How does implicit or explicit oral feedback affect student willingness to communicate in the classroom?

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Abstract

There are many types of oral corrective feedback and knowing which type is most effective in the classroom is a question that has puzzled Second Language Acquisition theorists for a long time. I propose to use action research to study the relationship between type of oral feedback and student willingness to communicate (WTC). I aim to see whether implicit oral corrective feedback or explicit oral corrective feedback has a positive or negative correlation in regards to student WTC in the classroom. I will investigate this question through my teaching in an advanced ESL course at the Salinas Adult School during my practicum teaching. I will count the number of times I give each type of oral corrective feedback to the students. In addition, I will ask students to answer a questionnaire at the end of each class. The questionnaire will ask students to answer questions in the form of a Likert scale in regards to their WTC in the classroom. These two sets of quantitative data (frequency data and interval data) will be interpreted using Pearson’s R. I will then see if there is a correlation between the amount and type of oral corrective feedback given to the students and their WTC in the classroom (as answered in the 1-9 Likert scale). Ultimately, I will use both quantitative and qualitative data, as I will be conducting interviews with the students as to gain a better understanding of their responses to the questionnaires. The goal of my interpretation of both types of data is to see whether or not the type of oral corrective feedback impacts student WTC in the classroom.

Key words: oral corrective feedback, Second Language Acquisition, willingness to communicate, Likert scale
Introduction

There seems to be an ongoing debate among language educators and researchers as to which type of oral corrective feedback is most effective in the language-learning classroom. Effective in what way? For the purpose of this study, I am examining how the type of oral corrective feedback, implicit or explicit, affects student willingness to communicate (WTC) in the classroom, i.e., the probability of speaking when free to do so. For students who are self-conscious about their language skills, one could hypothesize that this type of student might prefer to receive implicit oral corrections, such as recasts, so that their mistakes are not made obvious which could lower their WTC. For other language learners, who might be more outgoing or less self-conscious when it comes to making mistakes in the language classroom, explicit oral corrections might be preferred; once the student understands the mistake they have made and understands how to correct themselves, they might be more willing to communicate in the classroom. As an educator, my goal is for my students to feel comfortable and for them to be willing to communicate in the classroom as much as possible. I believe that interacting in the target language and creating opportunities for students to negotiate for meaning are the most effective ways for students to learn a language. Therefore, I would like to know if giving more implicit or explicit corrections through oral feedback affects my students’ willingness to participate in the classroom. Other teachers, specifically of languages, can utilize this study as a guideline for giving corrections to students by tailoring their corrections properly for their learners’ needs.

My two research questions are the following:

1. Is there a statistically significant correlation between the frequency of implicit corrections
given through oral feedback and student willingness to communicate, as measured by a self-report questionnaire?

2. Is there a statistically significant correlation between the frequency of explicit corrections given through oral feedback and student willingness to communicate, as measured by a self-report questionnaire?

My hypothesis is that there will be a statistically significant (positive) correlation between the frequency of implicit oral corrections and student willingness to communicate, i.e., implicit oral feedback will result in higher willingness to communicate.

**Literature Review**

*Types of Feedback*

For the purpose of this action research study, I will be comparing implicit corrections in oral feedback and explicit corrections in oral feedback. I will be using Mitchell, Myles, and Marsden’s (2013) definition of explicit feedback as “the learner is clearly told they have made an error and a correct reformulation is provided” (p. 169). Guided the definition of explicit feedback stated above, I have constructed a definition for implicit feedback, as “the student is not explicitly told that they have made an error, and is somehow prompted by the teacher to restate their original utterance.”

There is a significant amount of research in research in regards to types of feedback (especially recasts) and their impact on learner uptake in the L2 classroom. Lyster and Ranta (1997) conducted a study in four French immersion classrooms in Canada and documented the five most common types of feedback given by teachers. The most common types of feedback include explicit feedback and four types of implicit oral feedback including reformulations,
recast, clarification requests, elicitation, and repetition. Mitchell et al., (2013) offer the following definitions for explicit feedback and four types of implicit feedback

Explicit correction: Learner is clearly told they have made an error, and a correct reformulation is provided.
Recast: Teacher reformulates all of part of a student utterance, minus the error.
Clarification request: Learner is asked to clarify their meaning (without any indication of the presence of an error)
Elicitation: The learner is prompted to reformulate their utterance.
Repetition: The teacher repeats the learner utterance, including any error(s) (p. 169)

In Long’s (1996) article about the role of the linguistic environment in second language acquisition, he states that implicit feedback through reformulations is productive because it can help learners to notice the gap between their own productions and the target forms. As I will explain in my procedures section, I will be using action research to see how different types of implicit oral corrections and explicit oral correction affect student WTC in the language classroom.

Gaps in Research

There appears to be an abundance of research in regards to student motivation in an L2 environment (numerous studies by Dörnyei) as well as studies of anxiety and confidence in relation to WTC (Alemi, M., Daftarifard, P., & Pashmforoosh, R. (2011). Peng (2012) conducted a study in which he tried to measure WTC among Chinese students who were learning English. In a study similar to this one, Peng uses a scale that measures students’ WTC outside of the classroom in everyday life contexts, not in the classroom. Weaver (2009) writes about the trends in research (especially in Canada and Japan) on WTC and confirms that most research focuses on communicative anxiety and self-perceived communicative confidence. Within Weaver’s article, he speaks about Wen and Clement’s (2003) study examining the relationship between students’ desire to communicate and their WTC within the context of an ESL
classroom. Their studies showed that WTC is very complicated and comes from a variety of factors including personality and affective factors. While Wen and Clement’s (2003) study is very informative and does examine WTC in the English-learning classroom, there are no answers as to how feedback affects WTC.

While there is a lot of research available as to effective ways to give feedback, student motivation in the language classroom, and some studies on WTC, there is not much in the current literature on how different types of feedback correlate to student WTC in the L2 classroom.

Willingness to Communicate, Language Anxiety, and Motivation

MacIntyre (2007) defines willingness to communicate (WTC) as “the probability of speaking when free to do so” (p. 564); I will be using this definition as my central tenet for research. When we focus on WTC, we can look at certain factors that might “promote or inhibit L2 communication” (p. 564). In terms of inhibiting L2 communication, language educators and researchers are aware that some students experience language anxiety, i.e., “the worry and usually negative emotional reaction aroused when learning or using an L2” (p. 565). It is impossible to talk about WTC and language anxiety without mentioning motivation, especially because WTC “integrates motivational processes with communication competencies and perceived self-confidence” (p. 567).

Motivation is a very complex construct, but perhaps we can gain some further insight into the construct by learning what a truly motivated student is through Gardner (1985)’s description. He describes such a student as one who shows a desire to learn the language as well as puts in a strong effort to learn the language. When discussing motivation, especially in the language-learning context, it is especially important to talk about integrative motivation, or the desire to
somehow integrate into the target language community. Unfortunately, there are many times when a student may have a combination of high motivation and high anxiety that results in an unwillingness to communicate. Many language educators and researchers are curious as to whether implicit or explicit oral feedback increases or decreases language anxiety, whether it increases or decreases motivation, and finally, how it affects student WTC. Gardner makes a very important point in that much research on WTC involves the idea of motivation, specifically instrumental motivation, the idea that students might be more willing to communicate with different people for different reasons.

Willingness to Communicate Model

There is a pyramid model (MacIntyre, Clement, Dörnyei, & Noels, 1998) that helps to explain the willingness to communicate concept. There are six layers in the model (Appendix A): social and individual context, affective-cognitive context, motivational propensities, situated antecedents, behavioral intention, and communication behavior. At Layer III, there is an established desire to communicate as well as a “state of self-confidence” (MacIntyre, p. 568). This is the point where the language learner has the choice to speak or not. Layer II, behavioral intention, is the point in time where the language learner must make the decision as to whether or not they will engage in L2 communication. They may have thoughts such as, “Am I willing to initiate communication, or am I choosing to remain silent?” (p. 568). MacIntyre asserts,

WTC is a state of readiness occurring in the present moment. Its immediate influences are a state of self-confidence (defined by low anxiety and a perception of L2 competence) and a desire to communicate with a specific person. This conceptualization suggests that the initiation of communication is a matter of choice, a decision to be made at a particular moment. Choosing to communicate in the L2 is an act of volition (p. 569).

Motivational Feedback

In conjunction with Gardner’s definition of what it means to be a truly motivated student,
Dörnyei (2001) talks about the teacher’s role in providing appropriate feedback, which he believes is an “essential ingredient of learning” (p.123), which will help students to feel motivated in the classroom. Ford (1992) coined the “Feedback Principle” which states that people cannot make progress if they do not receive relevant feedback (p. 210). Dörnyei says, “it is the feedback you give your students in class or in their written papers that has the most salient role in bringing about changes in their learning behaviors” (p. 122). He warns that not every type of feedback is effective and cautions that some types of feedback can actually be counter-productive. In this study, I aim to examine the effectiveness of immediate oral feedback (either implicit or explicit) in regards to WTC. Dörnyei says, “Feedback that is promptly made available is far more effective than delayed feedback because…the learner has an ‘on-line’ awareness of his/her progress” (p. 124). Dörnyei believes that feedback can be motivational if the teacher is encouraging and praising which helps to promote student self-confidence. It is possible that motivational feedback will be present in my oral feedback to students, though it is not the focal point of my research.

Methods

Participants

The participants of this study will be me (the researcher) and adult students who are currently enrolled in the Salinas Adult School’s Academic Job Skills program; they are taking an English as a Second Language course as a requirement for their program. I am a graduate student of TESOL (Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages) at the Monterey Institute of International Studies and am in my third and final semester of the program. I have access to the students at the Salinas Adult School because I will be student teaching part of their Advanced English course as part of my Practicum experience; I will assist in teaching these students for at
least ten teaching hours. The majority of students are native Spanish speakers and are immigrants to the United States. As of yet, I do not have a formal breakdown of the number of students in the class, their ages, or their genders, nor specific information of their language capabilities. All students will be assigned either pseudonyms or random identification numbers so that they can remain anonymous.

Materials

Each lesson will include either implicit oral corrective feedback or explicit oral corrective feedback; a tally of how many and what kind of corrections will be kept for each class. Because this might be difficult to do during the class time itself, each lesson will be audio recorded. Students will be administered a (voluntary) final questionnaire (Appendix B) at the end of my teaching time which will help me to determine whether or not there is a correlation between type of oral corrective feedback and WTC in the classroom.

Procedure

I plan to use Action Research as my research tradition. Action research is often referred to as a self-reflective practice but Nunan and Bailey (2009) believe that there are key differences between action research and reflective teaching. As they point out, reflective teaching can happen at any point; action research is more of an ongoing cycle. They define action research as:

A systematic, iterative process of (1) identifying an issue, problem, or puzzle we wish to investigate in our own context; (2) thinking and planning an appropriate action to address that concern; (3) carrying out the action, (4) observing the apparent outcomes of the action, (5) reflecting on the outcomes and on other possibilities; and (6) repeating these steps again. (p. 226)
I chose action research because I know that it is meant to lead to change and improvement within the classroom. Testing out various types of oral feedback and seeing how they impact my students’ willingness to participate will need to be repeated multiple times, like a cycle. There will be 4-5 cycles as I have 10 separate teaching hours of class time. After evaluating the results of my action research study, I can see which type of feedback leads to improved levels of WTC in the classroom.

I plan on “mixing up” my oral corrective feedback in the classroom between implicit oral corrections and explicit oral corrections. The plan is to alternate days of strictly implicit oral corrective feedback and strictly explicit oral corrective feedback, and then to continue the pattern to complete a cycle of 4-5 alternations. I realize that there will be moments when I unintentionally give either implicit or explicit oral feedback; this means that I will need to keep count of the number of times I give each feedback in class.

In order to gain an understanding as to how implicit versus explicit feedback affects WTC in the classroom, I will give a questionnaire in the form of a Likert scale (which has numbers [1-9] to measure the student feedback) to all of the students in the classroom at the end of all of the cycles. I am using a Likert scale as they are commonly used to measure people’s attitudes towards a series of statements. Turner (1993) warns, “When questionnaires are presented in a language that respondents are engaged in learning, limitations in their language ability may prevent them from responding in a manner that accurately reflects their true opinion or attitude” (p. 736) and suggests the possibility of translating the questionnaire. While my students are supposed to be in the advanced level, I understand that I might have to translate the questionnaire if I do not feel that they can accurately answer the questions.
Students will be presented with mini conversations that are made-up interactions between a student and a teaching giving either implicit or explicit oral feedback. They will then be asked to respond as to whether the mini conversation makes them “extremely unwilling” (to communicate in the classroom) ranging up towards “extremely willing” (to communicate in the classroom). There will be (2) mini conversations for each type of implicit corrective feedback resulting in 8 mini conversations for students to rate. In conjunction, there will be 8 mini conversations of explicit corrective feedback for students to react to. It is important that the Likert scale range from 1-9 as the points are equidistant; this makes the Likert scale data interval data.

The questionnaire will be used to measure students’ WTC after they have received all of the cycles of the two forms of feedback. I am choosing to administer the questionnaire to everyone as students who did not receive feedback may also have benefited from (or been affected by) what they heard, and their WTC in the classroom could be affected. As Nunan and Bailey warn, “the challenge for survey researches is to design questionnaires that capture the information they wish to elicit without unduly shaping that information” (p. 126). I have decided to wait until the end of the 4-5 cycles to administer the Likert scale questionnaire, as conducting cycles are critical to doing action research.

Finally, interviews (Appendix B) will be conducted to truly tie together the data gained from the frequency data and the information from the after lesson after cycle questionnaires. Students will be interviewed as to why they chose specific numbers on the Likert scale and will be asked to expand upon their reasoning. They will be asked questions such as, “Why did statement #7 make you more willing to communicate than statement #10? How does the language of the two statements affect your willingness to communicate?”
Analyses

In regards to combining qualitative and quantitative data, Dörnyei (2007) offers the definition of a mixed methods design as a study that “involves the collection or analysis of both qualitative and quantitative data in a single study with some attempts to integrate the two approaches at one or more stages of the research process” (p. 163). My analysis involves quantitative data (frequency data as well as Likert scale data) and qualitative data from my after lesson questionnaires and interviews.

I will be using Pearson’s R to analyze my data as I am doing a correlation of the frequency of how many implicit or explicit oral feedback corrections I made and the Likert scale questionnaire data.

In addition to keeping track of the frequency and the Likert scale questionnaires, I will also be conducting interviews with the students, which I believe will help me to further analyze the data collected from the questionnaires. I am choosing to use a questionnaire in addition to the Likert scale because “the questionnaire embodies the attitudes, beliefs, and practices that you wish to document by administering it to your respondents” (Nunan and Bailey, 2009, p. 130). If I notice anything interesting in the data from my questionnaires, such as a correlation between gender and WTC, I can then do a post-hoc comparison.
References


Appendix A
The Pyramid Model of Willingness to Communicate

Appendix B
Likert Scale Questionnaire

Today’s Date:
Your gender:
Your name (optional):

Thank you for taking the time to complete this questionnaire. Please answer every question.

Willingness to communicate is defined as “the probability of speaking when free to do so.” (MacIntyre)

You will be presented with 16 mini-conversations involving a teacher-student interaction. Please read each interaction and rate how willing to communicate you would feel after experiencing such an interaction. Please answer by circling the appropriate number on the scale of 1-9 with 1 being “very unwilling to communicate” to 9 being “very willing to communicate” as to how willing to communicate you would feel after experiencing such an interaction.

1.
Student 1: That movie was very funny!
Student 2: Yes, I am agree.
Teacher: It is not “I am agree”, but “I agree.”

2.
Student 1: Why does he call her yesterday?
Teacher: Pardon?
Student 1: Why did he call her yesterday?

3.
Student: He eat a lot of pizza.
Teacher: He eat a lot of pizza?
Student: He eats a lot of pizza.
4. 
Student 1: What are you doing, Carlos?
Student 2: I make homework.
Teacher: We do not use the verb “make” with homework; instead we use the verb “to do.”

5. 
Student 1: I read much books every summer.
Teacher: Sorry?
Student 1: I read many books every summer.

6. 
Teacher: How old are you, Luisa?
Student (Luisa): I have 24 years.
Teacher: We don’t use the verb “to have” with age; we use a form of the verb “to be.”

7. 
Teacher: Michael, when were you born?
Student: I was born in September 21.
Teacher: Not “in” September 21, we use “on” when talking about days of the week.

8. 
Teacher: Is Michael here?
Student (David): Yes, is here.
Teacher: Remember David, you need to use a personal pronoun. Yes, he is here.
9.
Student 1: A long time ago, I live in a very big city.
Teacher: A long time ago, I…
Student 1: A long time ago, I lived in a very big city.

10.
Teacher: What does your son like to do?
Student: He play football.
Teacher: He plays football. Remember to add an ‘s’ to third person singular.

11.
Teacher: What does your cat look like?
Student: He is big and furry and has eyes blue.
Teacher: He is big and furry and has blue eyes.

12.
Student 1: He bought a new car because he have a lot of money.
Teacher: He bought a new car because he …
Student 1: Has a lot of money.
13. Teacher: How long have you been working on your project? 
Student: I have been working since 2 hours. 
Teacher: You mean you have been working for 2 hours. We use since when expressing a specific beginning point in time.

14. *Students are practicing asking questions* 
Student 1: Was the restaurant good. 
Student 2: Yes, it was. Did you went to that party? 
Teacher: Did you go to that party?

15. Student: There is a lot of garbages in the hallways. 
Teacher: You mean there is a lot of garbage. You don’t need to add “es” to the end of garbage to make it plural.

16. Teacher: What did you do yesterday afternoon? 
Student: I get my hair cut yesterday.
Teacher: I get my hair cut yesterday? 
Student: I got my hair cut yesterday.

Appendix C
Possible Interview Questions

I believe that as the class and oral feedback correction cycle progresses, I will think of new questions.

1. Why were you more/less willing to communicate for #5 and opposed to #10? (numbers are interchangeable)
2. How do you feel when the teacher explicitly tells you that you have made a mistake?
3. Do you prefer for the teacher to correct your mistakes more subtly (such as numbers 9, 12, and 16) or more explicitly (such as numbers 1, 4, and 6)?
4. What is your ideal way of being corrected by a teacher when you have made a mistake?
Certificate of Completion

The National Institutes of Health (NIH) Office of Extramural Research certifies that Leah Depue successfully completed the NIH Web-based training course "Protecting Human Research Participants".

Date of completion: 10/01/2014

Certification Number: 1575203