

## **Mistakes Approach and Oral Correction in TEFL/TESOL Class at Tertiary Education in Japan**

Senda Mariana Oana

Keisen University, Japan

J.F.Oberlin University, College of Liberal Arts, Japan

Classroom instruction is an area of study that elicits interest among scholars. Thus, considerable body of research has been dedicated towards investigating corrective feedback within the classroom context (Alkhamash & Gulnaz, 2019). As Katayama (1996) also noted, correcting oral errors when teaching a foreign or a second language is a challenge that both learners and instructors have to confront. Different forms of instruction aid in understanding the value of error correction. Alkhamash and Gulnaz (2019) identified form-focused and meaning-focused categories of instruction. For form-based instruction, corrective feedback becomes the primary concern where the focus is on pronunciation, accuracy, tone, voice, grammar and other aspects related to the learning of languages. In the case of the meaning-focused form, the interest is on the learning of vocabulary (Alkhamash and Gulnaz, 2019). Accordingly, instructors concentrate on meaning and communication. In view of the two categories, the latter form of learning permits more mistakes without learners being corrected. Regardless of the focus of instruction, past research such as the one Alkhamash and Gulnaz (2019) conducted established that teacher-awareness is important as it helps in deciding on the right moment to intervene. In view of the above, it is relevant to investigate the mistakes approach and oral correction in TEFL/TESOL classroom in the Japanese tertiary learning context. Evidence suggests that in the pursuit of effectiveness in learning within the Japanese context, along with a high degree of professionalism, teachers should demonstrate consideration of the personality of individual students, understanding of the learner's preferences, and focus on the goal of the assessment to select the appropriate strategies that enhance the leaning of English as a foreign language.

## **Japanese Context**

The learning setting influences both language learners and instructors. Alkhamash and Gulnaz (2019) highlighted that cultural factors such as communication patterns affect the way individuals learn. Consequently, teachers need cultural awareness to understand when to correct errors or allow learners to make mistakes. In this regard, correction is viewed as a teaching art that should be executed expertly (Katayama, 1996). Such knowledge is crucial since it influences learners' motivations to continue learning. Within the Japanese environment, young adults and adults comprise the vast majority of learners in tertiary institutions (Katayama, 1996). These groups of people prefer correction as an indicator of their learning and source of motivation (Katayama, 1996). Hence, teachers should demonstrate a high level of cultural awareness when instructing English learners.

Disparities in contextual factors demand differences in approaches to teaching English language. Katayama (1996) highlighted that within the Japanese tertiary learning context, there is no emphasis on using English as the communication or study language. Consequently, instructors should adopt the mistakes correction approach to guide learners who are likely to experience difficulty in learning English vocabulary due to lack of practice beyond the classroom environment.

## **Mistakes Approach Rationale**

Teachers should take responsibility of the mistakes correction process by guiding their students during lessons. In this regard, the instructors should create awareness about the committed errors and their solutions (Harmer, 2001). In addition, teachers need to encourage learners to practice speaking because it contributes to learning progress. Thus, instructors should utilize their knowledge to help students to advance their oral challenges.

Young adults who comprise the majority of students at tertiary level exhibit peculiar learning characteristics. According

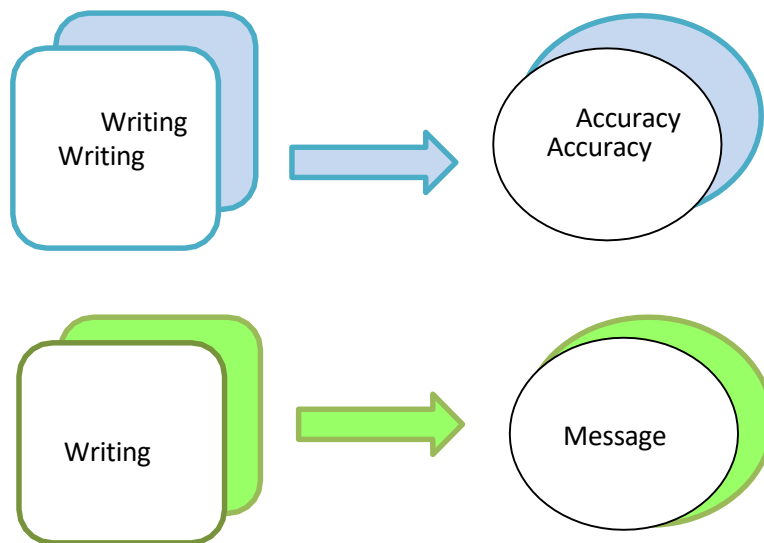
to Alkhamash and Gulnaz (2019), the learners prefer teachers to highlight all their mistakes explicitly (p. 42). The corrective feedback should take a positive approach to encourage students to participate in successive lessons. Moreover, feedback strategically frees students to share their concerns thus enabling teachers to understand how to address their challenges more effectively (Fang et al., 2018). Although adopting general approaches to handling challenges involved in giving student feedback seems plausible, teachers should consider the personality of individual students. Such knowledge is critical towards tailoring the feedback to meet personal needs and encouraging learners.

Despite differing standpoints, mistake correction during oral language lessons is deemed important. According to Ur (2016), the correction of errors helps students in the learning process although there is a need for understanding the appropriate scenarios or situations to correct learners. Hence, teachers should settle on a fitting approach to employ in the exercise.

The correction of language mistakes should target both writing and speech. Whereas writing assessments focus on accuracy, oral exercises target the conveyance of messages (Ur, 2016). However, in some instances, teachers confuse the goal of their assessment by focusing on the message rather than the accuracy of presentation (Ur, 2016). Although learners support the approach, instructors should exercise restraint and identify the right goal and make appropriate corrections. As Figure 1 exhibits, the nature of a lesson dictates its focus. For instance, during writing lessons, teachers should emphasize accuracy while during speech classes, they should target the conveyance of the message. Accordingly, instructors should differentiate the goal of an assessment before deciding on the approach to use. Although eliminating mistakes completely is impossible, their commission does not imply failure. Overall, instructors need to align corrections with the type of lesson.

**Figure 1**

*Focus of Correction*



*Note.* Adapted from Penny Ur's *100 teaching tips: Cambridge handbook for language teachers*, by P. Ur, 2016, Cambridge University Press.

An emergent theme borders on the right time to correct a student. Correcting a student in the middle of their speech is viewed as being negative (Ur, 2016). Similarly, ignoring a mistake during speech would exacerbate the issue as students fail to note the concern. The problem is compounded by the issue that some learners prefer being interrupted and corrected immediately instead of waiting (Ur, 2016). However, the preference does not apply to all learners. Given the variances, teachers encounter insurmountable challenges because they are expected to make correction decisions instantaneously. In view of the above, instructors should reinforce their awareness about learners' preferences and follow them in order to enhance the possibility of attaining encouraging results.

In correcting mistakes, teachers should consider the overall learning aim as it may impact the focus of their assessment. As Table 1 illustrates, there are several areas on which teachers focus while assessing students' oral responses. One of the goals of correcting mistakes is to draw the attention of learners to the correct answers (Ur, 2016). In this regard, the teacher should also compliment them on good behavior as a

way of encouraging contributors (Ur, 2016). In addition, reference to positive student work is viewed as a way of reinforcing constructive contributions towards the learning process. Students' knowledge that their teacher would comment about mistakes and correct their answers motivates learners to perform better (Ur, 2016). Thus, mistake corrections should focus on aspects that target the motivation of learners.

**Table 1**

*Teacher's Correction Guide*

Area	Grammar	Phrases/words	Pronouncing	Adequacy
Notes				

*Note.* Table 1 highlights areas that teachers should explore while correcting learners. Adapted from *The practice of English teaching*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition, by J. Harmer, 2001, Pearson Education ESL.

The stage of a lesson and related factors also influence teachers' decisions on correcting mistakes. While reflecting on the challenge of guiding learners, Harmer (2001) noted that identifying the appropriate time to interject is challenging during oral assessments. To overcome the concern, Harmer (2001) recommended teachers to consider the stage of the lesson, the nature of the mistake, the activity being undertaken, and the personality of the particular learner who has made the error. Hence, addressing critical factors is necessary before teachers make corrections and consider further action to enhance learning.

Accuracy and fluency are important considerations for instructors making language corrections. Harmer (2001) contended that teachers should know whether an activity being undertaken demands complete or average accuracy. For instance, in grammar lessons during pronunciation, fluency might be demanded. A key aspect is to differentiate between communicative and non-communicative tasks (Harmer, 2001). Hence, teachers should consider improving one's language fluency and overall correctness.

Contestations about the frequency of correction present another challenging concern for teachers. For instance, Harmer (2001) noted that engaging in numerous interruptions to correct learners is counterproductive. Yet sometimes teachers feel guilty for letting students proceed without corrective feedback. Consequently, correcting errors raises concerns for teachers despite their efforts. Having considered research in the field, Harmer (2001) highlighted that during communicative exercises, instructors should give learners the opportunity to present their points without interrupting them because of grammatical mistakes. Thus, teachers need to exercise restraint to avoid pressuring learners because doing so can hinder the knowledge acquisition process among students.

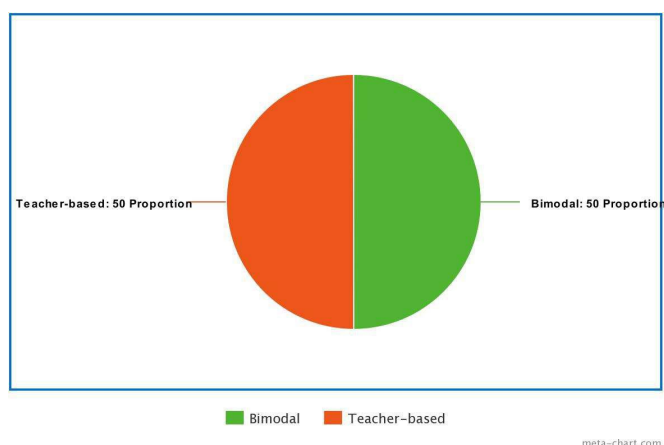
In view of the nature of language learning, communication problems should not hinder the fundamental objective of knowledge transfer. Harmer (2001) supported the idea that a student needs more than vocabulary to communicate their points. Nonetheless, teachers should offer alternative ways of expression to enrich student's capacity to communicate. As Harmer (2001) observed, sometimes interventions are necessary although they might yield undesired results. Such possibilities complicate the issue of correction because teachers become confused regarding intervening and the effect of their interjections.

Various methods are available for teachers seeking to eliminate language incorrectness. In an effort to show the problem, a teacher may use repetition, echoing, statement and question, expression, hinting and reformulation (Harmer, 2001). Regarding repetition, a teacher should ask a student to repeat what they said in a manner suggesting that something is unclear (Harmer, 2001). Secondly, echoing entails pinpointing the mistake to draw the attention of the student to the mistake made (Harmer, 2001). Concerning hinting, instructors provide clues to students on addressing a task (Harmer, 2001). Finally, regarding reformulation, instructors repeat the student's statement but correct any mistakes (Harmer, 2001). Evidently, the strategies help teachers to correct their students without discouraging them.

Research within the Japanese context has considered the impact of oral and written feedback in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) university context. For instance, Hirose (2012) carried out a classroom investigation based on peer feedback among students. Through the investigative sessions, the researchers encouraged learners to exchange ideas on improving their mastery of the English language. As Chart 1 shows, both bimodal and teacher-based approaches are applicable to correcting language mistakes. Hirose (2012) established that students held positive perceptions about bimodal peer feedback. Nonetheless, the instruction approach failed to have a significant effect on the ability of students to write and speak the English language. Despite the findings, the author concluded that written-plus-spoken peer feedback can improve student motivation towards learning English. Hence, in spite of its little impact, teachers should adopt the strategy as a way of enhancing the classroom environment.

### Chart 1

Feedback Modes



*Note.* From “Written feedback and oral interaction: How bimodal peer feedback affects EFL Japanese students,” K. Hirose, 2012, *The Journal of Asia TEFL*, 9(3), 1-26.

## Conclusion

Learning English as a second language remains challenging

across many environments. The problem affects the Japanese tertiary system largely because of contextual factors, differences in student preferences, and lack of clarity on the best teaching approach. Evidence suggest that teachers should identify student needs, decide on the right moment to correct, and provide feedback in a motivational manner. Instructors need attentiveness to pick the right moments apart from presenting corrections in a constructive manner. Based on research drawn from the Japanese context, students held positive perceptions about bimodal peer feedback. Hence, teachers should also allow students to correct one another. Instructors should demonstrate a great level of professional awareness to secure positive results in the application of the mistakes approach and oral correction measures in TEFL/TESOL in tertiary learning institutions in Japan.

## References

- Alkhamash, R., & Gulnaz, F. (2019). Oral corrective feedback techniques: An investigation of the EFL teachers' beliefs and practices at Taif University. *Arab World English Journal*, 10(2), 40-54.  
<https://dx.doi.org/10.24093/awej/vol10no2.4>
- Fang, W. C., Cassim, F. A. K., Hsu, C. N., & Chen, N. S. (2018). Effects of reciprocal peer feedback on EFL learners' communication strategy use and oral communication performance. *Smart Learning Environments*, 5(11), 1-16.  
<https://doi.org/10.1186/s40561-018-0061-2>
- Harmer, J. (2001). *The practice of English teaching* (3<sup>rd</sup> ed.). Pearson Education ESL.
- Hirose, K. (2012). Written feedback and oral interaction: How bimodal peer feedback affects EFL Japanese students. *The Journal of Asia TEFL*, 9(3), 1-26.
- Katayama, A. (1996). Correction of classroom oral errors: Preferences among university students of English in Japan. *Dissertations and Theses, Paper 5282*.  
<https://doi.org/10.15760/etd.7155>
- Ur, P. (2016). *Penny Ur's 100 teaching tips: Cambridge*



*handbook for language teachers.* Cambridge University Press.