to make a balance between accuracy-based activities and fluency-based activities.

Of course, errors made by students are not what teachers want. They are worried that students may learn from their own errors, so they have to be sure what they say is not incorrect. This attitude can be traced back to the early belief — the behaviorist learning model. That's to say, language learning can happen by repeating the correct ones (Naimi Amara, 2015: 61). This can also explain why teachers attempt to correct students' errors once they make. But it is known that language acquisition does not happen in such a way. Language learning consists of a system of rules that students must master, and it is natural and inevitable to make errors/mistakes in language learning process. Students may internalize the rules of their first language rules and the target language. They sometimes make errors because they apply the rules of their own mother tongue in the target language. Is it necessary to correct such errors students make when applying the rules intermediate between L1 and L2? These views are practically related to the five questions proposed by Hendriekson (1978: 389).

It is generally agreed that there are three choices of oral grammatical error correction: immediate correction, delayed correction and postponed correction. The three choices of oral error correction are almost the same as Hendriekson's (1978: 389) five questions about oral error correction. In fact, the three choices involves the very important issue, that is, when to correct.

Immediate correction refers to correcting students' errors or mistakes when they make them. Delayed correction means the correction in the classroom after the student has finished what he wants to say while postponed correction happens later than delayed correction. In activities that focus on the accuracy of oral output, especially on the accuracy of grammatical rules, immediate correction is the best method for the teacher to correct students' errors (for example, practice using the simple past tense to talk about what happened), and if the focus is on oral fluency, delayed correction is preferred.

Truscott (1999:443) suggested delayed correction may be used by the teacher to record what students speak or take notes, and present to students the errors they make in the classroom outside the classroom activities. But there is one disadvantage of delayed correction. It isolates grammatical errors from its context, thereby reducing the correlation of corrections to the context in which the students speak. Thus, such correction is the same as the written correction.

III. EFFICACY OF ORAL GRAMMAR ERROR CORRECTION

In the process of correcting oral errors in grammar, no matter whether teachers adopt immediate correction, delayed correction or postponed correction, we are concerned about whether oral grammatical correction can be effective. Error correction of spoken grammar is a debate in the study of second language acquisition. When to correct is involved in immediate or delayed correction. The focus and purposes of correction should be taken into consideration. For communication purposes, delayed correction is usually the first choice without interrupting speakers' utterances. Also, the time chosen to correct can be determined by the error types made by the students. For example, if the error is about a pronunciation or a grammar error which may lead to the listeners' misunderstanding, it's better to correct it immediately, because delayed or postponed correction cannot make students remember anything. In addition, the atmosphere of the classroom is important. When the whole class is clear about some grammar rule, and the one who does not master the rule is picked out by the teacher to be corrected, he will feel very embarrassed or even awkward. So the teacher may consider the appropriate time and the students' affection, and then decide whether to correct or when to correct. At this time, Both the teachers' intuition and the feedback from the students are equally important (Naimi Amara, 2015). One investigation by Afsaneh Rahimi's (2012) was about the effects of delayed error correction and immediate error correction. His research found delayed correction has a positive impact on fluency and accuracy, but has no impact on complexity. Delayed correction of students' errors, that is, after the completion of the speech, will have a great impact on the improvement of oral English ability of intermediate English learners, and will help improve the fluency and accuracy of the speech. However, to correct students' errors in different times may lead to different effects, some of them are effective, some of them are

ineffective, which means that the timing of correction is not universal, and a specific timing of correction is only suitable for a specific group of students. So, when to correct and how to correct are significant to the efficacy of oral grammatical correction.

Whether it is necessary to correct or not is one of the outstanding performance, because the study of this problem will inevitably involve other four aspects. There are two opposite conclusions on this issue: oral grammatical error correction is effective and ineffective. Research evidence suggests that oral correction is not effective; and no good reasons have been offered for continuing the practice (Truscot, 1999: 453). But Ellis (1999: 224) summarized that studies of formal instruction effects of on the success of SLA have been plentiful. More conclusions are ambiguous and unclear about oral grammatical errors correction. Lightbown & Spada (1999) claimed corrective feedback by the teacher is helpful. Swain's (1985) study indicated that error corrections can facilitate students' learning in a better way. Long (1990) holds the same view as Swain's. Many other researchers agree with Long's. Some focus on different corrective feedback models, hoping to find out which different corrective feedback teachers adopt is more effective

Also, it is a complex cognitive process for students to correct their errors or mistakes. For a long time, classroom oral error correction is usually a simple way for teachers to tell students the correct answers, not to give more consideration to the details, such as when to correct, how to correct and who to correct (Zhou Dongmei, 2007). But it is evident that a simple repetition of the correct answer cannot ensure students' long-term memory of the correct ones, and cannot also ensure that the students can complete the cognitive operations needed to correct the errors. The psychological and emotional process required to correct errors is different from the direct teaching of grammar. Students need at least four preconditions to eradicate an error. One of them is that students can pay attention to their discourse defects and the need to eradicate the errors

Many empirical research (Mackey & Philp, 1998; Morris, 2002; Xu Shanshan, 2007) is about certain ways or methods for the researchers to correct errors, which can only show whether the way to correct errors is effective, but cannot prove whether the whole error correction behavior is effective. The same timing to correct the errors made by different students lead to different effects: some are effective while some are ineffective. This shows that the timing of error correction is not universal, and a specific timing for error correction is only suitable for a specific group of students, because different students have different emotional and cognitive characteristics and the different timing to correct errors leads to differences in emotion

and cognition, which will make some students able to note their discourse defects while some are not aware about their discourse defects. The former is the successful correction, and the latter is the failure correction. Thereby, it is wise to follow these principles when correcting oral grammatical rules: (i) the techniques that are used in error correction can improve the students' accuracy when expressing; (ii) Students' emotional factors should be considered, and correction should not threaten students (James, 1998). Meanwhile, besides direct correction by the teacher, indirect correction is worthy of attention. That means, students may be encouraged to correct their errors/mistakes by themselves in heuristic method or the teacher provides the correct form so that students will not feel in an embarrassing situation. That's why it is important to take into consideration students' affective characteristics when the teacher decides whether to correct their mistakes or not (Yu Meigen, 2005).

IV. CONCLUSION

When to correct oral grammatical errors is a very complicated process. The three choices (Hendriekson,1978:387), i.e. immediate correction, delayed correction and postponed correction, are taken into consideration when students make oral errors in grammar. Meanwhile, when deciding to correct students' oral errors in grammar, teachers need to be clear that the focus of the classroom activities is on accuracy or fluency and also pay attention to students' affective and cognitive factors. At the same time, attention should be also paid to students' actual language level and emotional personality. The errors to be corrected must be serious to the students, but not beyond their actual language level so that the goal of oral grammatical error correction can be achieved.

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