UNIVERSITY OF EL SALVADOR
SCHOOL OF ARTS AND SCIENCES
FOREIGN LANGUAGE DEPARTMENT

Topic

CORRECTING COMMON ORAL LEARNER'S MISTAKES FOCUSED ON GRAMMAR

Presented by

BELLA BEATRIZ BURGOS MONTES

ESMERALDA LILIBETH CASTILLO MUÑOZ

JANETH ARACELI FLORES PAZ

To obtain the degree of

LICENCIATURA EN IDIOMA INGLES, OPCION ENSEÑANZA

Advisor

MAT. RHINA FRANCO RAMOS

SAN SALVADOR, EL SALVADOR, CENTRAL AMERICA, MAY 2009

UNIVERSITY OF EL SALVADOR
AUTHORITIES

Rector

ING. RUFINO ANTONIO QUEZADA SANCHEZ

Academic Vice-rector

ARQ. MIGUEL ANGEL PEREZ RAMOS

Administrative Vice-Rector

MTRO. OSCAR NOE NAVARRETE ROMERO

General Secretary

LIC. DOUGLAS VLADIMIR ALFARO CHAVEZ

SCHOOL OF ARTS AND SCIENCES
AUTHORITIES

Dean

LIC. JOSE RAYMUNDO CALDERON MORAN

Vice-Dean

DR. CARLOS ROBERTO PAZ MANZANO

Secretary

MTRO. JULIO CESAR GRANDE RIVERA

Head of the Foreign Language Department

MTI. EDGAR NICOLAS AYALA

Coordinator of the Graduation Process

MAT. RHINA FRANCO RAMOS

Advisor

MAT. RHINA FRANCO RAMOS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

TO GOD ALMIGHTY

For providing us with his wisdom, strength, patience and persistence for finishing our university studies successfully.

TO OUR DEAR PARENTS

For their unconditional moral and economic support throughout our studies; we thank them for believing in us and for providing us their valuable advices when we most needed.

TO OUR RELATIVES AND FRIENDS

Who gave us their guidance, affection and words of encouragement to the end of this path.

TO OUR PROFESORS

We appreciate the effort of all those who shared their academic knowledge and the important aspects that have made us grow in the professional field. Also to all teachers and different authorities who collaborated in our research.

Contents

I. Introduction

The topic of oral mistake correction has been chosen with the aim of improving our correcting techniques as teachers and at the same time to benefit our students and potential readers as well. This project has required consulting a wide variety of useful materials about the issue to enrich readers' knowledge on choosing the most suitable techniques and strategies for correcting mistakes without affecting our learners' activities and performance. For that reasons, we consider that this paper can be beneficial not only for other researchers who feel interested to work on this in the future, but also for teachers and students.

To develop the topic, it was necessary to check and gather information from different books and internet sources. Also it has been contrasted here the opinion of some scholars on how to correct learners oral production, along with our own view points as students and as teachers toward this subject. This has helped us to get our own conclusions and realized about the importance of correcting students and the best moment to do it.

This paper includes general and specific objectives that have guided the work. A justification which remarks the importance of this research, the body of the work in which a discussion about the chosen topic is presented as an essay containing the researchers view points reinforced with all the compiled information about different scholars. There is a conclusion to explain why is so important to develop this kind of researches and the benefits it has not only for researchers but also for people who will be interested in this matter. Finally, there are some recommendations to improve the graduation process.

II. Objectives

A. General Objective:

- To carry out a bibliographic research based on mistakes correction when learning a foreign language.

B. Specific Objectives:

- To compile the most useful and successful techniques in correcting learners' mistakes.

- To find out the importance of correcting or not learners' oral proficiency.

- To compare different approaches experts propose to correct learners' mistakes and when to correct them.

III.   Justification

This bibliographical research about the correction of oral learners' mistakes focused on grammar was carried out with the aims of finding out the importance of correcting or not learners' oral proficiency. Different approaches that some scholars propose to deal with the problematic under research were analyzed. Moreover some useful techniques to correct learner's mistakes were included.

This topic was chosen because teachers are the ones in charge of doing all they can to make sure that as students are learning a new language they do it in a correct way; thus, an effective mistake correction is vital for the learning process to provide learners with an effective teaching environment in which they can maximize their education.

Mistakes correction is a daily activity that teachers have to face up; that is why this work will be of benefit for teachers who want to improve their correcting techniques and at the same time to create a better learning atmosphere for students. In addition, students are going to be benefited due teachers will correct them in a balanced way in which they feel comfortable and without inhibitions to express their ideas.

Besides that, the Foreign Language Department will be benefited with this investigation, because it can be also taken into account for further studies to benefit students who are interested in investigating about the same topic. As well as teachers who may find a necessity to follow up the investigation of this kind in other subjects as Seminary or Métodos y Técnicas de Investigación among others.

IV.   Correcting common oral learners' mistakes focused on grammar

Learning a language is a long process during which a learner will inevitably make many, many mistakes. In other words pupils are taken from a stage of not speaking a language into one in which they become fluent in its use; thus, **correction plays an important role in the teaching learning process, which is why it becomes necessary to correct students' oral mistakes in an appropriate way**. In the opinion of many teachers, students who are continually corrected become inhibited and cease to participate. This results in the opposite of what the teacher is trying to produce - the use of English to communicate.

As it was mentioned in the previous paragraph, a crucial issue for any teacher is when and how to correct students' mistakes in their oral production since appropriate correction and feedback is important of the ESL classroom, just as are drills or speaking activities. Therefore, there are a number of types of correction strategies that teachers are expected to make during the course of any given class; for them it is not only important to correct students without making them feel uncomfortable, but it is also important to know what to correct, so that a distinction should be made between a student who uses previously learned material incorrectly, and a student who uses unstudied material incorrectly. One is a mistake, the other is an error. With that in mind it is essential to decide when and how to correct pupils' mistakes since the way teachers give feedback and correct such mistakes will be heavily influenced by which type they think the students are making.

 In our opinion, correction needs to take place, and is expected and desired by students. However, the ways in which a teacher correct student play a vital role in whether students

become confident in the language usage or become intimidated on it. Correcting students as a group, in correction sessions, at the end of activities, and letting them correct their own mistakes all help in encouraging students to use English rather than to worry about making too many mistakes.

A. **What is a mistake?**

ESL terminology defines a mistake as "a previously learned grammar point, vocabulary word, or phrase, which the student uses incorrectly" (http://bogglesworldesl.com/glossary.htm). When these are made, pupils may have already studied the material, but got some wires crossed between the brain and the mouth, or maybe they just momentarily fell into an old habit of promoting the misuse of the language in terms of accuracy and fluency when they are trying to communicate. It is important to mention that students produce mistakes in spite of the fact that a particular rule has been correctly acquired, thus these can be corrected by learners once the mistake have been pointed out to them.

In language study phases, students will not always use correct English. They will make numerous mistakes in various areas (grammar, vocabulary choice, pronunciation and incorrect stressing in sentences) when writing or speaking freely. These mistakes could affect the oral communication due to students give a wrong or different message from the one that they are trying to express, causing confusion or misunderstanding to the receptor.

B. **Is correction necessary? Pros and cons**

As teachers, we must decide whether or not to offer correction in each and every class. In other words, should we teachers correct every single mistake or should we give a value judgment and correct only major mistakes. Based in our experience we can say that if a teacher corrects

every mistake made by his/her students, he or she is leading a class of students whose fluency suffers. These students become overly concerned with grammatically correct responses, and produce lengthy pauses before answering even the most simple of questions as they worry about word order, verb tense, and the like. On the other hand, teachers who rarely or never correct their students' mistakes, words tumble out of students' mouths leading them to speak, but what comes out, though, is chocked full of problems with grammar and vocabulary as a result, their English is hard to understand. As it was pointed out early in the paragraph, both approaches have serious weaknesses hindering communication.

For Rod Ellis (1997), there are basically two schools of thoughts when correcting oral mistakes made during class discussions, "1) Correct often and thoroughly 2) Let students make mistakes". Sometimes, teachers refine the choice by choosing to let beginners make many mistakes while correcting advanced students often. However, many teachers are taking a third route these days as Ellis called it "The selective correction". In this case, the teacher decides to correct only certain mistakes. Which mistakes will be corrected is usually decided by the objectives of the lesson we are teaching or the specific exercise that our students are performing at that moment. For instance, if students are focusing on simple past irregular forms, then only mistakes in those forms are corrected (i.e., goed, thinked, etc.). Other mistakes, such as mistakes in future form, or mistakes of collocations (for example: I will make my homework) are ignored.

This could be done in conjunction with a later correction; in here teachers take notes on common mistakes that students make. And then during the follow-up correction session the teacher presents common mistakes made so that all can benefit from an analysis of which mistakes were made and why.

We believe that correcting or not correcting learners' mistakes is a major concern for a lot of teachers who feel that if they do not correct mistakes immediately, they will be helping to reinforce incorrect language production. This point of view is also reinforced by students who often expect teachers to continually correct them during class. But now the basic question to meditate on is: *why correction is necessary?,* in some consulted bibliography, we have found out that there are a few scholars who agree on the argument that students just need to use the language and the theory that the rest will come by itself seems rather weak for them, claiming that students come to teachers to teach them. If learners want only conversation, they might just go to a chat room on the Internet without having any correction, but obviously students need to be corrected as part of the learning experience. However, students also need to be encouraged to use the language because its accomplishment is only achieved through a great deal of practice.

C. **How to correct learners' mistakes**

It is true that correcting students while they are trying their best to use the language can often discourage them. Nevertheless, there are some useful techniques that can be taken into account at the time of adopting a way to cope with this issue; the most satisfactory solution of all is to make correction an activity. Correction can be used as a follow-up to any given class activity. However, correction sessions can be used as a valid activity in and of themselves. In other words, teachers can set up an activity during which each mistake (or a specific type of mistake) will be corrected. Students know that the activity is going to focus on correction, and accept that fact. But, as Rod Ellis (1997) sites "these activities should be kept in balance with other, more free-form, activities which give students the opportunity to express themselves without having to worry about being corrected every other word."

Another related approach is the one suggested by Huang, Cheng-Fu (2003) when he says: "It is important to correct students when they cannot find the right way to proceed, that is, when they are searching for the right word, phrase, or grammatical features; after several students have made the same mistake teachers should take notes of it and plan an activity for a later lesson. Do not interrupt what they are doing, but do not ignore the mistake either; to picture this, if a student is talking about a past event but uses the wrong verb tense which could confuse the listener, a teacher has to correct them on the spot to avoid a possibility for misunderstanding". Base on these words, it could be mentioned that teachers must correct mistakes when they happen, otherwise these mistakes will lead pupils to other misunderstandings in the future.

As group, we have concluded that another important question teachers should have in mind by the time of correcting students' mistakes is how should we correct them? Here we are proposing two things a teacher should include in any correction; the first one is to explain why it is a mistake; for example, how do mistakes lead to miscommunication? Will this word choice lead a person to believe something that is false? When talking about one thing, will using plural nouns by mistake lead to false assumptions? When students understand why, they are more motivated to remember correct English. The second one is that teachers always have to show students a better way! That is, a teacher does not have to tell them that they are wrong; but also a teacher has to give them an example, in a sentence or a real situation, to reinforce the correction. Sometimes, two or three examples are helpful. If it's a particularly difficult point, you can even have the whole class practice the correct sentences out loud so that everyone gets it.

There is a constant dilemma: to correct and encourage accuracy or not to correct and encourage fluency. In this sense researches into Second Language Acquisition have suggested some reasons why teachers do not have to correct students' mistakes all the time. By pointing out

that if teachers correct learners every time they make a mistake they will always be thinking about mistakes and that will slow down their speaking. Speaking very slowly and correcting themselves all the time will stop them reaching the next level and will make it hard for people to talk to them without getting bored and impatient. It will also slow down their reading and writing speeds, and makes it hard for students to listen to people speaking at normal speed. Moreover, if a teacher corrects every mistake that will also probably make learners only use easy language so that they know that it is right. To be ready to go up to the next level, however, they need to be ambitious in their use of language and try to use each new word or new grammar item at any time they think it might be possible. Besides that, if the teacher corrects pupils on many different unrelated points of grammar, they will not be able to concentrate fully on the most important ones or on the language point of the day.

For us it is better to avoid either extreme, it is necessary to find a balance between correcting or not. We need to choose the right time to correct and the right time to let students speak freely, corrections should only be made when students will receive the most benefit out of it. It is often worth avoiding interrupting students as much as we can; immediate correction can be useful when we are interacting with the class but when students are involved in pair or group activities, delayed correction is better. Here there are some suggestions to follow: listen while students are working and make mental notes of the most important mistakes, let them complete the activity, then draw attention to the mistake and invite students to correct it. Most mistakes in speaking are called slips. Slips are mistakes which the student can correct if a teachers draws attention to them.

D. **Techniques to correct learners' oral mistakes**

When giving feedback to learners on their performance in speaking English, the emphasis for the teacher should be to discover what learners did not say and help them say it, rather than pick their oral production out of what they said. This requires the use of activities which stretch learners appropriately and the teacher listening to what learners are not saying. That is difficult; though, there are a variety of good methods and techniques suggested to encourage teachers to consider whether immediate or later correction of student mistakes during oral work is appropriate.

Some useful techniques that may be used for both immediate and delayed correction are: asking for repetition without indicating the mistake, self-correction with the teacher's help, rephrasing a question, cueing and peer correction. These techniques were proposed by Alice Omaggio (1993), and they are interpreted in the following way:

Asking for repetition without indicating the mistake, this technique consists of a rolling movement of the hand to ask the student to repeat without indicating where the mistake falls. In many cases students will be able to self-correct when the teacher has indicated there is a mistake.

S**elf-correction with the teacher's help**; whereby the teacher localizes the error by repeating the learner's utterance up until the point where the error has occurred, and exaggerates the word which has preceded the mistake with a rising intonation.

Rephrasing a question is another technique that can be used when a student fails to answer or answers incorrectly without confidence. Generally, the rephrased question is a reduced form of the original.

Cueing; this is a useful feedback tool that can be employed when a student stumbles during an answer or makes an obvious mistake. Teacher then offers the student options to fill-in

the missing element or repair the mistake. An offshoot of cueing is to rephrase a question when a student responds with a correct form but an inappropriate response. Using this technique, the student is giving a chance to hear the question again, and obtain new information enabling him or her to give an appropriate response. The teacher also may wish to explain a key word as means of providing feedback to clear up confusion or apparent confusion on the part of the student to do so he/she can write an explanation on the board, use pointing techniques, or make gestures to enlighten the student. There are times when a teacher may not comprehend a student's utterance, or the pronunciation of word is so poor that teacher wishes to model it. Through questioning, the teacher is able to employ a more subtle way to discover, or model the word. Yet another way a teacher can aid the student in self-correction is by providing an answer to the question that was asked. This provides the student with a model of a correct structure, and still allows the student to come up with his or her own response.

Peer correction, this technique can provide students with appropriate interview questions written on cards; then have students interview one another. The interviewee is allowed to view the cards and assess the interviewer, making sure the questions were asked using the correct forms. Also, the teacher can encourage the students to provide corrective feedback during structured exercises simply by asking the class for help when a speaker stumbles or is stuck and then praising any effort to assist. It could be mentioned that researcher of mistakes correction techniques and strategies has not been exhausted since there is always a significant need for classroom research because mistakes are inevitable in the language classroom, but they should be addressed in a rational and consistent manner. Therefore, teachers need to develop criteria, and employ some of the aforementioned techniques, language teachers can discover what kinds of corrective techniques best suit their particular students.

In short the language teaching trains learners' oral skills, in order to help them express English fluently and accurately. It is necessary to correct the mistakes learners make according to the mistake type, its origin, the students' level, content, situation of speech, etc. There may be different mistakes correction approaches and strategies as the ones which were cited in this research, but in the daily teaching classes, they are often difficult to grasp, even to apply different attitude toward the mistakes. So that, teachers should find a balance between the approaches of correcting or not correcting pupils taking into consideration what benefits correction of any kind might have for learners. Finally, teachers can take the responsibility for the actual decisions of when and how to correct students, because only teachers are in the position to gauge what is helpful at what point in the students learning.

V. CONCLUSION

It is important to develop this kind of research because it benefits us in the sense that through investigation, new knowledge is acquired. Another reason is that it allows researchers to improve themselves in the field under investigation and in the particular case of teaching it can help to create a better learning environment for students.

This investigation has been very significant for us since it has helped us to realize the importance that an effective mistake correction plays in the learning process. There are a lot of teachers who take for granted that correcting learners' mistakes is just something that has to be done as part of the learning process itself without knowing that an effective correction helps learners become confident in their language usage. On the other hand, an ineffective correction causes students become intimidated and the consequence of this is the lack of learning.

Finally, researchers concluded that teachers have to keep a balance between correcting or not their students, choose the most suitable way to do it and find the right moment to make the corrections.

METHODOLOGY

This bibliographical research consisted on investigating about how to correct common oral learner's mistakes. To carry out this, different steps were followed:

The first step was to select a topic. It was relevant to think about a suitable interest to be investigated. It had to represent a daily problem that required attention to know more about with the purpose to benefit readers. Therefore, the topic was chosen among a variety of topics. It was narrowed and it was decided to focus the research on students' oral mistakes production.

The second step was to search for the literature. Here it was necessary to look for different books, magazines and WebPages that contained information related to the topic under research. There was a wide selection of literature. To discriminate the information reading techniques such as skimming and scanning were used. The importance of the contents were arranged through bibliographic entry cards, notes and maps to keep track of important points to take into account in the investigation.

The third step was to develop the argument. In this step the facts to support the topic were organized in a logical order. Moreover, argumentation was necessary to have valid reasons for the research to be interesting to the readers. Having the arguments, they were evaluated until the most relevant were found. They worked as evidences of the effective sources to be used for the investigation in order to establish the correct order of the warrant.

The fourth step was to survey the literature. Here the outline was prepared to start shaping the work. To elaborate the outline an organized pattern had to be followed. In the first stage the data had to be assembled to draw an information map according to its importance. The second stage the information was synthesized allowing the evidence to be present based on the relevance

of the scholars' contributions. Finally, in the third stage the patterns of the data were analyzed to study the logical connection of the information gathered.

The fifth step was to critique the literature. At this point, the literature had to be interrelated to know how the topic under research defines the intention that the researchers wanted to project. Besides, it had to present additional entries to support the existent theories with the purpose of solving the research problem.

The sixth step was to write the review. When all the information was ready, it was possible to start writing the report. Through constant revision, auditing and editing the paper had to be refined until having the final report. It pretended to present a well based investigation easy to understand for readers.

VII. Recommendations

❖ It is important to carry out this kind of researches because they help us to reinforce our knowledge about the teaching learning process and at the same time to improve our teaching methodology.

❖ Advisors should unify the evaluation of criteria to provide better tutoring sessions.

❖ It is necessary that the new coordinator of the graduation process and the advisors set clear rules from the beginning of it to avoid inconveniences for under graduate students and themselves.

❖ It will be useful that all of the teachers of the Foreign Language Department from the University of El Salvador get involved in the graduation process to support not only the students in this process but also the advisors.

❖ The head of the Foreign Language Department from the University of El Salvador must take an active role in the graduation process and support all of the ones that are involved in it.

VIII. Bibliography

Books

Corder, S. P. 1981. *Error analysis and Interlanguage*. Oxford University Press.

Elis, Rod. 1997. *Second language acquisition*. Oxford University Press.

Harmer Jeremy. 2007. How to teach English. Pearson education Longman.

HUANG Cheng-fu. 2003. Error corrections strategies to spoken English. *Journal of Guangxi College of Education*, (5).

Norrish, J. 1983. *Language learners and their errors*. Macmillan Press.

Richard, J. C. 1974. *Error analysis: Respective on second language acquisition*. London: Longman.

Web sites

Teachers' corner. 12 January 2002 . UsingEnglish.com. 7 December 2008
<http://www.usingenglish.com/articles/why-doesnt-my-teacher-correct-all-my-mistakes-when-am-speaking.html>

 Learners' mistakes. 26 February 1999. Mistakes and speaking comprehension. 10 December 2008 <http://www.anglisci.pl/interviews/errors-mistakes-and-speaking-comprehension.html >

 About.com. English as a second language. 26 August. 2007. Why correction is necessary. 5 December 2008 <http://esl.about.com/od/esleflteachingtechnique/i/i_correction_2.htm

Moure Orlando. Common English mistakes. January 1999. Om mistakes. 7 December 2008
<http://www.ompersonal.com.ar/ommistake/contenidotematico.htm>

ESL glossary. 19 May 2006. Glossary. 5 December 2008
http://bogglesworldesl.com/glossary.htm