

# Corrective Feedback Types Used in Iraqi University Classrooms When Teaching English Pronunciation

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**Abstract**—This study looks at corrective feedback types used by Iraqi university teachers of English as a foreign language (EFL) in addressing their students' pronunciation errors. Corrective feedback has become a significant notion in EFL learning as it is seen as a facilitator to enhance L2 learning. Corrective feedback basically refers to any feedback provided to the learner containing evidence of learner error of language form. This study investigates the corrective feedback types used by Iraqi university teachers in EFL classrooms at the university level to see whether there are quantitative differences in the preference of any corrective feedback types. Data of the study gathered from EFL classrooms obtained from observations of the first-year classrooms of the English department of four private colleges, namely: Al-Nisour University College, Al-Bani University College, Al-Farahidi University College, and Al Turath University College. The methodology depends on frequency analysis of corrective feedback types employed. The corrective feedback type that was used, the most was the correct form, followed by repetition and recasts, some form of elicitation and then body language, and finally negative evidence.

**Index Terms**— Corrective feedback types, Pronunciation errors, EFL learning.

## I. INTRODUCTION

One of the essential language learning skills is pronunciation because it makes communication possible. Derwing and Rossitter (2002) stated that the majority of foreign/second language (L2) learners' main difficulty is learning how to pronounce. Learners consider pronunciation the main cause of their problems. Richards (1974) cited by Ababneh (2018) stated that "interlanguage" sets between the learners' native language and the target language (TL) are L1 dependent and to errors caused by the first language (L1) transfer. These errors vary from one learner to another due to different variables, such as "learning strategies, different training procedures, individual differences of teachers, and

textbooks." This phase keeps temporary until the learner improves his/her performance which is based on his/her improved competence of the TL. Tushyeh (1996) explained that Arab learners commit four error types of language errors and one of them is the phonological errors where the learners confuse /p /and /b/;/f/and /v/; and /i/ and /e/.

It is a fact that most second-language learners produce grammatical, lexical, and phonological errors in their speech. Pit (1967) argues that errors that truly reveal the learner's underlying knowledge of the language at a certain stage reflect the learners' transitional competence. Errors of performance, on the other hand, should be referred to as mistakes not errors. He continues to state that first, errors tell the teacher how far the learner has progressed toward the goal and consequently how much he still has to learn. Secondly, errors provide researchers with evidence on how language is acquired. Thirdly, errors are indispensable to the learner himself because they can be regarded as a device to learn; they are a way for the learner to test his or her hypotheses about the L2. Finally, errors are a strategy used by both L1 and L2 learners. Vasquez (2007) refers to the fact that there is controversy regarding the best ways to handle learners' errors stating that some language teachers attempt to correct all of their students' errors, whereas others only focus on correcting errors that are directly related to the topic being addressed in a particular lesson or errors that inhibit communication.

Another controversy related to correcting errors in L2 acquisition (SLA) is that some researchers focused on providing support for or against error correction (EC) in general. Whitlow (1977) and Schwartz (1993) cited in Vasquez (2007) affirm that EC serves no purpose in SLA, whereas many other researchers agree that correcting errors in language classrooms helps learners improve their proficiency in TL.

Chaudron (1977) and Lyster and Ranta (1997) and many other researchers involved in teaching English as a foreign language (EFL)/English as a L2 (ESL) claim that errors should be corrected and they believe that learners expect to be corrected.

Most studies concerned with EC have based on classroom observations, but no study talked about the best way to handle learners' errors or what is the most effective and suitable techniques to address students' errors.

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#### *A. Types (techniques) of Correction Feedback (CF)*

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#### *Elicitation*

It is a CF type whose aim is to engage the learners in identifying their errors. Lyster and Ranta (1997) and Vasquez (2007) described elicitation as the most effective way of addressing learners' errors because it involves the learner in the correction process, which in turn leads to the most amount of uptake. Having learners do the correcting themselves helps them feel more motivated, independent, and cooperative. Some forms of elicitation were asking a question providing hints and eliciting the answer.

Bartran and Walton (1994), cited in Vasquez (2007), also described a type of elicitation, peer correction, whereby learners are encouraged to help each other identifying errors and correct them.

#### *The use of the interrogative word "what?"*

More explicit forms of correction have also been identified. Schachter (1981) claims that some ESL teachers rely on the use of the interrogative word "What?" as a correction technique. By asking "What?" the teacher explicitly indicates to the learner that his/her previous utterance was not clear and that it needs repair. When using this technique by the teacher, the students are often confused as to the teacher's intent (that is, it is ambiguous).

#### *Recast and repetition*

Two additional types identified are recasts and repetition.

According to Lyster and Ranta (1997), recasting is the reformulation of all or part of the students' erroneous utterance minus the error, whereas repetition refers to the repeating of the learners' previous erroneous utterance by adjusting one's intonation as a way to highlight the error (ibid, 1997).

Lyster (1998) stated that "recasts risk being perceived by learners as alternative or identical forms". Chaudron (1977) noted that recasts are ambiguous because the teacher's responses can serve several functions and the learners have difficulty perceiving the teacher's intent.

#### *The use of the correct form*

Another way or technique is an overt or explicit correction, defined by Lyster and Ranta (1997) in that the teacher explicitly provides the learner with the correct form. It is one of the least ambiguous types of correction. Bartran and Walton (1994) have a different view in that they believe that although the explicit correction is frequently used in communicative activities, it interrupts the learner's intent to communicate, makes the learner feel uncomfortable, and inhibits his/her willingness to communicate in the TL.

#### *Body language*

Vasquez (2007) refers to a somewhat different type of handling learners' errors; body language which has been suggested as an effective way in EC process. It refers to non-verbal cues through which the learner's attempt to communicate non-verbally. As suggested by Bartran and Walton (1994), for instance, hand movements can be used to indicate errors or even facial expressions such as frowning and doubtful looks to tell the learner that there is a problem.

#### *Negative evidence*

This indicates the use of a negative word or phrase such as "no," "never," or "I don't think that is correct."

#### *B. Teachers' Beliefs about Correcting Students' Errors*

Burt (1975, p. 53), cited in James (1978), states that a review of literature on EC in foreign language teaching reveals that there are no current standards exist on whether, when, which, or how students errors should be corrected or who should correct them.

Before correcting students' errors, teachers need to consider whether the errors should be corrected at all, and if so, why (Gorbet, 1974 cited in ibid: 1978).

Recent studies reveal that the students not only want to be corrected but also they wish to be corrected more than teachers feel they should be (Ruth and Judy, 1976). A recent survey of 1200 university students of a foreign language was conducted partly to determine their reactions to having their errors corrected by their teachers. It was found that the "students prefer not to be marked down for each minor speaking and writing error because this practice destroys their confidence and forces them to expend so much effort on details that they lose the overall ability to use language" (Walker, 1973 cited in Henderickson, 1978). For some students, it is more important to communicate successfully in a foreign language rather than to try to communicate perfectly in it.

## II. METHODOLOGY

Classroom observation was selected as the main data collection method in the present study. The data were collected through the second semester of the study year 2018-2019 at four private colleges, namely: Al-Nisour University College, Al-Bani University College, Al-Farahidi University College, and Al Turath University College. The first-year classrooms at the departments of English language at the colleges observed were selected as the classrooms to be observed. Eight teachers were selected teaching English pronunciation. Each teacher was observed for 2 h. The total number of hours was 16 h. Table I presents the distribution of teachers whose classrooms were visited.

In an attempt to identify the CF types used in Iraqi university classrooms on the phonological level, the major aim of this study is to answer the question: What types or do the Iraqi EFL teachers on the university level use to address students' errors.

In the lessons observed that the students were introduced for the 1<sup>st</sup> time in their academic level to the sound system

of English. The lessons contained single sounds and single words containing English vowels and consonants. A lot of training exercises were done to arrive at correct pronunciation. Two lessons per week were taken in the language lab where students listen to exercises on the CD that accompanies their textbook (Better English Pronunciation, J.D. O'Conner, 1980). The other two lectures (2 h per week) were taken in the classroom to conduct different tasks in phonetics and phonology and to have more practice in pronunciation. Each teacher was observed in his classroom and audio-recorded. In addition, throughout the observations, written notes were taken to illustrate teacher-student interactions involving errors

TABLE I  
DISTRIBUTION OF PARTICIPANTS

College	Number of teachers	Number of hours
Al-Nisour Un. Co.	2	4
Al-Bani Un. Co.	2	4
Al-Turath Un. Co.	2	4
Al-Farahidi Un. Co	2	4
Total No. (8)		Total No. (16)

TABLE II  
DISTRIBUTIONS OF CORRECTION FEEDBACK TYPES USED IN CORRECTING  
PRONUNCIATION ERRORS

Correction types				
Correction types	Frequency	Percent	Valid percent	Cumulative percent
Valid				
Correct form	8	33.3	33.3	33.3
Repetition and recasts	7	29.2	29.2	62.5
Elicitation	5	20.8	20.8	83.3
Body language	3	12.5	12.5	95.8
Negative evidence	1	4.2	4.2	100.0
Total	24	100.0	100.0	

and EC. The notes were kept as a complementary resource to the audio-recordings.

Once all observations were concluded, each teacher was interviewed for about 15 min in an attempt to bring forth their conceptions on EC and whether they have any added information on types of EC.

#### A. Data Analysis

The results were analyzed in two ways. First of all, the classroom observations and audio-recordings were examined to identify the EC types used in addressing pronunciation errors. Secondly, the data collected through the interviews were analyzed and the results were compared to those obtained from the classroom observations and recordings.

After transcribing the audio-recordings and studying the notes taken during each lesson, the phonological errors identified referred to instances of mispronunciation of a word or a word segment. Six types of addressing students' errors were identified: Correct form, repetition, recasts, elicitation, body language, and negative evidence. All teachers used each of the CF types, some more than the other. Fig. 1 displays the distribution of correction types identified in the classrooms observed.

As it is obvious in Table II and Fig. 1, the correct form type is the most popular type where its frequency equals (8), and repetition is higher than elicitation (that is, repetition and recasts = 7 and elicitation = 5). In addition, the remaining types of CF types are roughly equally popular in (between 3 and 1).

#### B. Interviews with Teachers

All the teachers in the study expressed their belief that errors have to be corrected directly as the errors in pronunciation block the learner's attempt to acquire the correct pronunciation. The teachers in the study were not aware of the ways in which they handle their student's

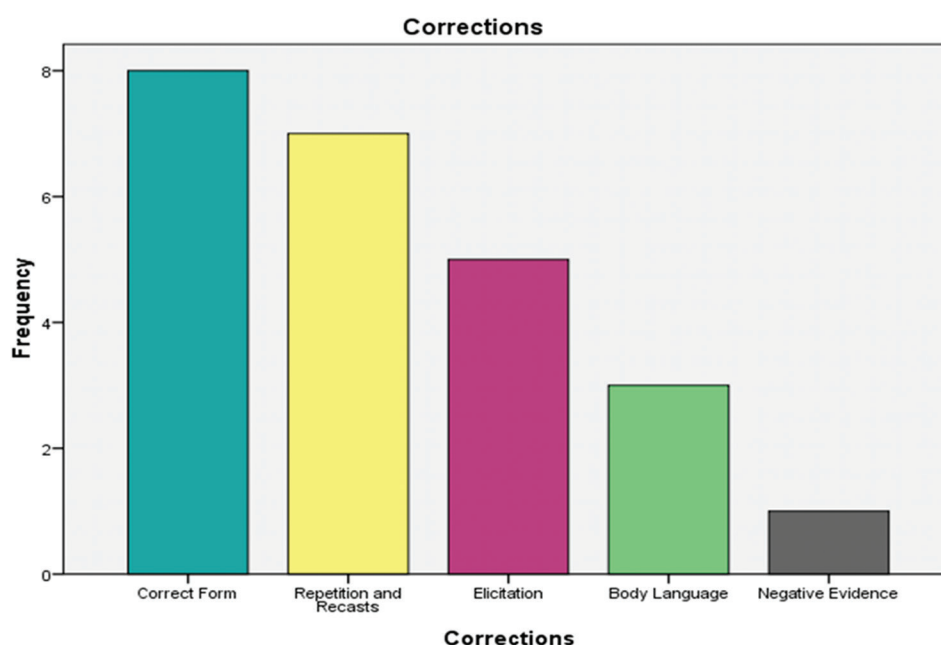


Fig. 1. Distributions of correction feedback types used in correcting pronunciation errors.

errors. All of them stated that they use the correct form type more than other types because they believe that this type is the most preferable by students. Concerning repetition and recasts, most of them stated that they use this type also but not as they use the correct form. Elicitation as a type of CF is also used by teachers in the study. Only two of the teachers in the study said that they use negative evidence types to correct their students' errors. About half of the teachers stated that they sometimes use body language to correct their student's errors in pronunciation and finally no one of them used the interrogative word "What" to correct their student's errors in pronunciation.

### III. CONCLUSIONS

Findings of the present study have indicated that five CF types only have been used by EFL teachers at the academic level teaching English pronunciation for the first classes at the English department of four colleges; namely Al-Nisour University College, Al-Bani University College, Al-Farahidi University College, and Al Turath University College. The teachers have a strong tendency to employ correction methods that are not cognitively challenging for the students, that is, they are more inclined to provide them explicit responses or clues, which might stem from the teachers' desire to save time. Five general CF types were identified, correct form, repetition and recasts, elicitation, body language, and negative evidence. These types as described by several researchers are the most effective correction CF types. The correct form was the CF type used the most. Repetition and recast were also used the most. Elicitation was also used fairly often and it was usually followed by body language and negative evidence.

Through the teacher interviews, it was determined that these teachers were not fully aware of the ways in which they handled their student's errors. Their statements indicated that their main form of dealing with errors was the correct form. They stated that the students find this type successful in correcting their errors.

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