

**UNIVERSITY OF EL SALVADOR
SCHOOL OF ARTS AND SOCIAL SCIENCES
FOREIGN LANGUAGES DEPARTMENT**



GRADUATION WORK

**“HOW SPEAKING CORRECTION TECHNIQUES AFFECT THE
LEARNING PROCESS OF INTERMEDIATE AND ADVANCED
ENGLISH STUDENTS IN THE FOREIGN LANGUAGES DEPARTMENT
OF THE UNIVERSITY OF EL SALVADOR ”**

**TO OBTAIN THE DEGREE OF:
LICENCIATURA EN IDIOMA INGLES, OPCION ENSEÑANZA**

PRESENTED BY:

**ROSA DEL CARMEN ALFARO MELENDEZ
ANA MIRIAM CASTRO LOPEZ
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ADVISOR:

**M.a.T. JOSE RICARDO GAMERO ORTIZ
NOVEMBER, FRIDAY 30TH, 2007**

SAN SALVADOR, EL SALVADOR, CENTRO AMERICA

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NOVEMBER, FRIDAY 16TH, 2007**

SAN SALVADOR, EL SALVADOR, CENTRO AMERICA

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Acknowledgement

First of all, I thank my Faithful and Truly God who always helps me and teaches me that nothing is impossible for Him. He always hears and answers my prayers and gives me the desires of my heart. All the glory and honor and my success is
for Him

I am thankful to my parents Ramiro Castro Flores and Tita López de Castro and my aunt Vilma Castro Flores for their unconditional love and help. On the other hand, I thank my sister and brothers for their special care of me during this
process.

I am sincerely thankful to MAT. José Ricardo Gamero Ortíz who gave us academic advice that helped me to learn a lot. Also to MtI. Pedro Antonio Salazar Murcia who was my teacher and was the coordinator of graduation work. Thank you for giving me good knowledge about my career.

Thanks to all people that directly or indirectly helped me to accomplish this magnum dream.

ANA MIRIAM CASTRO LOPEZ

I dedicate this work to:

My Lord, Jesus Christ, the almighty and lovely God who has given me the support and all that I needed toward the graduation process and during my life. Thanks God for let me acquire wisdom and patience in every hard moment of this process, this effort is for you.

My parents, Rigoberto and Rosa de Cruz for being truthful and for helping me during my lifetime. Aunt Carmen, for her comprehension and support.

My daughter, Andrea Rebeca for being the reason of all the sacrifice I do. You are a gift from God.

My group, thanks for letting me be part of this project. Ana Miriam, I pray God gives you all what your heart desires and needs always thanks for being my friend...

Doménica Maeda, my friend and spiritual guide who has left a trace in my life. Our advisors, a million thanks.

ROSA ALFARO MELENDEZ

I dedicate this work to:

God

For giving me life, health, strength in every time and for helping me to accomplish this stage of my life.

My Parents

Francisco Antonio Rodríguez and Teresa de Rodríguez because they have been my inspiration and motivation to go forward. Thanks for your unconditional love, sacrifice and support in my life.

My Brothers and Sister

For being at my side during this work but with especial gratitude to Geovanny and Xiomara who encouraged me to go and never let me down. Thanks for helping me to reach this goal.

My Adviser

MT. José Ricardo Gamero Ortíz for his suggestions, advice, patience and time sharing with us during this work.

All my teachers

For sharing with me their knowledge and helping me to become a professional

To my friend Marisela Gómez.

For providing us with didactic material and for helping the group at anytime. Thanks a lot for everyones.

MONICA MARIA EUGENIA RODRIGUEZ AMAYA



The English language as a lingua franca is a necessary tool nowadays in any field; but to learn English is not as simple as it seems to be. Since it is learned by a process in which English comes into contact with the learners' mother tongue, it causes a confusion which provokes mistakes in a learner's use of English. Mistakes are products of the learner's effort to produce language despite prior knowledge (Simon Mumford and Steve Darn 2005). These mistakes can be at the level of listening, speaking and writing. Julian Edge (1989) suggests that mistakes can be divided into three categories: slips (mistakes which students can correct themselves once the mistakes have been pointed out to them), errors (mistakes which they can not correct themselves and which therefore need explanation), and attempts (that is when a student tries to say something but s/he does not know yet the correct way of saying it).

Besides the mistakes aforementioned, teachers must know the importance of correction. If students are not corrected during their learning process they can fossilize and drag those mistakes to Intermediate and Advanced English levels. Mistake correction plays a useful role in order to avoid incorrectness or fossilization in their target language acquisition experience. Another trouble that students face in their learning process is interlanguage, which according to Corder (1978) and Selinker



(1974), characterize it as something that is similar to what is spoken by other language learners, but different from target language norms.

In Selinker's view, interlanguage is an intermediate system located on a continuum stretching from the mother tongue to the target language.

In correcting students, teachers use different techniques which must be related to the kind of activity that students are performing. *In the Foreign Languages Department of the University of El Salvador, the learning process of Intermediate and Advanced English Students is affected in a positive and negative way by the speaking correction techniques applied by teachers in the classroom. It is affected in a positive way when the correction helps students to learn the language avoiding incorrectness or fossilization in the moment in which they are throughout the five central processes to second language acquisition. All this happens because of the tactfulness and politeness in which teachers apply the techniques causing the effects of thankfulness, gratefulness and satisfaction on the students. On the other hand, it is affected in a negative way when teacher's correction causes the locking of students' participation, missing classes, getting resentment, low grades, less participation, getting embarrassed, ashamed, frustrated, shy, afraid and nervous affecting students' self-esteem.*

One positive way in which speaking correction techniques affects the students' learning process is when students avoid incorrectness or fossilization.



In the English teaching field it is necessary that teachers use different techniques at the moment to correct students' mistakes to help them avoid a future fossilization. Selinker (1974) says that fossilization is a system that is governed by its own rules and that very rarely becomes totally congruent with the system of the second language, unless language acquisition begins very early in life. For Intermediate and Advanced English teachers of the Foreign Languages Department, fossilization is a serious problem because students tend to keep the rules from their first language in the second language acquisition. At these levels it is quite difficult to eradicate this problem, in spite of the amount of explanation that pupils receive. As an example, the common pronunciation mistakes that early learners commit with the regular past verbs: They say "watched" as it is read, instead of pronouncing the last -ed as a /t/ sound.

According to Corder(1978), the fossilizable mistakes in students are due to the way in which they learned the target language in their first levels. It is required to know the consequences that carry out the teaching process in a second language classroom. In these cases teachers have to pay more attention to the mistakes that students make during an oral task; otherwise, fossilization can be habitual for learners.



It means that teachers must work on those mistakes that students have fossilized to help them have an effective learning process.

In the Foreign Languages Department, some Intermediate and Advanced English students expressed that they need to be corrected and preferred consistent correction for avoiding incorrectness in the process of the language acquisition.

Students' learning process is affected positively when students learn the language throughout the five central processes to language acquisition with the application of the speaking correction techniques.

Many of the mistakes made by second language learners are systematic, which means that every language learner has to face a process that is mentioned in Selinker's theory (1974). According to him, there are five central processes to second language learning and acquisition.

1. Language Transfer, or Interference from mother tongue.
2. Transfer-of-Training, or errors due to the nature of the language learning materials and approaches themselves.
3. Strategies of Second Language Learning, or mistakes due to their own approach to the material to be learned.



4. Strategies of Second Language Communication, or mistakes due to the way in which the learner attempts to communicate with native speakers in a natural language-use situations.

5. Overgeneralization of Target Language Material, or mistakes due to the way in which the learner restructures and organizes linguistic material.

The first process is Interference. This mistake can be found at the level of pronunciation, morphology, syntax, vocabulary or meaning. These mistakes occur when the students use strategies such as literal translation, language switch, appeal for assistance and mime. For example: They translate “balon” for “balloon”.

Ana Carolina Ramos Alfaro, César Augusto Guzmán Martínez, Francisco Antonio Rodríguez Argueta and Rolando Guzmán Martínez teachers of the Foreign Languages Department said that most of the speaking problems that students face during the language learning process are in pronunciation and word order. They expressed that some students did not pronounce the letter –s at the end of the words and they confused the stress of the syllables record (noun) and record (verb).



The second process is Transfer of Training. Some fossilizable mistakes may be due to the nature of the learning materials or procedures used in formal second language learning. For instance, Selinker cites the example of Serbo-Croatian speakers who learned English from a textbook in which the third-person singular was almost always presented in the masculine form “he”, as a result the students used to say sentences like “He is my sister”.

The third process is Strategies of Second Language Learning. These are attempts to develop competence in the language, and it may include a procedure such as appealing for assistance from native speakers or teachers. According to Rolando Guzmán Martínez when students asked him for information, they usually ask “How do you say...?”, “Is that correct?” or “How can I say...?”

The fourth process is Strategies of Second Language Communication. It is when learners attempt to negotiate meaning with native speakers in authentic language-use situations. There is a Typology of Communication Strategies which is divided in three categories:

1. Paraphrase.
2. Transfer.
3. Avoidance.

The Paraphrase category is sub-divided into three strategies:



1. Approximation. It is the use of a single target language vocabulary item or structure, which the learner knows that is not correct, but which shares enough semantic features in common with the desired item to satisfy the speaker (e.g., “pipe” for “water pipe”).

2. Word coinage. The learner makes up a new word in order to communicate a desired concept (e.g., “airball” for “balloon”).

3. Circumlocution. The learner describes the characteristics or elements of the object or action instead of using the appropriate TL structure (“She is, uh, smoking something. I don’t know what its name is. That’s, uh, Persian, and we use it in Turkey a lot”).

The second category is Transfer, which is sub-divided into four strategies:

1. Literal translation. The learner translates word for word from the native language (e.g., “He invites him to drink” for “They toast one another”).

2. Language switch. The learner uses the NL term without bothering to translate (e.g., “warm” for “caterpillar”).

3. Appeal for assistance. The learner asks for the correct term or structure (e.g., “What is this?”).

4. Mime. The learner uses nonverbal strategies in place of a meaning (e.g., clapping one’s hand to illustrate applause).

The last category is Avoidance. This is sub-divided into two strategies:



1. Topic avoidance. It occurs when the learner simply does not talk about concepts of which the vocabulary or other meaning is not known.
2. Message abandonment. It occurs when the learner begins to talk about a concept but is unable to continue due to the lack of meaning structure, and stops in mid-utterance.

Even though it is expected that Advanced English students speak the English language better than those in Intermediate levels, Francisco Antonio Rodriguez Argueta, an Advanced English teacher, expressed that his students still made the same mistakes when they were speaking. They did not handle the language as well as it should be.

The fifth process is Overgeneralization of Target Language Material. In this process mistakes derived from overgeneralization result when a previously available strategy or rule is used in new situations where that rule does not apply. For example, many ESL students do not add an –s to the third-person singular verb form in the present tense, over generalizing the use of the form without –s in the remaining person.

Speaking correction techniques affect the students' learning process positively due to the tactful and polite way in which teachers apply them causing the effects of thankfulness, gratefulness and satisfaction on the students.



Among the most common oral correction techniques used in the Foreign Languages Department of the University of El Salvador can be mentioned: Pinpointing, Statement and Question, Repeating, Gestures, Cuing, Providing Your Own Answer, Peer-Correction, Direct Correction, Getting It Right, and Recording Mistakes. According to Walz (1982), the techniques mentioned above are classified in three categories:

- a) Self correction with teacher's help
- b) Peer-correction
- c) Teacher-correction

The first category, about Self correction with teacher's help, includes several techniques:

The first one is Pin- pointing: Teachers pinpoint the error without providing the correct form by repeating the student's response up to the point at which the error is made, hesitating, and exaggerating the last word a little with a rising intonation.

For example: S: I go school.
 T: I go...
 S: I go to school.



In the Foreign Languages Department of the University of El Salvador, Intermediate and Advanced Students said this technique is frequently used by teachers in classes, and it helps students to avoid getting low self-esteem when they are put in the spot. Ricardo Garay Salinas expressed that if the students make the same mistake over and over, he corrects them; but if the mistake is not so frequent he does not. While other teachers as Francisco Antonio Rodriguez, César Augusto Guzmán and Ana Carolina Ramos Alfaro said that they also correct the students, but it depends on the activity that the learners are performing. These teachers said that, if they are evaluating a speaking task, they do not correct pupils a lot because they prefer not to interrupt the students' flow.

The second technique is Statement and Question. In this technique students can appreciate some common questions and phrases like “That’s not quite right” , “Do people think that’s correct?”. The Statement and Question technique was not commonly applied by the teachers in Intermediate and Advanced English levels in the Foreign Languages Department. Although, Francisco Antonio Rodríguez Argueta and Rolando Guzmán Martínez Advanced English teachers used it.

The third technique is Repeating. The student is asked to repeat what he/she has said, perhaps by saying “Again?”, which coupled with intonation and expression will indicate that something is not clear.



Example:

S: She watch T.V.

T: Say it again, please.

S: She watches T.V.

Intermediate English teachers really applied the repeating technique but the Advanced level teachers applied it less. It means that the technique influences Intermediate students learning process in a positive way. Students expressed they learn more and feel more comfortable when the teacher does not correct directly.

The fourth technique is Gestures. In this technique, teachers use hand gestures to indicate the use of the wrong tense. When teachers know their classes well, a simple facial expression or a gesture (for example a wobbling hand), may be enough to indicate that something is wrong. Teachers must be very tactful in the way to apply this technique; otherwise depending students' personality they can be easily offended and hurt with a mocking expression.

Example:

S: I have goed to the beach twice this year.

T: I...have ... (he made a gesture)

S: Ah... ah...I have gone to the beach twice this year.



Rolando Guzmán Martínez said: “Well, in some cases I make some funny faces like telling them... something is wrong, by using gestures”.

Ricardo Garay Salinas said that sometimes he dramatizes a lot. For example when he is teaching the alphabet, the students get some problems. They say for example a, b, c, d, and then “e” but they say “i” in Spanish. In this case he does something like oh.. ah.. what?... are you... say...ing? “I” or “e”. He claimed that sometimes it works sometimes it doesn’t”.

The fifth technique is Cuing. The teacher provides some options for the incorrect or missing element, as in an oral multiple choice. Example:

T: When did you come to this part of the United States?

S: I...I... (Student hesitates over the verb form)

T: Come, came, have come...

S: I came last year...

Cuing is one of the most used techniques by the Foreign Languages Department teachers due to the positive effects that it causes on the students when teachers give students the choices. So, students can use the right answer to correct the mistake by themselves. Intermediate students expressed that teachers applied the Cuing technique in their classrooms, and Advanced students agreed.



The sixth technique is Providing Your Own Answer. The Teachers cue the students by providing their own answer to the questions, supplying a model.

E.g. Teacher: Where did you go on your vacation?

Student: I... Uh... (Student hesitates over the verb form)

Teacher: I went to the beach this summer. What about you?

Student: Oh! I went to an amusement park with my friends.

This is a frequent technique used in both levels and it is because students feel better and less stressed. This is a way that teachers use in order to give confidence to students' participations and it increases good learning process according to students' points of view of Intermediate and Advanced English levels.

The second category is Peer-Correction: It is when students are able to provide feedback for their peers. This technique was used in both levels to correct mistakes and both levels had the same frequency because Peer Correction can be applied at any level. The application of this technique is essential for getting good results in the learning process of English language students; moreover, it helps students to feel free and relaxed when other classmates correct their mistakes. This technique can not be useful when students do not have the appropriate knowledge.



Francisco Antonio Rodríguez Argueta said that it is a useful technique because the mistakes produced by a number of students can be corrected by themselves.

The third category is Teacher-Correction.

This technique is Direct-Correction. Teacher can choose to correct students' responses directly by modeling the appropriate form of the utterance.

Example:

S: Flight 309 go to Paris

T: Flight 309 GOES (he emphasizes the wrong word) to Paris.

S: Flight 309 goes to Paris.

One important point about the Direct-Correction technique is that if the mistake is immediately corrected, fossilization can be avoided. However, this technique almost never has positive effects over the students' attitudes. Intermediate and Advanced students did not like teachers to use the Direct-Correction technique. But this technique set better results in the students learning process, because if they are corrected immediately and directly they never forget the correction.

On the other hand, in Jeremy Harmer's theory (1998) it is found that there are two oral correction techniques: Getting It Right and Recording Mistakes.



Getting It Right. If the student is unable to correct herself /himself, or respond to reformulation, the teacher needs to focus on the correct version in more detail and says the correct version emphasizing the part where the problem is.

Example:

S: Mary must to study for the exam.

T: Mary must to study...

S: (student does not respond)

T: Mary must study for the exam.

In spite of the fact that, in the Intermediate levels the technique Getting It Right is more used than in Advanced ones, it helped students to identify where they had made the mistake. In that way, they can improve their second language learning. Cecilia del Carmen Reyes Rojas teacher in charge of Advanced English said: “Well, it depends on the students’ personality because I try to avoid they feel over corrected, and then they won’t participate anymore in the course”. So, the teachers have to take into account that over correcting students causes discomfort, depending on learner characteristics, language-acquisition environment and purposes for language learning Selinker and Lamendella (1979).

The second one is Recording Mistakes. In this technique the teacher acts as an observer, watching, listening and recording to students so that he/she can



give feedback afterwards. Observation allows the teacher to give good feedback to students on how well they have performed, always remembering that teachers want to give positive as well as negative feedback.

The Recording Mistakes technique was hardly ever used in Intermediate and in Advanced English levels. Rolando Guzmán Martínez, an Advanced English teacher, applied it according to the activity he was administering, for example in an oral presentation task. In addition, this technique influences the students in a positive way even if the results are less demanding than the other techniques, according to students' gathered data of Intermediate and Advanced English levels. The Recording Mistake technique is useful because the students do not feel frustrated when they are corrected.

Ricardo Garay Salinas said that he sometimes corrects his students alone because he thinks it is the right way to do it. Cecilia del Carmen Reyes Rojas expressed that she uses to correct the students in front of the class depending on the student's personality, because she has learned to know her students. If the student was strong, she corrected her /him in front of the class, but if the student was sensitive, she corrected her/ him alone.

On the other hand, students' learning process is affected in a negative way when teacher's correction causes the locking of students' participation, missing



classes, getting resentment, low grades, less participation, embarrassment, frustration, afraidness, nervousness; in synthesis, a low self-esteem.

Unfortunately students self-esteem is affected when students are embarrassed in front of their classmates, some teachers are not tactful in order to use the speaking correction techniques or they are not polite in the moment students ask for help. Intermediate and Advanced teachers in the Foreign Languages Department think that it is difficult not only to correct every single mistake, but also to maintain a right attitude at that moment. Teachers expressed that the attitude towards mistake corrections has to vary for each student. It will depend on individuals learners characteristics such as aptitude, motivation, age, personality, and level in which students are. According to Jeremy Harmer (1998) some students do not take the risk to say something if they know that they will make mistake. They feel afraid to participate in class because of the teacher's reactions; however, other students do not pay attention to what the teacher could think. It is known that second language students make mistakes in their interlanguage process.

The way in which Intermediate and Advanced English teachers correct them plays an important role in the student's learning; at that moment, teachers have to take into consideration the characteristics mentioned previously.



According to Selinker (1974), some types of speaking correction techniques are useful to help learners, both to avoid early fossilization and to develop higher levels of competence that will make their interlanguage more acceptable.

In any Foreign Language classroom, oral correction techniques are helpful to have successful learning, but it will depend on when and how these are applied.

Some Intermediate and Advanced English students believe that frequent correction may destroy their confidence and prefer to be allowed to communicate freely without constant intervention from the teacher. Francisco Antonio Rodríguez Argueta, Cecilia del Carmen Reyes Rojas, Rolando Guzmán Martínez and Ricardo Garay Salinas are in agreement with the students who expressed that they do not like to be corrected frequently. Intermediate and Advanced English students expressed that when they are interrupted in every single mistake during an oral task, their oral production is blocked and they feel nervous, anxious, shy, embarrassed, frustrated, uncomfortable and so on. In those situations, teachers have to know and be sure when and how to correct their students; otherwise it can become a complicated situation that affects students' learning process in a negative way.

It is also necessary to mention that overcorrection can arise many problems for the learners because of the frequency and the manner in which they are being corrected.



Simon Munford and Steve Darn (2005) exposed that mistakes are corrected immediately only when the aim of the stage of the lesson is to promote accuracy, particularly during the drilling of the target language and during guided practice. When the aim is fluency delayed correction techniques are required in order not to damage either the flow of the activity or the confidence of the pupils.

Making a combination of all the analysis and the theory gathered from the Intermediate and Advanced English teachers and students of the Foreign Languages Department of the University of El Salvador, can be argued that giving feedback on students' oral mistakes means to improve the learners' speaking ability. It must be given every time that the activity is performed and only when the students require it. For that reason it is necessary the use of the oral correction techniques aforementioned.

Therefore, their use influences the students' learning process in both positive and negative way. But it depends on when, how and which techniques are applied. It is supported that the application of oral correction techniques affects the students in a negative way when they do not want to participate anymore after being corrected by their teachers and their learning process becomes to be locked.

On the other hand, when techniques are applied in the right moment and in the right way it helps the students to get better results in their language learning process. However, the right moment of the application of the oral correction



techniques and the best way to use them is learned through the experience that teachers get in every course.