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Approaches to Error Correction

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Introduction

It has been traditionally supposed that in the classroom situation students will make errors and that teachers will correct them. That is, that one of the teacher's main responsibilities is to correct the learners' errors. Although the teacher's approach to classroom second-language errors has remained remarkably consistent, there has nevertheless been much change in the concepts of language, language learning and teaching methodology during the past several decades. (Chastain 1960, p. 47) In this paper the author describes various aspects of the nature of errors, as well as their causes and possible treatments and also some classroom procedures and preconditions. The author emphasizes the importance of a different teacher's attitude toward language teaching and language learning. Some guidelines are presented for a re-examination of the teacher's approach to errors and error correction.

Historical View

Throughout the period from the 1950's to the 1970's and even continuing into the 1980's, the audiolingual approach to teaching language has been popular in Korea. Language learners are still expected to memorize words, sentences, idioms, sentence patterns, and finally dialogues. Students and teachers alike presume that when the learners have mastered all of the discrete elements, they will be able to communicate accurately. We find in reality that this result is seldom achieved. Although within the audiolingual system, it can be shown that students have mastered a certain number of words or sentences, it can also be shown that the learner forgets what he has learned

quite easily. In general, audiolingual teachers have tended both to overestimate the learner's progress and to regard learner's errors from a somewhat puritanical perspective. Nelson Brooks(1960) considered error to have a relationship to learning resembling that of sin to virtue: "Like sin, error is to be avoided and its influence overcome, but its presence is to be expected." (p. 58) Brooks also suggested an instructional procedure that would help learners produce error-free utterances: "The principal method of avoiding error in language learning is to observe and practice the right model a sufficient number of times; the principal way of overcoming it is to shorten the time lapse between the incorrect response and the presentation once more of the correct model." (p. 58) If the students continued to use the target language incorrectly, it was the teacher's method that should be blamed. Teachers were advised to correct errors immediately. Student participation in the discovery of their own errors was neither required nor even advised, and the responsibility for the correction of discovered errors lay with the teacher. Many teachers never questioned this mechanical approach to errors and error correction despite the heavy burden it placed upon them. Indeed, one of the teacher's aims was to prevent mistakes even from occurring. "Whenever a mistake is made, the teacher should correct it at once and then repeat the correct pattern or the question for the benefit of the entire class." (Hansen and Wilkins 1974, p. xvii)

Structural linguists introduced contrastive analysis to deal with learner errors. They assumed that errors were the result of first language interference. Therefore, teachers who have a systematic knowledge of the differences between the target language and the native language of the learners can teach the language without student error. Later empirical study has shown that, although interference from native language is the major source of phonological error, interference errors are only one of many types found in the lexicon, syntax and morphology. (Burt, 1975)

Communicative Approach

In recent studies of second language teaching, the concepts of language

and language learning have changed. Meaningful communication is increasingly seen as the function of language and thus, in the language class, emphasis has been placed on actual communication in the target language. Communicative quantity has been emphasized over communicative quality and students are no longer discouraged from communicating in spite of formal errors. The communicative approach, then, has produced an increase in the occurrence of error in the classroom and with it an altered understanding of the place of error in language learning. More and more learners' errors are seen as an invaluable and indispensable part of language learning.

The more positive perspective toward second-language error is based on pedagogical research and observation of first-language learning. Parents both expect and accept errors as a natural, developmental part of their child's first language acquisition. Indeed the adult language learner in a foreign country is seldom stigmatized for his errors as long as he communicates without misunderstanding. When second-language learners' errors are criticized or stigmatized in the classroom, the learners are under intense pressure not to make errors in front of the teacher, and this eventually leads to passive participation or reluctant silence on the part of the students. All language learners, both first- and second-language learners, necessarily produce errors when they communicate, just as proficient speakers exhibit numerous performance lapses in actual communicative situations. The second language learners' errors are of importance to the teacher, then, in two ways. First the student's systematic errors can provide useful insights into the process of language acquisition, learning process, and the student's internalized language learning methodology. Studying student errors also has immediate practical applications for second language teaching. (Corder 1973, p. 265).

The most obvious practical use of the analysis of errors is to the teacher. Errors provide feedback, they tell the teacher something about the effectiveness of his teaching materials and his teaching techniques and show him what parts of the syllabus he has been following have been inadequately learned or taught and need further attention. They enable him to decide whether he can move on to the next item on the syllabus or whether he must devote more time to the item he has been working on. This is the day-to-day value of errors. But in terms of broader planning and

with a new group of learners they provide the information for designing a remedial syllabus or a program of reteaching.

According to the communicative approach, there has been a big shift in pedagogical focus from preventing errors to learning from errors, and allowing students to make errors without being humiliated. Meaning is more important than form. Fluency is more encouraged than accuracy in communication class.

Attitudes Toward Errors

Student's attitude toward errors largely depend on the teacher's attitude toward error and its place in language and language teaching methodology. James Moffett(1968, p. 199) explained why the teacher should be patient in correcting learner's errors:

The learner simply plunges into the assignment, uses all his resources, makes errors where he must, and heeds the feedback. In this action-response learning, errors are valuable; they are the essential learning instrument. They are not depised or penalized. Inevitably, the child who is afraid to make mistakes is a retarded learner, no matter what the activity is in question.

In contrast to the exploitation of error is the avoidance of error. The latter works like this: the good and bad ways of carrying out the assignment are arrayed in advance, are pre-taught, then the learner does the assignment, attempting to keep the good and bad ways in mind as he works, next, the teacher evaluates the work according to the criteria that were laid out before the assignment was done. Even if a system of rewards and punishment is not invoked, the learner feels that errors are enemies, not friends I think any learning psychologist would agree that avoiding error is an inferior learning strategy to capitalizing on error. The difference is between looking over your shoulder and looking where you are going. Nobody who intends to learn to do something wants to make mistakes. In that sense, avoidance of error is assumed in the motivatton itself. But if he is allowed to to make mistakes with no other penalty than the failure to achieve his goal, then he knows why they are to be avoided and wants to find out how to correct them. Errors take on a different meaning, they define what is good. Otherwise the learner engages with the

authority and not with the intrinsic issues. It is consequences, not injunctions, that teach.

On the other hand, when the teacher presumes that the language is a perfectible system, he is then about to be quick to correct the learner's errors. He presumes that learner's errors should be prevented, or at least corrected immediately. In general, he opts for the avoidance of learner error.

This teacher finds himself in difficulty with the communicative approach methodology that is becoming increasingly popular. He finds that when communication is the goal, learner's errors do not matter nearly so much. He realizes that the main purpose of language learning is to communicate in the target language orally or in writing. He finds that when the teacher emphasizes communication itself, the students will be more or less completely involved in the communication, and they will be learning the language. That is, after all, the student's main job. Released from authority conflict, he will learn the language more effectively.

Recognition of Errors

When any teaching methodology, as for example, lecturing, provides no opportunity for the students to practice the target language, it is almost impossible for the instructor to recognize errors: what they are, how they occur, or why they have happened. Of course, he will probably recognize them when he corrects the student's examination at the end of the course, but such recognition comes too late to be of benefit to the student's learning. If the instructor is to deal with errors effectively, he must find some way to recognize them in the course of his teaching. Most have found that it is important to collect student errors during class sessions. It follows therefore that the teaching methodology must provide for some learner involvement and participation, if only to provide an opportunity for the instructor to collect and record instances of the learner's errors. It is, thus, self-evident that it is possible to collect learner errors only when the learner is permitted to produce the target language actively and to produce the errors in a

comparatively tension-free atmosphere. In more modern educational terminology, it is only in the learner-centered class that error correction can be effectively realized. It also follows that, if the goal of the course is oral communication, class size will have an important effect upon the teacher's opportunity to observe individual students' performance. Oral communication classes then must be small and the methodology must be centered on the learner. With clear recognition of learner errors, the teacher can plan what to teach and how to modify his teaching materials. It is only when a teacher considers what the student learns more important than what he teaches that the teacher will be able to recognize the learners' errors.

Causes

According to the more traditional teaching methodologies, explanation of errors has been quite simple. That is, students make errors because they do not understand the rules of the language completely. If they master the rules, errors will naturally disappear.

Richards (1974, IX) pointed out that some errors are errors of competence while others are errors of performance. Errors of competence are related to the student's cognitive grasp of the language system, errors of performance involve lapses that occur as a result of trying to generate a message in the target language. Competence errors may, and probably will, result in linguistic errors during performance, but the converse is not true. Errors in performance cannot be attributed to insufficient linguistic knowledge, because there are some other factors which may be involved.

Some competence errors are the direct result of interference from the first language. Contrastive analysis models hypothesized that most errors were caused by interference. However more recent studies show that many competence errors cannot be explained on the the basis of interference from the first language. Interference errors frequently involve word order and sentence construction. (Duskova, 1969) There are also errors arising from the process of learning: these are intralingual and developmental. According to Richards (1974, p. 174), intralingual errors are "those which reflect the

general characteristics of rule learning, such as faulty generalization, incomplete application of rules, and failure to learn conditions under which rules apply." And developmental errors in the English language class "illustrate the learner attempting to build up hypotheses about the English language from his limited experience of it in the classroom or textbook." Different investigators show different conclusions as to the relative frequency of inter-language and intralanguage errors. Tran-Thi-Chau (1975, p. 133) found 51 percent interference errors from the native language, 27 percent intralanguage errors, and a few errors caused by interference from a second foreign language. Dulay and Burt (1974) reported 4.7 percent interference errors and 87.1 percent developmental and intralanguage errors.

Performance errors are faulty language constructions that occur when the learner tries to communicate in the target language in spite of his correct understanding of the grammar of the language. These errors are not made because of the lack of competence; they are likewise common in language production by native speakers. Performance errors are a result of fatigue, confusion, lack of concentration, "a slip of the tongue," but not of ignorance. Second-language learners make performance errors more often than native speakers because of lack of self-confidence, because of trying too hard, and because of learner's perfectionism.

Another significant reason for the occurrence of error is the lack of communicative practice in the target language. The learner has simply not practiced enough to use the target language comfortably and the number of elements which distract and confuse him is markedly larger than those which trouble the native speaker. What the learner needs is more opportunity to communicate in the target language, especially in situations where his primary concern is not the language itself. The learner can improve his own personal competence after acquiring his linguistic competence and communicative competence. The process of reducing the number of performance errors of the second language learner to the level approaching that of the native speaker is one which takes time and practice.

Preconditions

Before the teacher attempts to correct learner errors, he requires some knowledge of various student characteristics, such as:

- 1) Individual differences,
for example, personality type, first language,
cultural background
- 2) Educational history
for example, academic record, previously observed
error patterns, error treatment types perviously used
- 3) Current state
for example, motivation, anxiety level, fatigue, etc.
(Cohen, 1975, p. 416)

Listening to students' errors, the teacher must consider the total context rather than just discrete elements in words or sentences. This requires that the teacher consider the context of the utterance as it exists in the student's mind. Thus, the sentential accuracy of the utterance generated by the student will be less emphasized than the contextual fluency. Even though a few errors occur in the discourse, passages, or communicative activities, those errors can be treated on the whole after carrying out those activities with the students.

In summary then, an important precondition to error correction is the teacher's understanding of the student as a human being with communicative needs larger than mere sentential accuracy. The teacher must note whatever errors he identifies as they relate to the total context of the learner's utterance. This presupposes that the instructor will have devoted some effort to the establishment of a classroom atmosphere that is friendly, non-judgmental, cooperative, and supportive. Inside such an atmosphere, the student can invest his own intelligence and creativity. He will be able to accept the expected frustrations of language learning. The ultimate precondition, then, to a successful approach to error correction is that the student feel himself worthy, successful, and accepted.

Priorities

Burt (1975, p. 49) distinguishes "global" errors, errors affecting the overall sentence organization (*e.g.* wrong order, missing, wrong or misplaced connectors, etc.) from "local" errors, errors affecting only single elements in a sentence (*e.g.* noun and verb inflections, articles, auxiliaries, etc.). She also reports that native speakers will find it more edifficult to understand a foreigner when he makes global errors. As a consequence, she suggests that teachers devote more attention to global errors than to local errors. These global errors, which could be called "communicative errors," often arise from semantic misunderstanding rather than phonological or syntactic misunderstanding. This is a partial explanation for the high level of interest in the study of vocabulary among university students in Korea.

Allwright (1975) thinks that errors that students most frequently make deserve the teacher's correction first, rather than errors which might be classified as exceptional. Johansson (1973) said that exceptional rules should not be emphasized.

The errors most worthy of correction are those which stigmatize the speaker or irritate the listener. Listener irritation can result even when the message is comprehensible. (Johansson 1973, p. 110) Native speakers can be easily irritated by the foreigner's style of speech, the tone of his voice or the register of his speech. These socio-cultural problems of communication, though admittedly difficult to deal with, do deserve the teacher's careful attention.

Stevick (1982, p. 18) suggests the following:

Communicative competence can not come out of mechanical drills... It consists, after all, in knowing what to do with (grammatically correct) sentences in larger contexts. Communicative meaning depends on a much wider range of factors than linguistic meaning does. As you help your students to develop communicative competence, therefore, at least two things must happen: (1) You must provide them with samples of language in use—samples which are long enough to bring in the full range of factors, whether the length of a paragraph or a novel. (2) Your students

must take part imaginatively in what is happening in the sample. You may also (3) discuss with your students the parts that various words and sentences play in the whole.

Leo Jones and C. Von Bayer (1983, 1-7) claimed that "For students to acquire this communicative competence they must learn more than just grammar and vocabulary. They must learn which structures are appropriate to the situation they are in and the people they are with. They must learn to use a range of expressions (some of which they already know, some of which are new) that are commonly used to agree, to complain, to discuss the future, and so on. They must learn to conduct conversations—beginnings, middles, and endings—that are fluent and natural." They continued: "The focus of each lesson should be on understanding functions expressed in a wide variety of ways that the students feel comfortable with. This element of choosing some expressions from a possible range is precisely what fluent speakers of a language do all the time. We know more expressions than we use, and we must always make a quick choice of one expression to use in any given situation." (1983, p. 6) They list the following sentences which are marked with asterisks according to their level of politeness:

- * Hey, I need some change.
- ** Have you got a quarter, by any chance?
- *** You couldn't lend me a dollar, could you?
- **** Would you mind lending me five dollars?
- ***** Could you possibly lend me your typewriter?
- ***** I hope you don't mind my asking, but I wonder if it might be at all possible for you to lend me your car.

The differences in these sentences is a clear indication of the importance of appropriate expressions. Even though a sentence is syntactically correct, there is no guarantee of communicative correctness unless students have been made aware of appropriateness as an important element in each choice of expression which they make. Teachers who correct their students only for syntactical faults may be overlooking far more important communicative problems.

Holly and King (1971) said that only errors common to the whole class were deserving of class time for correction. Teachers need to devise ways to correct idiosyncratic errors without requiring the whole class to attend to them. Teachers can profitably use the time that students are performing group or pair activities for this purpose. Such individual correction of errors can produce a significant decrease in the total class time devoted to negative imperatives.

It has also frequently been advised that the teacher correct only those errors which are relevant to the teaching objective of the current class session. A disorganized conglomeration of errors, no matter how cleverly explained by the teacher, will confuse students and distract them from the main teaching point. It has been said that such hit-and-miss error correction can propagate the errors rather than eradicate them. Therefore errors which are not relevant to the teaching plan of a particular class are generally best ignored.

Procedures

When students produce errors in the course of a class, the teacher can deal with them in several ways. He can ignore them, or handle them directly or encourage self-correction by responding indirectly. In deciding whether to ignore the errors or to correct them, the teacher will consider the relative merits of correcting this particular error at this particular time. He will consider pedagogical reasons, the communicative purposes of the utterance, and the possibility of negative reactions. Once he has decided to correct a certain error, the teacher has a menu of strategies open to him.

Holly and King (1971, p. 496) suggest the following:

1. Rephrasing the question.

Teacher: Why did he come home so late?

Student: Er... (hesitation) He...

Teacher: Why is he so late?

2. Cueing

Student: She has ...there. (with a pause)

Teacher: Work, worked...

Student: Worked. She has worked there.

3. Generating simple sentences.

Teacher: What has the boy just done there?

Student A: He has ...there. (with a pause)

Teacher: What kind of things can he do? He has...

Student A: Played. He has played there. Student

B: He has eaten...there.

Corder (1967) suggests that instead of supplying a correct response, the teacher should just hint at a correct form or supply it indirectly. In that way, the student has the opportunity to hypothesize, make inferences, and learn some strategies. Even a pause can be a pedagogically useful tool. Students need to be given enough time to make correct sentences. Teachers can also ask, "Would you repeat that sentence again?" or "Did you say...?" or "What did he do?" or "I'm sorry, I can't hear you too well." It is important to give the student the encouragement he needs to rethink his sentence in English.

It is important not to interrupt students in the middle of a sentence or conversation, just as a mistake has been made. Rather, teachers should monitor student conversations (especially while moving around the room during group activities) noting some good, and some not so good, ways of expressing oneself. The teacher must refrain from jumping in too soon. Otherwise, the students will become highly dependent upon the teacher, or they will monitor their own production so carefully that it will be unrealistic. Even better than noting of student performance is tape recording of conversations for later student-teacher analysis. Correct expression, tone of voice, grammatical errors, naturalness—all of these can then be treated in the larger context of the conversation. This cooperative effort on the part of teachers and students emphasizes the supportive, non-judgmental aspect of the class.

Traditionally, correction has been mainly the teacher's prerogative. The difficulty of finding enough time for individual correction and the increased respect for the learner, two increasingly significant aspects of modern education, have directed teachers' attention to peer correction. Since this concept

is new to many students (not to mention teachers), a lack of confidence is still evident among many students in correcting their classmates, errors. Yet it can be observed that peer correction is more specific, individual, personal, and timely. More and more, teachers are becoming aware that one of their main roles is teaching students to teach one another.

Conclusion

The teacher's approach to error correction depends on his own personal concept of the theory of language and language learning. Language as a system of communication has been emphasized recently by language teaching theorists. Students learn how to communicate through their involvement in communicative activities of a number of different types, for a number of different situations. There has been much work done on the correction of syntactic error, but the study of communicative error correction is still comparatively undeveloped. It is not an easy task and much work is still needed on procedures for correction within the communicative context, in a supportive atmosphere. The time seems to be ripe for a change of attitude toward learner errors: Errors are not enemies, but friends. Human beings make errors and learn from making errors. Miscommunication will always arise in the language classroom; but, when the teacher utilizes the miscommunication, he will find that more accurate communication can be the result of the creative use of the miscommunication.

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<국문초록>

Approaches to
Error Correction정 동 수
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언어교육 시간에 교수는 가르치고 학생은 그 가르침을 이해하며, 때에 따라 학생이 언어의 오류를 범할때에 교수는 그 오류를 즉시 수정하는 것이 교수의 임무로 전통적으로 간주되어 왔다. 근년에 언어이론과 학습이론은 현저히 발전하였지만, 학생의 언어오류에 대한 교수의 태도와 접근방법은 큰 차이가 없었다.

교수의 오류에 대한 접근 방법은 교수 자신의 언어 이론과 학습 이론에 근거해야 한다. 교수 자신의 언어 이론과 학습 이론은 발전하였지만, 실제 교실 수업에 있어 교수법과 오류의 접근 방법은 예전 그대로 시행되고 있다. 현대 언어 교육의 목적은 의사 소통을 유창하게 하도록 하는데 있다고 본다. 의사 소통이 언어의 목적이라면, 오류의 접근 방법도 언어의 목적과 그 기능에 일치되어야 할 것이다. 모국어나 외국어 습득에 있어 오류는 필요불가결한 요소이며 언어발달 과정의 일부로 인식되어 연구되고 있다. 학생의 언어오류의 발견·분석을 통하여 학생의 언어 습득과정, 진도 및 언어 습득 전략까지도 이해할 수 있게 된다. 의사소통이 언어 교육의 목적이며 강조되어야 할 일이라면 오류를 수정함에 있어서는 언어의 정확성 보다는 언어의 유창성이 고려되어야 할 것이다. 언어 오류의 교정 순위도 교수법적인 이유, 오류의 일반성, 오류의 발견도수 등이 참작되어야 하지만 우선적인 것은 의사 소통에 방해가 되는 요소를 일차적으로 취급하여야 한다. 또한 상대방에게 불쾌한 감정을 일으킬 수 있는 어조, 어구, 태도 등도 중요하게 된다. 문법적인 오류보다는 의사소통과 관계되는 사회언어학적인 요소가 더욱 중요시 되고 있다.

언어오류의 원인은 모국어의 간섭, 습득과정에서 오는 오류, 문법에 대한 이해부족, 언어의 규칙을 잘못 응용하는 등의 원인이 있지만, 학생의 언어사용 체험이 부족하여서 오는 경우가 더 많다고 지적된다. 따라서 오류를 방지하는

데 주력하기 보다는 오류를 시행하면서 언어를 습득하는 환경이 요구된다.

중요한 것은 학생이 언어를 사용하는 시간과 기회에 마련이다. 의사소통은 항상 청자·화자의 인간적인 반응에서만 가능하다. 이 인간적인 반응을 효과적으로 자연스럽게 제공할 수 있는 것은 교수이기 보다는 동료 친구이다. 동료 친구의 교정은 교수의 교정보다 자연적이며 적절한 것이다. 동료가 자연스런 청중이 될 것이므로, 학생 중심의 교수법과 오류를 수정하는 방법이 바람직하다. 이때의 교수의 역할은 학생 스스로가 서로를 가르칠 수 있도록 돕는 일이다. 학생으로 하여금 언어활동을 실시케 하고 이를 교수가 관찰한 다음, 학생과 함께 오류를 연구하는 것은 효과적이다. 오류가 한 문장에서 취급되기 보다는 문맥 속에서 이해 수정되는 것이 학생에게는 유익하다.

결론적으로 언어의 목적이 의사 소통이고, 의사 소통은 의사 소통 함으로써 가능하므로, 언어 사용을 적극 권장하여야 한다. 언어 사용에서 발생하는 오류는 의사소통이 이루어지는 한 주의하여 취급되어야 한다. 오류를 취급할 때에는 학생에 대한 이해, 그 당시의 심리적 여건, 학생의 성격 등 상황이 고려되어야 한다. 이와 같은 오류 연구는 새로운 것이며 앞으로 계속 연구되어야 한다.