



Corrective Feedback and Learner Uptake Between L2 English Speakers

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ABSTRACT

Corrective feedback has been widely debated by linguists as to whether it can help to enhance L2 language proficiency or hinder their learning of the language. Although feedback can help L2 learners to understand their mistake, without positive display of uptake, learners might not be able to produce modified output which shows their understanding of feedback given. This study investigates the type of feedback given by high proficiency students and the uptake displayed by low proficiency students. Direct observations were conducted between two students comprised of one high proficiency student and one low proficiency student. The students were given a topic to discuss for five minutes, and the feedback and uptake were observed. The analysis of the data showed that feedback was given by the high proficiency student, and the uptake displayed by the low proficiency student was repeating the feedback given. Finally, the study provides recommendations as to how the research can be improved for future research.

Keywords: *corrective feedback, learner uptake, second language acquisition*

1. Introduction

Many students of the second language learners (L2) believe that learning speaking skills can be challenging as speaking is usually impromptu unlike other skills such as writing. Spontaneous speaking activity, or even class interaction may not be something the students favour in second language classes as they are afraid of making mistakes in front of the whole class. However, since learning a new language is a process, it is typical for students to make mistakes in their learning. In the discipline of Second Language Acquisition (SLA), the investigation of learner errors has generated debate. According to a study by Tomczyk (2013), grammar, pronunciation, and lexical mistakes are some of the most frequent ones made by students. SLA defined the term as feedback, and studies done by Long in the 1990s gave this study's rational focus on form. In addition, the corrective discourse model developed by Lyster and Ranta (1997) was employed to determine the various types of student uptake. According to Esmaili and Behnam (2014), this corrective feedback offers evidence of learners' incorrect statements, which stimulates learners to correct them in accordance with the focus of feedback regarding their accuracy and comprehensibility. This study focused on the learner uptake and linguistic feedback in content-based interaction between two different students with varying levels of English proficiency, as was mentioned above. It emphasizes on the types of errors made and the student's utilization of corrective input.

In the realm of second language acquisition, interactions have been the focus of various studies. With a focus on teachers or students and their speech either alone or together, there are numerous opinions regarding the function of classroom discourse and interaction (Surakka, 2007). The most crucial factor in learning a second language is how it is conveyed in interactions between learners. In this regard, Corrective feedback is one of the topics that has been extensively researched in the context of language learning and conversation. Corrective feedback gives students the opportunity to engage on certain linguistic elements, which might result in implicit learning and improve their communicative proficiency. Lyster and Ranta (1997) defined six different feedback forms, including recasts, elicitation, clarification requests, explicit corrections, metalinguistic feedback, and repetition, in their research of corrective feedback and learner uptake between the interaction of two L2 English students. Hence, this study will highlight on the type of feedback given by high proficiency student and the uptake displayed by the low proficiency student.

1.2 The two objectives of the research are:

1. To identify the types of linguistic feedback demonstrated by the high proficiency student in the interaction between low proficiency students.
2. To find out the distribution of uptake in response to various types of linguistic feedback.

2. Literature Review

Studies and research on feedback has been crucial and controversial topic among SLA theorists. Some believe that feedback is harmful to L2 acquisition while others believe that feedback is an essential catalyst for L2 development. One of the basic theoretical claims was made by Swain (1985) who suggested the Output Hypothesis. Swain (1985) proposed that comprehensible input (Krashen, 1985) alone does not improve learners' language acquisition in terms of syntax, and that the production of output in response to input is necessary for further language development (cited in Suzuki, 2004). Swain suggested that with the consistent feedback from teachers and peers, learners were able to produce modified output which shows how important is feedback in language learning. Modified output can be demonstrated in the form of learner uptake, or learner reaction to teachers' corrective feedback given to learners' error. This modified output can also be seen between peers of the same proficiency level, or those of the same.

Another theory to prove the importance of feedback and uptake by looking at the interaction between peers is the Interaction Hypotheses by Long (1981). Interaction hypothesis was first proposed by Long (1981) and revised in 1996. This hypothesis was later developed into theoretical approach which include second language learning processes such as learner's exposure to and production of language, interplay of learner's input or output with learner's cognitive resources and other individual differences (cited in Loewen & Sato, 2018). Long (1981) proposed that through interaction, language learners have the access to comprehensible input, opportunities for outcomes and correction. Interaction Hypothesis emphasise that second language learners learn through negotiation of meaning and that corrective feedback and learner uptake serve as a source for interactional modification. Interaction theory focuses on four key construct of interaction which are input, negotiation, output, and noticing. These key constructs can be related to the development of L2 acquisition with the presence of feedback and uptake by learners.

2.1 Key constructs of Interaction

The first key construct is input in which according to Gass and Mackey (2015), as other theories suggested, interactionist approach also believe that input is a necessary component in language acquisition (cited in Loewen & Sato, 2018). Interactionist researchers have found that interactionally modified input is better for L2 acquisition rather than pre-modified or unmodified input.

The second key construct is negotiation. Negotiation can be divided into two which are negotiation of meaning and form. Negotiation of meaning deals with elements of clarification requests, confirmation checks, and comprehension checks, all which responses with communication breakdown. When the learners are not able to understand the message convey, they will try to understand by asking series of questions to understand the idea or repeating back what has been said to confirm what they have heard. Another form of negotiation is negotiation of form which often consisting of feedback with corrective intent. One form of feedback that has been listed down according to interactionist is the input-providing feedback. Input-providing feedback provides the correct linguistic form for the learner; for example, recast which reformulate learner's incorrect utterance, and immediately provides the correct form after learner's erroneous utterance.

The third key construct is output which the interactionist approach draws strongly on Swain's Comprehensible Output Hypotheses. Swain proposes that output allows learners to test their linguistic hypotheses and possibly receive feedback on this hypothesis. When learners try out new structure during communication, receive feedback of their error, they will know that they need to revise back their hypothesis. Apart from that, output involves language use; thus, it can develop fluency and automaticity as it involves not only production but also practice (cited in Loewen & Sato, 2018).

Noticing is the fourth key construct which is as important as others Although on one level we can observe that if there is uptake, then there is a positive response of peer interaction, if there is no uptake, then they might not notice it. For instance, if feedback is delivered indirectly to a learner, then they might not even notice it. So, simply correcting someone who is using language incorrectly does not ensure that they will be aware of it. Therefore, the first thing that is required is that they must notice it because if they do not notice it then they do not even recognize that the peer has given feedback starting in a particular language form. Thus, no learning can take place in this interaction. Therefore, the first requirement is that they must be able to perceive it. This is where the principle of noticing in second language acquisition comes into play because learning cannot take place without noticing. The interaction approach has been greatly influenced by Schmidt's noticing hypothesis, which holds that L2 learning cannot happen without awareness. Gas and Mackey (2015) claims that there is a universal agreement that agrees that learning L2 interaction involves developing the cognitive constructs of attention, awareness, and the related notion of noticing (cited in Loewen & Sato, 2018). With the evidence from studies being conducted by interactionists, there is no doubt that all for key constructs are interdependent for L2 acquisition and learning, and they are all emphasised on feedback and uptake as part or language development.

2.3 Interlocutor Characteristics

Interaction researchers also investigate on the effects related to individuals' engagement in communication. Several studies have made comparison on the interaction between L1 and L2 speakers, and between L2 and L2 learners. A study by Mayo and Pika (2000) found that advanced L2 interlocutors produced richer input to their partners than L1 speaker (cited in Loewen & Sato, 2018). Another study found that L2 learners are more willing to indicate lack of understanding when they are interacting with other L2 learners rather than L1 speaker. The study of this kind of interaction also in favour of interaction between L2 and L2 and emphasise on feedback and uptake as one of the research projects conducted by interactionist has found that learners tend to react to feedback by modifying their initial errors (modified output) more often during interaction with L2 peers. All the example of studies indicated that L2 speakers can be better interlocutor than L1 speakers which something that teachers can take into consideration when conducting interactive tasks (Long & Potter, 1985).

Apart on comparing on the effects of L1-L2 interactions and L2-L2 interactions, the interactionists also conduct studies to investigate the effects of peer interactions and its effectiveness in language development. Although there were a lot of arguments especially on the quality of feedback that L2 received when interacting with their peers, numerous studies have found the positive effect of peer interaction to L2 learners. For example, Philip et.al (2014) stated that learners are less stressful when they are interacting with peers than those interaction that were being led by teachers as they will feel freer to interact. This finding is adding to earlier study by Sato's (2013) study on learner's perceptions of peer interaction where the learners confirmed that they did not feel worried of making errors while talking to each other as compared to teacher-centred conversation. In terms of study on feedback and uptake between peers, some studies have found that learners' uptake are more positive and frequent when they received feedback from their peers as they will immediately correct their errors (Loewen & Sato, 2018).

3. Research Methodology

This study is to investigate the linguistic feedback and uptake of two speakers of two different proficiency level of English language. The two speakers were students from Universiti Putra Malaysia, currently in their third year of study, and the first speaker obtained Band 1 while the second speaker is a MUET Band 4 student. As a requirement of the university, those students who obtained MUET Band 1 and 2 needs to take extra English language classes as opposed to those who obtained MUET Band 3, 4, 5, and 6. This means that the students of MUET Band 1 and 2 will get extra classes in preparation for them to take other English courses as requirement for graduation. For both speakers, they have completed compulsory English course which are speaking skills and writing skills, and now they are taking another writing courses.

To collect the data, a specific time and date was chosen where both speakers were present in physical setting. A general topic with few specific questions were given to record the conversation. The topic was chosen in taking into consideration the proficiency level of both speakers. Since the first speaker is a Band 1 student which equivalent to CEFR level A1, according to CEFR alignment, the selection of the topic should be revolved around something that is familiar to the student such as hobbies, families, friends, or interest. As such, the speakers were given the theme 'Leisure time', and to get the speakers to have direction on what to say, a series of questions were given as guideline. The questions were adopted from Cambridge IELTS practice speaking questions. The high proficiency student was given the role to start the conversation by asking questions to the low proficiency student. The high proficiency student was also required to give his opinion towards the questions given. The recording lasted for five minutes and twelve second, following the requirement specified in the assignment description.

4. Findings

As the recording is only about 5 minutes, there were limited findings can be collected. However, there were some noticeable feedbacks given by the high proficiency student to low proficiency student. The two types of linguistic feedback can be drawn from the data alongside with the non- verbal feedback given by high proficiency student throughout the whole conversation, and this can be taken as an acknowledgement of understanding the idea shared by low proficiency student.

4.1 Linguistics Feedback

The two-linguistics feedback were:

- i) Lexical
- ii) Phonological

4.1.1 Lexical feedback

Example 1: Minute: 1.52

Low proficiency: "with another .. With friend ..friends .. like play football at..at"

High proficiency: "field.."

Low proficiency: "at field .. yes..yes.."

Example 2: Minute: 4.

Low proficiency: Oh .. for me .. for me .. is .. is important .. very important .. because the leisure time .. aaa .. can be rust the body and the .. from .. from stress .. from .. from stress .. from stress .. aaa .. work .. stress work .. stress study .. aa .. can .. can .. can .. cann ..

High proficiency: "rest our body..."

Low proficiency: "yes..healthy.."

High proficiency: "healthy mind"

Low proficiency: "yes..healthy mind.."

From the above examples, when low proficiency student was having difficulty to produce the word to complete the sentence, the high proficiency student offered help by providing the word to complete the sentence. The feedback was given implicitly as the high proficiency student straight away completed the sentence without indicating that he is correcting the low proficiency student.

4.1.2 Phonetic

Example 1: Minute: 1.05

Low proficiency: many books I have and I done to read ..and last day..I..go the err..festi..pesti..party..

High proficiency: "festival.."

Low proficiency: "Aar..festival book at IOI.. "

In this finding, the low proficiency student was having difficulty in pronouncing the word 'festival' or perhaps he was not sure how to pronounce it. Realising the difficulty of the low proficiency student, the high proficiency assisted the low proficiency student by pronouncing the word. This is also a type of feedback though made implicitly.

Example 2:

Low proficiency: "rust our body..."

High proficiency: "rest our body"

For the second example, the feedback is not immediate feedback. The low proficiency student has mispronounced the word 'rest'. While assisting the low proficiency student to complete his sentence, the high proficiency student implicitly corrects the pronunciation by repeating back the whole phrase.

4.2 Learner Uptakes

From all four the findings of feedback, there were two uptakes display be the low proficiency student. According to Lyster and Anta (1997), uptake refers to learner's attempt to correct the mistake or error after getting the feedback. There are two types of student uptake:

- i) uptake that results in 'repair' of the error in which the feedback is focused (other-initiated repair)
- ii) uptake that results in an utterance that still needs repair (needs-repair)

Although there were four different types of uptake (repetition, incorporation, self-repair, peer repair) under 'other initiated repair', only one type of uptake that can be distinguished from the data which is repetition.

Repetition refers to the low proficiency student's repetition of the high proficiency student's feedback in the conversation. The examples are as follow:

Example 1:

Low proficiency: "play football at..at"

High proficiency: "field.."

Low proficiency: "yes..yes..at field" (repetition)

Example 2:

Low proficiency: "...festi..festi...festivi.."

High proficiency: "festival.."

Low proficiency: "Aar..festival book at IOI.. " (repetition)

Example 3:

Low proficiency: "yes..healthy.."

High proficiency: "healthy mind"

Low proficiency: "yes..healthy mind.." (repetition)

The category "needs-repair" includes six types of utterances which are acknowledgement, same error, different error, off target, hesitation, and partial repair. Only one type of utterances can be found from the data which is acknowledgement. Acknowledgement refers to a simple "yes" on the part of the low proficiency student in response to the high proficiency student's feedback. This type of feedback is regarded as simply accepting the feedback given as that feedback were what the low proficiency student was thinking during the conversation.

5. Conclusion

Based on the findings, it can be concluded that during peer interaction, feedbacks are given from the high proficiency student followed by immediate uptake by the low proficiency student. This has proven the claim made by the interactionist that peer interaction will benefit the low proficiency student as they will mostly correct their error instantly after the given feedback. Educators should take into consideration in designing tasks that allow students to interact with each other and guide the students on how to give feedback to their peers so that learning can take place naturally even when they are interacting with the peers.

This study also shown the importance of social engagement with peers which can be seen as a crucial component of language acquisition and can improve students' cognitive growth because language learning, specifically, involves constant interaction. It is believed that interaction amongst students will help them develop both their cognitive and productive language skills (Sarem & Shirzadi, 2014). Through this study, we can observe that interaction allows for beneficial effects on L2 development, and that careful consideration must be given to the intricate issue of individual variances. The distinctive language employed is crucial since the learners will interact and communicate about their comprehension during the interaction.

5.1 Limitation of the study

The study is lack of data to be analysed. To improve the study, future researcher needs to decide the type of task to be given to the participants. A task that requires the participant to get information or a problem-solving task are much better than discussion. The task should have objective for both participants to achieve at the end of the interaction. If the task is design as such, the probability of getting feedback is higher especially if the high proficiency student needs to understand the idea given by the low proficiency student. When this happen, we can also see the process of negotiation of meaning between two speakers as they are trying to understand each other.

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