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HOW TO CORRECT STUDENT'S ORAL ERRORS IN AN EFL CLASSROOM

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1. INTRODUCTION

Errors are the everyday opportunities that teachers can take advantage of to know what topics or structures need to be reinforced or reviewed while working in an EFL classroom. Teaching English to teens is a challenge while they are in the teaching-learning process with different interests and needs, so teachers have to look for ways of motivating them to keep on participating actively in a class while teens are getting involved and interested in the acquisition of the Second Language.

English learners are surely going to make errors when expressing some ideas. They have to be treated not as something bad that shows students weakness, but as paths or ways to avoid while speaking. Teachers need to focus not on the errors that are made, but instead, they have to pay attention to the things behind the errors. That means that special attention have to be put to the things or sources that can make those errors happen during the process.

Correcting mistakes is something that some teachers could not consider important in an EFL classroom, but this work has been made upon the belief that this is necessary to get students proficiency while speaking English. To do that some error correction techniques are presented with the purpose of giving readers some choices to be used while facing oral errors in an EFL classroom made up of EFL students.

2. OBJECTIVES

2.1 GENERAL OBJECTIVE

- To carry out a bibliographical research based on error correction techniques that can be useful to correct EFL students while they participate during a class.

2.2 SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES

- To state a well-defined topic accessible to the EFL teaching-learning process
- To collect enough information that provides strong evidence to support a thesis statement related to error correction techniques to correct students' oral errors in an EFL classroom.
- To create a logical and defensible set of conclusions based on the literature that has been consulted to write the essay.

3. JUSTIFICATION

Correcting errors in an EFL classroom is something that teachers have to deal with every time they stand in a group of learners who are going through the process of acquiring English. Taking these words into consideration, this work has been done in order to help in a way the teaching-learning process, the students and the teachers as well as give sources to those people who may read this piece of work on how to correct students' errors while speaking.

It is necessary to correct students' errors to get fluency and accuracy from them, but it is also important to have the enough knowledge in this topic before doing it and that is why these kinds of work are helpful to master a topic in which a teacher can face the problems he or she could find in a classroom at the time of instructing a lesson.

Some benefits of doings this bibliographical research are that the researchers have gained the necessary tools to know the possible causes and solutions which can help to take decisions on how to face these errors that students make while speaking in any lesson. Also, students from the University of El Salvador will be able to have information and know more about errors and how to treat them in an EFL classroom.

In addition, EFL students are going to be beneficiaries from this bibliographical research because teachers may analyze some possible reasons of error and how teachers can treat them and look for the techniques that better suit for their learning process.

4. HOW TO CORRECT STUDENTS' ORAL ERRORS IN AN EFL CLASSROOM

4.1 Definition of Terms

While learning a foreign language, error correction has become one of the most important teaching processes, but few teachers know how to do it without making students feel ashamed or bad while being corrected in front of their partners. Teachers often take so negative attitudes toward errors that they could not tolerate any errors and tend to correct them as soon as they could find any. Teachers could spend a lot of time and effort to correct students mistakes without getting any favorable result for their students, who may not like the way they are corrected, so before developing the techniques relating to error correction, it is important to establish the difference between them and mistakes since both concepts are confused or misused, for not all the teachers know what they really are.

According to Douglas H. Brown, "mistakes refer to a performance error that is either a random guess or a slip. They are not the result of a deficiency in competence but the result of some sort of temporary breakdown or imperfection in the process of producing speech." Mistakes are made by all students learning a foreign language, and they are also made by native speakers not because of their lack of knowledge but for a small accident while speaking. Brown defines errors "as a noticeable deviation from the grammar of a native speaker that reflects the competence of a learner." In this case, errors show the lack of knowledge that students could have about any grammatical topic, or the misunderstanding of any grammatical structure.

Being clear about the difference between mistakes and errors is important to know how to correct students of English as a Foreign Language which is not an easy job, since sometimes it is difficult to identify when they are making errors and when they are making mistakes. If a student of an EFL classroom is asked to say a sentence about his best friend's abilities by using the modal verb "can", and he expresses "My best friend Carlos cans swim very well." It is not easy to know if the usage of the third person singular in the modal verb is a mistake or if it is an error since a teacher cannot draw conclusions by a sentence that the student has already taken for granted that all the verbs and modals need to emphasize the third person singular. To conclude that, it is necessary to ask for more sentences in which modal verbs have to be used. Doing that, the teacher will realize if the student is making a mistake or an error.

4.2 What causes EFL students to make errors while learning the language?

Learning English as a Foreign Language is something high-school students have to go through as a requirement of the curriculum. While being in an EFL course, students study the language as a subject that has to be taken to get their high-school diploma, so there are many different attitudes toward the class during the hour while this is developed. While developing a class and having students' participation, teachers ask for the production of patterns that are not understood by some students. Students are to say any sentence to show they have understood the topic that was taught to them. By doing this, it is possible to get several answers that may show students' disinterest in the language. So teachers should

encourage students to participate actively during the class and pay attention the produced sentences or words to identify any error in them, which does not have to be seen as a problem but as an opportunity to know which topic or grammatical structure has to be strengthened to get proficiency in the language. The identified error should not be seen as it was in the past “a problem to overcome or an evil to be eradicated.” (Pit Corder; 1973).

To know how to help learners by correcting their errors, it is important to take into account what causes them. It is not possible to get a medication that defeats any illness without knowing the virus that causes it and the way to kill such virus. Some of the sources that causes EFL students make errors according to Douglas Brown are these:

- a) Interlingual Transfer
- b) Intralingual Transfer
- c) Context of Learning

(Principles of Language Learning and Teaching p. 223-227)

a) Interlingual Transfer

While learning English as a Foreign Language most of the tenth graders have only been in touch with their mother tongue (Spanish). They take advantage of this while acquiring English, so when they are asked to say a sentence; at the beginning of the process, they have to follow the pattern of their mother tongue. For example; if they are studying the possessive forms of nouns, and they are asked to say sentences describing something that their fathers have, some of the

learners say “The car of my father is nice.” Instead of saying “My father’s car is nice.” The first sentence shows the grammatical pattern which is followed in Spanish, and even though that sentence is clearly understood by a Spanish speaker, it does not follow the structure that is established for showing the possession in English when using the Saxon genitive. So interlingual transfer can be define as the process in which Foreign Learners (in this case Spanish-speakers) make a relationship between the mother tongue patterns (sounds, grammatical rules, structures) and the language which is being acquired (English).

b) Intralingual Transfer

The first source of error that students face while learning a new language is the interlingual transfer, but while learners are advancing in the process, they find another source of error called intralingual transfer; the one Brown defines in the same work previously cited as “The generalization within the target language.” This source of error is also known as overgeneralization, the application of grammatical rules in a general way. For example; if a teacher is studying the past tense, and he explains the spelling rules for making the past form of the regular verbs, and then irregular verbs are introduced so that students may say sentences to talk about what they did last weekend, they start to use the regular verb spelling rules with irregular verbs, even though, when it has already been given the past form of them and explained that those rules are not use with irregular verbs. So it is not strange to hear a student saying “I swimmmed in the pool on Sunday.” When he is asked to say what he did on that day.

c) Context of Learning

This is source of error that does not have to do with the mother tongue, but it is closely related to human and material resources and their roles in the language learning. Here books, visual, audio and some other material used in language teaching play an important role. If these materials are not adequate to students' need and interests, they are not going to cause any positive impact on the teaching-learning process, so that students may have a meaningful learning.

Teachers also take an important part in this source of error, since "They may provide incorrect information by way of a misleading definition, word, or grammatical generalization." (Brown, 2000)

Teachers can also be one of the causes of students' errors while explanations are not given clearly. It is mandatory to check learners' comprehension by asking them checking questions of what they are supposed to do after a topic. For example, if the teacher is explaining the use of "s" ending for the third person singular verbs in the simple present tense, he is not going to know if learners have the idea by asking "Is it clear?" A possible way to know if pupils have gotten the idea about the topic would be to give them different sentences so that they may choose the correct one. The teacher could express the following sentences:

Maria walk to school every day. Or Maria walks to school every day.

After that, the teacher could ask students to say their own sentences by using "she" or "he" as subjects of a sentence.

4.3 Kinds of errors

Errors have been seen as something wrong and bad in many ways during decades, but in the teaching-learning process of acquiring a foreign language,

these errors are considered useful to reach a good level of proficiency in learning languages, in this case the English language. According to Corder (1973) and Ellis (1997), errors are classified into four categories that they also think, however, are not enough to describe errors, but to classify them. Helping us –consequently- diagnose learners’ learning problems.

The categories Corder mentioned are: Omission, addition, selection and ordering. These categories can vary in dimension. This variation can go from a single word to a paragraph.

Here are some examples:

A- Omission of some required elements:

In this category the learner forgets or does not know the elements enough to arrange a paragraph or sentence as in this case, even though the listener can understand the context. Based on what has been said previously, it is not suitable for the grammar and good communication to omit some important words which help to have the clear idea of the context.

E.g. Yesterday, I wash my car. (Here the extra syllable for the past “-ed” has been omitted).

B- Addition of some unnecessary or incorrect elements:

Beside the first category (omission of some required elements) and this is like the opposite from that first category, some unnecessary elements are added to this error (these elements are formed by students for the anxiety of talking or thinking in their mother tongue). This is when the learner says more than he or she has to express in a sentence.

E.g. The beaches that is near to my house is very beautiful. (In this example the extra-syllable “-es” has been added and it is not necessary due to the verb that has been used.)

C- Ordering or misordering of the elements:

This error is constantly repeated among students when learning a language. In this error, students cannot organized the words to make a coherent conversation in the target language and in the case of Spanish native speakers, it is a little confusing to form sentences without thinking in their mother tongue.

E.g. I would choose the car red (Students sometimes confuse the order of the words in the target language specially speaker which their L1 is Spanish. It almost always happens that they change the position of noun and adjective.)

D- Selection of an incorrect element:

The error here is that learners form structures when patterns or instruction are generalizing, so they choose an incorrect form as the example given below:

“My best friend goed to the beach and stayed there for 3 days.” (The incorrect element “goed” for the past of “go” is not appropriate because here it is presented as if all verbs are regular.)

These errors can vary in dimension. They can include from a single word to a paragraph. For this reason, according to Douglas Brown (2000), errors can be viewed as either global or local. Global errors hinder communication. These prevent the message from being understandable as it can be seen in the following example.

“I liking play soccer, but I not went because my t-shirt red not know.”

As it can be seen in the example the message of the sentence is not clear, so the communication is not good. On the other hand, local errors do not lose the message the speaker wants to share and this is understood even though there is still a minor violation of one segment of a sentence that allows the listener to guess the intended meaning. See this example:

“I need to go to the bank to changing some money.”

Here the message is clear; yet there is still an error in verb form because here in the phrase “to changing some money”, it is meant to express purpose not another thing.

Beside these four categories that Corder talked about, there are other two important ones. These categories are Overt error and Covert error suggested by Corder in 1973 and renamed by Paul Lennon as Domain and Extent (cited in Brown 2000).

Extent is the rank of linguistic unit that would have to be deleted, replaced, supplied or reordered in order to repair the sentence. On the other hand, Domain is the rank of linguistic unit from phoneme to discourse that must be taken as context in order for the error to be understood, Paul Lennon (1991).

In these errors it is important to mention that the grammar used by the learner is good, but the context in which the grammar has been used is not accurate. For example: if somebody says: What is the weather like? And then another person answers: I like cold weather. The grammar is correct, but the context is not appropriate for this question.

4.4 Error Correction Techniques

Teachers need to consider some techniques in order to develop students' confidence when speaking because of the learning types and learning situations they face every day. Those techniques are arranged in three categories, being these categories addressed to the performance students have in the classroom with themselves, the teacher, and classmates.

The first category is about **Self Correction with the Help of the Teacher**. In these category teachers can use many techniques such as: **Pin pointing, Repeating, Gesturing, Cuing, and Providing own answers**.

Pin Pointing: This technique is about locating exactly the error and repeating it, in an exaggerating rising of the voice, until the student identifies their error and tries to correct it. Teachers must be clear that they do not have to provide the correct word.

E.g.: Student: I go bed early.

Teacher: I go...

Student: I go to bed early.

When using this technique, students feel pleased to correct their mistakes by using the knowledge they already have.

Repeating: The teacher uses a question in order to have the student, repeat what he/she said. "Could you repeat that again, please?" this can be a nice way to ask for repetition. This question must involve an implicit message for the student not only to repeat but also to realize that there is a mistake.

E.g.: Student: She watch TV.

Teacher: Again?

Student: She watches TV.

Gesturing: This technique is about using body language and gestures. There are certain errors that students make that are easy for them to correct if the teacher helps them by using any gesture or body language, for example the simple past.

E.g.: Student: My sister and I do the dishes last night.

Teacher: By pointing to his/her back, help the student.

Student: Uh, My sister and I did the dishes last night.

Cuing: To help students is not necessary to say the word missing, but to give some cues for the student to remember what he/she forgot. The roll of the teacher is to give students a variation of the missing word.

E.g.: Teacher: What did you buy?

Student: I... (Hesitates).

Teacher: Buy, bought...?

Student: I bought a shirt for my dad.

Teacher Provided Answer: Teachers, who give answers, can be another helpful tool to the students because that way, teachers are modeling the activities.

E.g.: Teacher: Where do you like going on vacation?

Student: I... (Student hesitates).

Teacher: I like going abroad on vacation. How about you?

Student: I like going to visit my grandparents.

The second category is **Peer Correction**. For this technique teachers can achieve what they need by using any of the techniques for self correction with one of the students who has the idea of what another person said.

E.g.: Teacher: “Group work”, tell a story and if one of you makes a mistake, the rest of the group will correct him.

Student 1: I go to the beach yesterday...

Student 2: No, the verb is not ok.

Student 1: I **went** to the beach yesterday.

Teacher Correction is the third category and it's known also as **Direct Correction**. This technique is about correcting the mistake on - the – spot in order to avoid making the same mistake once again and again.

E.g.: Student: Sofia do not like jogging.

Teacher: Sofia **DOES NOT** like jogging. (The teacher emphasizes on the word that is not ok)

Student: Sofia does not like jogging.

5. CONCLUSIONS

- Oral errors made by EFL students do not have to be seen as impossible problems to be solved, but as chances to know what topics have to be reinforced while being in class. These errors tell a teacher how well a grammatical structure or a word pronunciation has been understood and acquired by learners.
- Teachers need to identify the sources of errors if they want to help EFL students improve their proficiency and accuracy while communicating their ideas. The identification of the sources of error can help the teacher to get appropriate techniques to correct learners' errors efficiently.
- After teachers identify the source of errors, they have to use as many different kinds of techniques as they can, making efforts or not hurting students' confidence in learning the language.

6. METHODOLOGY

The methodology that was used to carry out this bibliographical research was taken from the book “The Literature Review” by Lawrence A. Machi and Brenda T. McEvoy. The steps that were taken to write the essay were the followings:

a) To select the topic: The topic was chosen according to the research group’s interest and because error correction is a problems that teachers have to face every day in the classroom while developing and EFL class.

b) To search the literature: The information that addressed the main ideas for the selected topic was gathered and the data was collected by previewing, selecting and organizing all the statements that were connected to the main topic of the research.

c) To develop the argument: The facts that were compiling and taking from some books and web sites were arranged in a logical order so that they proved the thesis made about the research topic. The arguments were also written based on some author’s opinions, the group’s beliefs, opinions, and work experience. While finishing the arguments, they were evaluated by analyzing each research group member’s conclusions and the ideas that support them as well as the reason to write the conclusions mentioned before.

d) To survey the literature: The gathered information was assembled and evaluated. This allowed the group to see all the puzzle pieces. Then the data were recording by building subject maps and entry cards that contained the main ideas

taken from books and web sites. The information in the maps and entry cards was synthesized to build the claims of the research topic.

e) To critique the literature: The collected data was interpreted by using a logical interpretation of evidence to produce propositions that signal a specific conclusion. The argument patterns were established by asking ourselves the question: What information is the study question looking for? And the written argument was written by using the cause and effect pattern to show students' reaction while being correcting during their oral participation.

f) To write the review: The writing of the drafts started by writing down an outline of all the ideas that had been gathered and that were considered important to support the research topic. Three drafts were written and checked by our advisor.

7. RECOMMENDATIONS

- This kind of work is very helpful to students who are finishing their career of B.A in English Teaching because it gives them the chance to study a specific topic by reviewing several books written by different authors with different point of views that can open students' minds to different principles and ideas.
- It is difficult to find literature related to some topics about the English Teaching at the University's library, so it would be helpful if the professors in charge of the Graduation Process could provide some web-sites or bookstores' names where current literature may be found.
- It is necessary to select carefully the topics that are going to be instructed in order to have the necessary sources to write an academic report.
- Professors and students who take the graduation process must design a guide to follow during the process in order to set clear objectives to make it easier for them and to get better proficiency from the students mentioned.
- It is important for the process to involve as many professors as necessary so that they will not be in charge of many groups to advice.

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