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An Overview of Error Correction: Cultural Dimensions and Techniques

Kathleen Carty
School for International Training

Joseph Reilly
School for International Training

AN OVERVIEW OF ERROR CORRECTION: CULTURAL DIMENSIONS AND TECHNIQUES

KATHLEEN CARTY/JOSEPH REILLY

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DATE 10/14/81 PRINCIPAL ADVISER [signature]

PROJECT ADVISER/READER: [signature]

ABSTRACT

In this paper the writers consider the theoretical issues of error correction in the language classroom. The evolution of different philosophies regarding error correction is discussed. This is followed by an overview of some of the assumptions behind language teaching approaches in vogue and implications these assumptions have for handling errors in the classroom. Finally, the paper presents classroom evidence to support the idea that there is a cultural dimension that must be considered in the treatment of learners' errors.

PREFACE

STUDENT: "He go to the store."

TEACHER: "Yes, yes! Excellent."

STUDENT: "He go to the store."

TEACHER: "Careful. 'He....'"

Error correction (EC) has been a part of language teaching for as long as people have been studying other tongues. But only recently has it come into its own as a subject of intense study. Researchers, however, have as much trouble agreeing on terminology (shouldn't we more properly call it "error feedback"?) as they do on virtually every other aspect of error correction. What should be corrected? When? How? By whom? These and related questions are being asked, examined and answered in many different ways today.

We would like this paper to be useful to and read by language teachers. Is there such a thing as "native competency" in teaching? Rather, aren't we all in states of "transitional competency", at a teacher's equivalent of "interlanguage"? One of the themes of this paper is to make teachers aware of the danger of fossilization within a limited range of techniques. That this is a problem has been noted by some researchers (Fanselow, Holley and King).

A contributing factor may be the teacher's identification with any of the major language teaching approaches in vogue. This paper advances the case that the complex issues involved in EC, further compounded by the human element introduced by differing cultural backgrounds of learners, require a wider range of techniques of handling errors than a single approach can offer.

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I. THEORETICAL ISSUES OF ERROR CORRECTION

Mohammed: "How long are you here?"

John: (pause) "How long have I been here?"

Mohammed: "Yes."

The above exchange seems straightforward enough. A student of English as a second language (ESL) asked a question which the native speaker (NS) needed to clarify. Did the second language learner commit an error? It seems he did. Did he know at any point that an error was committed? He may not have. Did the NS correct the error? Yes, by seeking clarification of the time reference of the question, he indicated to the learner that the utterance was time-wise at least, ambiguous. Did the learner know that he was being corrected? Again, he might not have. He may simply have attributed the hesitation of the NS to some ambiguity inherent in English, an ambiguity that may or may not exist in his own language. In the learner's mind, the above exchange may have been no more than a correct, albeit slightly unclear, request for information, followed by a refinement to eliminate any ambiguity. There was no error, no correction perceived.

What is an error? What is meant by error correction? What causes errors? Do they serve any function? Are errors to be allowed? How should they be handled? And the individual learner? Where does he fit in? What part do culture,

language, background and attitudes play in this picture? Far from being straightforward, it will be seen that in second language teaching, opinions about errors and their correction vary widely, sometimes to nearly opposite extremes. These same extremes seem to exist in the realm of the attitudes that learners have towards errors. Despite an interesting survey (Cathcart and Olsen, 1976) which seemed to indicate that students of all nationalities share similar ideas about the need for correction, and preferred techniques for it, classroom evidence indicates that the cultural dimension which can be generalized along national lines, has to be considered by the teacher if he is to reap full linguistic benefits from time and energy spent on learners' errors.

James Hendricksen (1976) defines an error as "a form or structure that a particular teacher deems unacceptable because of its inappropriate use in a given communicative task".[1] H. V. George (1972) similarly acknowledges a need for arbitrariness in the concept of error when he says "...an error is an unwanted form; specifically, a form which a particular course designer or teacher does not want."[2] These writers emphasize a need for flexibility in the concept of "error." The word "error" itself has sometimes been challenged as to its appropriateness in cases where, for example, a student correctly applies all the rules he has learned thus far and yet generates a form which is not standard for the

target language (TL). It is argued that the learner who is following all the rules he knows does not commit an "error" or a "mistake" in the same way that a student who forgets or disregards the rules does. Alternative terms, such as "goof" or "deviation", do not seem to the writers to solve the problem of negative connotation, since these words also have unfavorable connotations to the general reader. Rather than substituting a new term for it, "error" can be used as long as the teacher appreciates the flexibility in the concept. Keeping in mind that very few teachers (native speakers included) teach purely standard English as defined by prescriptive grammarians, the qualified teacher is justified in regarding himself as the standard by which the students' performance can be measured. To put it another way, an error is in the eye of the teacher who beholds it. In the exchange at the beginning of this section, Mohammed's question was clearly an error from John's point of view: the unacceptability of the utterance underscored by the need to rephrase it. Another complicated issue is raised by the notion of correction.

In the past few years objections have surfaced to the use of the term "correction" with regard to the treatment of errors. These objections stem from the idea that "error correction" implies the result desired by the corrector, i.e. the elimination of the error. Teachers know that this is anything but true. Many student errors recur despite

continual and continuous "correction" by the teacher. In addition, there are cases where a teacher, taking his cue from the parents who delightedly acknowledge the accomplishment of baby's one-word sentence by supplying the full form, reacts to the learner's semantically correct but grammatically wrong utterance with an approving nod and the correct grammatical form. The teacher neither requires nor expects the student to repeat the utterance with the grammatical change. Can "correction" be appropriately used here? The more neutral term "feedback" has been proposed as a less ambiguous alternative. While the authors of this paper appreciate the need for precision in terminology, they feel that the vast majority of language teachers, for whom this paper is written, would use the term "error correction" to cover all cases of teacher reaction to learners' mistakes. Therefore, for the purpose of the paper, "error correction" will be used synonymously with "error feedback" to mean the reaction of the teacher to an inappropriate form by the learner.

To return once again to the exchange at the beginning of this section, John did in fact "correct" Mohammed, by his request for clarification of the question. If Mohammed is at the stage in his second language where he can assimilate the correction, he might do so, but whether he does or not, the fact that the rephrasing gives him the opportunity to recognize his mistake and correct it, justifies the use

of the term.

How is it that despite all our experience with language teaching, we have not developed an approach which prevents students' errors before they are spoken? Isn't there any way to avoid errors? At the time when language learning was thought to be a process of forming speech habits, great emphasis was indeed put on the prevention of errors. Alas, to no avail. The dread error quickly developed an immunity to even the audio-lingual approach and reared its ugly head at every opportunity. Along came the cognitive code theory of learning, which says that language learning is a process of formulating hypotheses about the TL, and testing and refining them until the learner is satisfied with his own communication. Errors were now seen to have a positive function in this process, for how could the learner test hypotheses without making mistakes? As Corder (1967) says, a totally correct statement may only be the parroting of a memorized utterance previously heard by the learner[3]. Teachers saw that a learner who was determined to avoid all errors was one who was reluctant to test his hypotheses any further. Encouraging communication became more important than discouraging mistakes. Rather than spend energy trying to prevent mistakes, teachers now see the need to make use of them: understanding where they come from, how they reveal where the learner is in the language-learning process, and what the nature of the mistake reveals about the nature

of the correction to be employed.

And where do errors come from? The Saudi studying English who says, "I listen you"; the Korean who says, "This one is best big"; and the Persian who says, "The book which I bought it", are making mistakes of a common source; interference from the native language (NL). Interference occurs when the learner superimposes the TL on the NL with the assumption that what works for the latter will work for the former.[4] (The positive aspect of this phenomenon, in which the learner successfully transfers a feature of the NL to the TL, is known as transference. Since transference involves no mistakes, it will not concern us here.) Interference was labeled second-language learning's number one enemy by contrastive analysis (CA) in the time of the language-as-habit vogue. The idea behind CA is that a detailed comparison of the NL and the TL will indicate points of correspondence, which the learner should have little difficulty transferring and points of difference that might cause the learner some trouble.

The efforts put forth by CA were noted and appreciated by most teachers, who gratefully accepted these predictions of and explanations for student errors. Naturally enough, since students are individuals, not all these predictions proved true for learners of the same background. And soon, researchers began to notice that there were a great many more inaccurate structures being generated by students that

could not be attributed to interference from their mother tongues. Analysis of these errors eventually led Larry Selinker (1972) to coin a new term: interlanguage. Although Selinker deserves credit for the name of the idea, the idea of the idea had been germinating for some time. Corder (1967) called it "transitional competence".[5] Interlanguage (IL) refers to the separate linguistic system a learner creates in his attempt to produce the TL.[6] To go into detail on how each learner derives an interlanguage is beyond the scope of this paper, but it must be noted that, as the name "transitional competence" implies, IL is a dynamic concept. The learner is forming rules, trying them out for communication effectiveness, adjusting or discarding them, and forming new rules. Along the way, the student makes errors -- inappropriate surface forms stemming from faulty deep structures. CA could not adequately explain the Saudi's "He can goes" or a Japanese student's "I enjoy to study". It was possible, however, by careful observation and analysis of the errors, for teachers and researchers to discover the strategies a learner was using to generate his IL, as well as the development of the learner's IL vis-a-vis the TL. Thus, as the CA star waned, the error analysis (EA) star waxed.

By means of EA researchers have been able to locate the reasons for students' mistakes. Although different people have

enumerated error origins in different ways (Cohen, 1975 and George, 1972) basically, learner errors can be attributed to one of three general causes: interference, interlanguage (both of which have already been discussed), and intra-TL difficulties. (We will not concern ourselves, for the moment, with mistakes that might be caused by carelessness. These can apply to native speakers as well.) Of the three of these, interlanguage is considered to be the root of the greatest number of errors (Scott, 1974 and Cohen, 1975). In fact, it seems necessary to point out here that interlanguage is not a "cause" of student errors, but rather a result of them. It is an approximation of the TL (once it has become identical to the TL, it is no longer an "interlanguage") which results from some lack of knowledge about the TL. It seems possible to subsume the other causes of errors under interlanguage. To illustrate the point, let us look at an example of the third category (intra-TL, in this case, English, difficulties) above. When a learner says, "I enjoy to study", the hypothesis he is testing is something like this: "enjoy" is a verb of feeling, just like "like" and "want"; and in English, verbs of feeling are followed by the infinitive. This learner's IL has not yet incorporated the exceptions to that rule. But, in this case, the fact that "enjoy" cannot be followed by the infinitive stems from the idiosyncratic nature of

English (and languages in general), and the strategy employed by the hapless learner should probably be commended.

An aspect of interlanguage which needs mentioning is the phenomenon of fossilization. This term refers to the congealing of an item, rule, or subsystem of the IL, thereby becoming more or less a permanent feature of it.[7] Fossilization is possibly a function of some aspect of the IL moving from the learner's short-term memory to the long-term, since fossilized items seem so impervious to change. Once an item or structure has become fossilized, it becomes very difficult for the learner to make progress with it. Selinker reports that fossilized items can be corrected out of the IL only to reappear at a later time.[8] Whether or not the learner will be able to get himself out of the fossilized rut seems to depend on intangible factors, such as aptitude, intelligence and motivation. Motivation, in particular would seem to play a key role. The American working for an American company and living overseas in a Western compound will be far less motivated to work on the finer points of a foreign language if he only needs that language for shopping. On the other hand, those who wish to really integrate themselves into another culture are much more willing to invest their time and energy in eliminating the differences between their IL and the TL.

We have thus far been considering what may be called "competence errors". By that we mean errors that are caused

by the learner's imperfect system of internalized rules of the TL and their exceptions, or his application of the rules is somehow faulty. Either way, competence errors are those which could not be corrected by the learner alone. One other kind of mistake can be said to be due to faulty competence: cases where the learner "knows" the rule but consistently fails to apply it. He may regard the correction as unnecessary as long as the form can be understood, or again, relating to motivation, he may feel the effort to be invested in the correction process is just not worth it. By continual use then, the pattern becomes fossilized. Fossilized errors should be considered errors of competence, because of the high probability that the learner will be unable to eliminate them by himself.

Besides competence errors, there are also errors of performance, or as Corder calls them, errors of carelessness.[9] Performance errors are those which students -- and native speakers -- are apt to make through carelessness, yet are able to correct by themselves. They know the rule and they are willing to apply it, but for some reason, perhaps fatigue or indifference, have failed to do so at the moment. Sometimes they repair the utterance immediately, other times it takes a rereading of something written or a rehearing of something spoken. But once aware of the mistake, the learner does not need an outside source to guide his correction.

We have had an overview of errors: where they come from, their function for the learner, and some different kinds. As we approach the problem of correction by the teacher, we will see that the picture shifts a little, that we must change our focus a bit. Should teachers correct learners' errors? In the audio-lingual heyday of language-as-habit, the answer was an unqualified "yes". Bad habits were to be nipped in their erroneous buds. As more and more research in EA revealed, however, most teacher correction had little effect on eliminating errors, and could sometimes be seen to have an inhibiting effect on students' attempts at meaningful communication. Some theorists began to feel that the erroneous zone should be left alone. Most theorists and teachers, however, have staked out a position between these extremes and have chosen to correct certain kinds, but not all, of the errors students make. Shifting our focus, then, let us mention some of the factors to be considered in deciding which error to correct.

Burt and Kiparsky (1972) made a distinction fundamental to this problem when they pointed out that certain errors (they labeled these "global") affected the sentence as a whole, whereas others (called "local") affected only a fraction of the sentence. A global error impaired communication while a local error could be readily understood by an NS. Olsson (1972) also distinguished errors along these lines: her

"semantic" and "syntactic" categories of errors correspond to Burt's "global" and "local".[10]

Almost all theorists agree that global errors, which hinder comprehension, should be dealt with in some manner. This may not be as easy as it sounds, especially since there is a good chance that the teacher was unable to interpret what the student meant.

Having said that global errors should be dealt with, we are left with the problem of what to do with the local errors. Students say they want to be corrected (Cathcart and Olsen, 1976). But can teachers correct everything? Certainly they shouldn't. Such a policy would be uneconomical timewise, and stifling in terms of communication. Nonetheless, certain local errors occur in class which should be given special consideration by the teacher. Among these, high on the list, are errors which are pedagogically relevant to the focus of the lesson. Even minor errors of this type can be corrected with a view towards prevention of possible future problems. Teachers should also keep in mind the studies by Johansson[11] showing that certain student errors, although easily understood, tend to irritate the NS more than others. This kind of stigmatizing error may cause the NS to "turn off and tune out" or to regard the learner as uneducated or lazy. Correction of this type of error, accompanied by an explanation of why the correction is necessary, is generally considered to be appropriate. The

teacher should also weigh the pros and cons of handling high-frequency errors which seem to be headed for fossilization.

In all of the cases just described the teacher must remember that there is a limited amount of class time. That time should not be spent on errors which don't affect a large segment of the class, or on errors whose correction will have a low-probability of success, or on explaining obscure exceptions to rules of much wider applicability.

Despite the cut and dried appearance of the foregoing discussion, the issues are not all black and white. Teachers are individuals and will develop their own answers to the problem of which errors to correct, as they should. Often a student error, even a blatant one, may be the result of a strategy of thinking which the teacher recognizes and wishes to commend. In such a case, the wise teacher may be the one who praises the content and resists the temptation to correct the form.

II. APPROACHES: ROLE OF ERROR CORRECTION

In section one we have looked at what constitutes an error and what is meant by error correction. We have also considered the function and sources of errors, and what some of the considerations we as language teachers need to look at when we correct. In all of this, we have aimed at showing why we feel EC is a valid and necessary part of the learning situation.

Section two begins with an explanation of why there has been a switch from contrastive analysis (CA) to the newly elaborated field of error analysis (EA). The paper then describes the attitudes towards EC that are associated with the latest approaches[12] in language teaching. We will state the assumptions behind these approaches and mention techniques that are in keeping with the theories these approaches are based on.

If we are to trace the emergence of some of the latest approaches, then it is necessary to go back to the audio-lingual approach, which had its actual beginnings during World War II. It was devised so that all four language skills (listening, speaking, reading and writing) would be developed sequentially, with the oral skills being practised extensively before reading and writing were introduced. The approach was seen as a scientific way to learn

languages and considered to be much more valuable for communicative skills than its predecessor, the grammar-translation approach.

In the 1950's the audio-lingual approach was in the vanguard of language teaching. Because it was mainly concerned with oral production, it placed major stress on the empirical analysis of speech data. Errors were part of the data, but because the approach emphasized avoidance of errors, a specialized system developed to predict and account for speaker errors. As mentioned in section one, this was the beginning of contrastive analysis, which is the "detailed comparison and contrast of the language of the learner with the target language".[13]

In the early 1960's, with the emergence of transformational/generative linguistics and the emphasis on cognition, there was a switch in methodology involving EA.

> "...error analysis follows closely the psycholinguistic search for an alternative to the behaviorist's habit formation theory of language acquisition...This alternative involves viewing the learner as one who interacts actively with the new language, developing new hypotheses about the structure of the language he/she is learning as well as modifying and discarding earlier formed ones. The claim is that the systematic errors made by the learner provide evidence for this view."[14]

Some of the assumptions behind the audio-lingual approach are: (a) language is a system of habits and it is learned behavior; (b) the mind is like a blank tablet upon which language is engraved through habit-forming

practices; (c) language is primarily oral; (d) second-language learning is inductive; (e) the emphasis in language learning should be on the forms of the language rather than on meaning; language is looked at as an arrangement of forms and the learner needs to know how to manipulate these forms.[15]

Much of the methodology surrounding this approach is centered around dialogues, pattern practice, and drills. It provided for a teacher-centered classroom: the learners were dependent on him for everything.

In the area of EC the role of the teacher was clearly defined. He was encouraged to eliminate any errors made by students lest the inappropriate forms become habitual. A teacher was expected to step in at any time and edit mistakes. There were many procedures used for this editing process. One of the most common techniques employed was to stop a drill when there was a mistake, model the correct form and have the student repeat until he was able to come as close to the teacher's utterance as possible. Another technique was to have a member of the class, other than the teacher, model or repeat the correct utterance. Each learner was expected to get the pattern correct after a certain amount of repetition and to internalize the linguistic elements that were presented in the drill.

After the audio-lingual approach there was the

cognitive approach. This approach viewed language learning as an activity that involved creative processes rather than just rote memorization. The aim of the approach is to teach language as a system which incorporates grammatical analysis and cognitive exercises.

Errors were still handled through CA. It was only with the recognition that many errors being made by students could not be predicted by CA that researchers began to examine and analyze errors in careful detail.

With the onset of the 70's language teaching entered a new era and eclecticism was viewed as the best way to approach teaching. The emphasis shifted from language to learner, and teachers were encouraged to select techniques that were best suited to meet the individual needs of the learner. The affective side of the learner could no longer be neglected.

> "...in order to bring together the whole person in the learning process...we must basically restructure our approach."[16]

This is exactly what Charles A. Curran did when he developed the counseling-learning (CL) approach to education. In this approach, learning is viewed as a unified, personal and social experience for both teacher and learner.

It provides the learner with a feeling of self-worth. No longer is the learner in isolation or in competition with others, but rather he learns in and through the

community he has become a part of. The physical, emotional, intellectual and voluntary functions are still integrated in learning. CL is self-invested learning. Self-investment results in a kind of retention and personal fulfillment rather than just something memorized or informational.[17] There is little place for rule-followed behavior in this type of approach.

In the CL approach, the learning process is broken down into five stages: "(1) embryonic stage: close feeling of dependence on the part of the learner; (2) self-assertion: student begins to experiment (no correction because hostility may result); (3) birth: the learner gets help whenever he/she stumbles if he/she requests it; (4) adolescent /reversal: the learner is secure in the target language; (5) independent: the learner basically functions alone." EC can be included in stages four and five because the learner is in a position to handle intervention from the teacher.[18]

The assumptions upon which this approach is based are numerous, but there are certain underlying factors that must be present if optimal learning is to take place. Security is the fundamental element: people learn best in an atmosphere in which they can feel personally secure. Once we are secure, we enter the learning situation with an open and free attitude. Through trust we can allow

ourselves to be propelled into the realm of the unknown and not be hindered by fear of failure or judgment by others. "Security becomes a foundation upon which all other elements are based."[19]

There needs to be a strict balance between new information and familiar material. This balance is like a fine cutting edge that must be gauged accurately so that the learner does not escape from self-engagement. Learner self-assertion must also be allowed to manifest itself. There might also be resistance to knowledge, in which case the adult learner might feel self-conscious and fearful of errors, thereby failing to participate.

Another assumption that CL holds to be an important part of the learning situation is quiet or reflective time. A learner needs time to internalize or absorb what is studied in order for retention to take place. A final factor to be considered within the learning situation is to know whether or not the student has grasped the importance of accurate discrimination in sounds, meaning and grammatical usage. Without this ability, a student may reach a point of artificial competence in which he assumes that something has already been mastered when, in fact, it has not.[20]

How do these assumptions translate on the technique level in regard to EC? It is clear that teachers who identify with the assumptions behind CL would at stages four and five of the learning process provide correction. This would

only be done at the request of the learner and rarely at the earlier stages of learning.

It must be emphasized here that all correction should be given in a non-threatening way by the use of the "understanding response".[21] Later on in the learning situation there might be opportunities for EC to be provided by someone else in the community. This can take place when the teacher passes out of the all-knowing phase. It is safe to say that EC would not be actively put in operation until a learner had clearly passed into stage four or five.

A technique that might be used for EC is to have the teacher stand behind the learner and, at his request, repeat a sentence or pattern until the learner feels that he has understood where the problem is. The teacher is to allow the learner to decide when and if the error has in fact, been corrected. The teacher avoids the nagging, punitive aspects of the parent role. "In free conversation, transactions are adult-adult, with corrections being made in the manner one might use in supplying a word to a native-speaking friend who had momentarily forgotten it".[22]

> "...abstracted, intellectualized correction does not provide the adult language learner with a 'know-feel' learning situation. The adult learner should be allowed to struggle toward the target language, just as a small child does when learning to communicate in the native language. A direct correction can be considered to be a rude interference in adult awareness and it robs the learner of his/her own identity. As a result, it can produce anger and hostility."[23]

Slightly before CL surfaced as an approach to language teaching, another approach appeared. This was the Silent Way, which was developed by Caleb Gattegno. It is based on fundamental assumptions about teaching and it attempts to lead students to language production and inductive insights about the linguistic patterns of the TL. Some of Gattegno's assumptions about teaching and learning are:

> "We are retaining systems and do not need to stress memorization as much as most teachers do...Students must relate to the new language and practise it to make it their own;...Teachers must be concerned with what the students are doing with themselves rather than with the language, which is the student's concern...The ability to repeat immediately what a speaker has uttered is no proof of retention. Hearing something said several times does not guarantee retention...Not all learning takes place here and now; some may well be the outcome of sleeping on it. It is possible to notice differences between what one says or thinks and what others say or think, but only when one works on oneself do changes happen... Awareness demands of the teacher that they know what to do at every moment, facility demands of the students that they give themselves to the tasks and practice them... It is the students' need for facility that imposes silence upon the teacher."[24]

In the Silent Way, the learner develops an inner criterion of correctness. It is considered wrong to correct students immediately instead of giving them the chance to work out the problem by themselves because each student is capable of correcting his own errors.

> "...if self-correction is required in any case, whether the teacher acts as a model or not, it seems sensible to use it deliberately. Self-correction assumes self-awareness and it is awareness that is educable...Each student brings with him his capacity of becoming aware of his functionings and proves this by correcting himself."[25]

"Students are engaged in a constant series of trial and error approximations to the language."[26]

The Silent Way requires that a learner come to utilize himself fully and strive in every way to achieve personal objectives.

> "Errors are corrected by the learner, who uses for this purpose the system that he/she has already built inside him/herself. They are not corrected by outsiders--a teacher or parent can only bring to the attention of the learner the fact that a difference exists between what he says and what is said by those around him. This information then becomes for the learner a new limit, challenge or aggression from outside. The learner must decide, as with any new aggression, whether and how to work with it."[27]

Although Gattegno believes that correction comes from within the individual learner, it is part of the teacher's concern to indicate to a student if a response is wrong and then the student knows further work on the word or phrase is needed. If the teacher thinks it is necessary he might actually show the student where the additional attention should be placed. For example, the Silent Way makes use of color-coded charts, which give all possible orthographic manifestations of phonemes both for instructional and EC

purposes. Teachers may indicate problems by using a pointer to tap out correct sounds on the color charts and they may even have a student come up to the chart and tap out the sounds individually, if there is a problem with pronunciation. There is no repetition for the purpose of habit formation in the absence of meaning, but repetition may be used as a technique for correcting errors. Many times the teacher can depend on the other learners to help with correction because students frequently learn from each other.

The Silent Way rejects any idea that might try to protect a student from making a mistake. Errors are a built-in part of the language acquisition process, and each learner will work through his own errors given the right space and time factor.

The basic difference in the handling of errors between a Silent Way teacher and others is that (1) there is very little positive feedback in the sense of telling the student that the response is "right" or good; (2) the teacher's reaction to mistakes is matter-of-fact and students are made to feel that the wrong response is not being corrected but is being accepted and worked with; and (3) the teacher learns the students at the same time the students learn the language.[28] It must be remembered that this approach is called the Silent Way because of the necessity, as Gattegno

sees it, for silence on the part of the teacher. A complex system of hand and head gestures replaces many of the verbalisms used in other approaches. The teacher's silence allows the students the space they need for generating the TL.

As language teachers continue to pursue humanistic approaches to learning, another rather avant-garde theory must be considered. Suggestopedia (Suggestology) is an approach which originated in Bulgaria under the direction of physician and psychotherapist Georgi Lozanov. It was developed in the early 60's and has gained a lot of attention in other areas of training.[29] It is an instructor-based classroom instructional technology borrowing from traditional instructional methodology, relaxation techniques, Zen breathing, music therapy and spaced repetition.[30] The authority of the teacher is a key factor for the success of this approach.

Instruction under the Lozanov approach consists of three phases: (1) presentation of new material in the TL; (2) review of previously learned material; and (3) relaxation cycle, which consists of an active portion emphasizing concentration on an external object (such as a printed text) and the passive portion where the learner tries to concentrate on the music rather than the material.[31]

"...Lozanov believes we are all capable of accumulating cognitive information faster, more easily, more directly

and with greater precision than has been traditionally assumed. Each of us has worked out a set of defence mechanisms -- perceptual screens, really -- which protect us from the 'blooming buzz' of the unscreened environment".[32]

Lozanov further states that we have anti-suggestive barriers inside each of us that prevent us from mastering anything we might attempt to learn. We need to overcome these barriers, and language teachers can assist us in this by taking these barriers into account when designing lessons. They can bring instruction into harmony with these barriers.[33]

At the momentthere is not enough meaningful research surrounding Suggestology, least of all in the area of error correction. It seems, though, that because the authority of the teacher is such a vital part of the process, perhaps some type of direct feedback might be given to the learner in the way of correction.

III. ANECDOTES: WHO? WHY? WHAT? WHEN? HOW?

The problems and issues associated with errors and their treatment, which were examined in section one, and the language teaching philosophies put forth in section two must now be looked at in relation to each other. We must see if any single approach from section two can fit together with the issues raised in section one, to form a harmonious whole. The purpose of section three, then, is to examine the writers' experiences as teachers and see if there isn't a socio-cultural dimension to EC that must be considered by the teacher, a dimension which is minimized as an issue both in EC literature and in some of the latest teaching approaches.

To organize this section, it will be divided into five parts under question word headings. Part I is Who: that is, who the students are that the writers are dealing with. Part II is Why: why were these learners chosen to be looked at? The third part, What, refers back to the concepts introduced in the first section of the paper: what kinds of error should be corrected and what should be allowed to pass? Part IV answers the question, "When should errors be dealt with?" How the writers handle errors in the classroom is the subject of Part V. The approach to these

questions is anecdotal; based on the trial and error of classroom experience.

PART I: WHO?

Who are the learners to be looked at? The two broad groups the authors would like to examine are Middle Eastern and Far Eastern students. The authors' experience with Middle Easterners includes four years of teaching in Saudi Arabia, four years of Iranians in classes in the English Language Services Institute in the United States, a semester with Algerians in Algeria, and a good deal of contact with other Middle Eastern nationalities (Kuwaitis, Qataris, Libyans) in mixed classes in the USA.

As for experience with Far Easterners, the writers spent three years as English teachers in South Korea. In the US, they have taught ESL courses to homogeneous groups of Japanese and to mixed classes containing various other Southeast Asian nationals. It is their very different experiences interacting with these two groups of learners that account for the evolution of their EC techniques. The anecdotes that will be mentioned will lend credibility to the techniques that will be presented.

PART II: WHY?

The authors have decided to focus attention on error correction techniques with Middle Easterners and Far Easterners for two reasons: (a) personal experiences with these

groups have enabled the writers to examine how culture plays a significant role in the language learning process of these groups, and (b) the differences in culture between these groups are distinct enough for the writers to make some broad-based generalizations concerning EC techniques that teachers could employ when working with nationals from these groups. These two diversified groups illustrate the fact that cultural attitudes must be taken into consideration when correcting errors.

As we begin to look at some of the cultural variances between the groups, the reader is reminded that these impressions are strictly personal and therefore, somewhat limited. The contexts of all situations cited must likewise be kept in mind. The writers realize that individualism prevails in all situations, especially in classrooms, and that perceptions of others' cultural characteristics can be stereotyping at its worst. In spite of this, it is essential to this paper to make specific references to the most obvious cultural traits that the writers and other researchers as well have come to ascribe to these groups.

One of the fundamental cultural differences between a Middle Easterner and a Far Easterner is the way in which they protect their self-esteem or pride in a learning situation. For the Far Eastern student, "face-saving" strategies are of a non-confrontational nature. If, for example, a Korean

or a Japanese student omits a definite article when speaking and a teacher points out the mistake, rarely will the student overtly challenge the teacher's correction. The student might question the validity of the correction, but it will be done in private.

A Middle Easterner, however, employs "face-saving" strategies that are of a confrontational nature.[34] In an exercise in which the students had to complete a set of sentences by adding an adverb of frequency, a Saudi student in the writer's class completed the sentence "I tell a lie" as follows: "I never tell a lie". When questioned about the probability of a person never telling a lie, the student insisted he never did. Regardless of the possible differences between the English "never" and the Arabic translation, the incident illustrates the unwillingness of that Saudi (in that situation, at least) to admit fallibility.

In line with the non-confrontational attitude of a Korean or a Japanese, these students also employ avoidance tactics to get around a particular element of the TL that they might be feeling insecure about. An example of this tactic was noticed by one researcher with Japanese students "avoiding" the use of relative clauses in compositions.[35] Rather than make a mistake with the clause the students were apparently choosing to use two distinct sentences to get the idea across. This, of course, circumvented the problem. Teachers need to be aware of this and not assume that

the student has simply chosen an alternative form. Many times this avoidance illustrates a lack of competence on the part of the learner.

Middle Easterners on the other hand, seldom use avoidance tactics.[36] They tend to be over-confident and unafraid to experiment with any new form of the language. Many times, this type of student has not fully mastered the new material but a strong self-assurance enables him to attempt it anyway. Verbal accuracy is not as important to the Middle Eastern student as it is to a Korean or a Japanese.[37]

There seems to be an overall difference in temperament between the two groups. The Koreans and Japanese tend to be much more reserved and unobtrusive in a classroom situation whereas, the Saudis or Iranians are usually gregarious and oftentimes even assertive. In the earliest stages of language learning, a Far Eastern student demonstrates steadfast patience which enables him to function well while seeking to understand the new information that is being put forth. These learners have a need for accuracy and continuity when learning English and most of them approach the learning process in a very systematized way.

For the Saudi or Iranian continuity is not always an essential element in the overall process. These students can function more easily in a less structured situation. They don't have as great a need for accuracy as other

students and they are more at ease with ambiguities.

Although both groups clamor for direct, immediate correction from the teacher,[38] the cultural elements underlying this are very different. Many times an Arab student asks for correction because he believes that this is good form, and it is what the teacher expects. In actual fact, they tend to reject a lot of negative feedback as simply the concerns of an over-zealous teacher. This perhaps stems from the situation with Arabic, called diglossia.[39] Diglossia is the existence of two forms of one language operating in a society: an everyday language used by the people for ordinary conversation, and a highly codified formal version used by the media or in literary circles. The language of everyday use is believed to have no "grammar". Transferring this concept to English, many Arab students tend to feel that emphasizing grammatical accuracy in spoken language is unnecessary. Diglossia in Arabic may also account for another positive quality most teachers note in Arab students: their ability to handle a high level of ambiguity when engaged in conversation.

These are only a few of the cultural differences the authors have noted and worked with. There are others that could be cited but here the concern is with those that have been of consequence in the classroom.

PART III: WHAT?

To come to grips with what kinds of error to correct, various factors must be kept in mind. Besides linguistic considerations, which will be discussed in a moment, there are the cultural characteristics mentioned above. It did not take long for the authors to realize that the reserved Koreans and Japanese prefer the security of an accurate utterance to the fluency of a possibly inaccurate one. Saudis, on the other hand, with an NL background which is verbally extroverted, value fluency above other language skills. The following exchange (between friends who happened to meet on the street) was related by a Korean student of low-intermediate level. Carefully constructing the sentences as he spoke, he said, "I met Mr. Kim on Chilsong Street by accident. 'Where are you going?' I asked. 'To the bank,' he replied." The precision and care with which the student spoke, traits rarely exhibited by the more exuberant Middle Easterners, should be commended, and the "error" of a wrong register ignored, at least for a while. In a case such as this, certainly correction from the teacher would have an inhibiting effect and should be postponed until the student demonstrates by increased fluency, the confidence to generate this kind of simple exchange more rapidly.

Arab students seem to delight in being extremely verbal. Even at the early stages of learning they develop a

fluency that easily surpasses their Far Eastern counterparts. Unfortunately, this overall competency is not matched by grammatical accuracy. Teachers are often surprised to see just how inaccurate the communicatively competent speech of Arab students is.[40] Just as it is unwise to do anything that would inhibit the development of fluency for a Korean student, it would also be unwise to ignore a Saudi's constantly repeated errors (even if understandable) through which an undesirable image of the student may be projected.

To return to the question of which errors to correct, the writers feel that part of the answer depends on cultural factors inherent in the learners. This may introduce an element of inconsistency in the treatment of errors in the classroom, especially in a group of mixed nationalities. Fanselow and others have noted this inconsistency but do not generally consider it a problem. In EC it is acceptable to use (to paraphrase a popular saying) "different corrective strokes for different cultural folks".

With that caveat, let's go back to the first section of the paper to take a look again at Burt and Kiparsky's global and local (or semantic and syntactic) errors. The Saudi student who said, "We were too late for making the plane", when he meant, "We were very late but (just) made the plane", committed a global error. The person hearing the utterance assumes that because the student was too late

he missed the plane. Thus, the correct meaning was not communicated. The student's utterance may be seen to stem from a few sources. In everyday Arabic, first, there is no distinction between words like "too" and "very". And students hearing short utterances by native speakers such as, "I'm too busy today" and "We're very happy about that" are liable to cross-associate[41] the quantifiers, and not understand the implication of one student saying about another, "He's too smart".

By contrast the Korean or Japanese who attempts sentences with the "too...to..." structure rarely makes a semantic error doing so. There is no equivalent structure in Korean or Japanese and a sentence such as, "It's too hot to play football" is translated into Korean as something like, "Because it's hot, I'm not playing football". So the idea of not being able to do something because of some condition is transferred from their native language as they learn the "too...to..." pattern. On the negative side of the coin for the Far Easterners is the fact that because neither "too...to..." nor any similar structure exists in their own tongue, it will take them far longer to incorporate it into their English repertoire, and it becomes a victim of avoidance strategy until they do.

Global errors must be dealt with in the classroom, but these are not the only ones. What can be done about the

myriad of local errors the teacher faces every day? Students say (could they be making a global error here?) they want to be corrected (Cathcart Olsen, 1976). Although teachers can't correct everything, certain guidelines can be followed to help determine which errors can be wisely handled. For example, the importance and frequency of the error must be kept in mind. A careless mistake with a form which the student generally says correctly need not be repaired, but constant omission of the copula by the Arabs cries out for treatment. Similarly, the confusing of pronouns by Koreans as in, "My wife, he...", could be a source of acute embarrassment for the speaker. Strategies of monitoring one's speech for this kind of error can be practised in class.

Teachers must also remember that there is a limited amount of class time, and that time belongs to the students. If in a class of European and South American learners there is one Saudi who never distinguishes between the /p/ and /b/ phonemes, it is unfair to the class as a whole to spend more than a little time on that. With a whole class of Saudis consistently confusing /p/ and /b/ the teacher can spend more time on it. But the teacher should be aware that this kind of pronunciation problem is not easily erased, and should not expect success the first time dealing with it. The problems the Japanese have with /l/ and/r/ present similar difficulties. For a teacher dealing with these problems for the first time, just giving the students awareness that there

is a problem and that they must work on it gradually is sufficient.

There is one more time-related guideline that can be of use to teachers when deciding what to do with errors. It can be illustrated by the following anecdote. When an Iranian student referred to the man preparing the food as the "cooker", the writer corrected it to "cook".[42] Asked how it was that the verb form could be used as the agent, the teacher gave the "rule" that sometimes in English the verb form could be used unchanged as the agent of the action. Trying to summon up a few other examples, he could only think of two: "rebel" and "convert". Not only were these words beyond the level of the student in question, but the verb form did change (in pronunciation) when used to mean the agent. The problem was that the writer had formulated a "rule" of such limited applicability as to be useless to the student. More appropriately he should have told the student that the "cooker" was an example of good thinking (since it followed a rule of broad applicability), but an exception to the "er"-as-agent rule.

Besides the above considerations, teachers should correct certain errors that in another context they might ignore: errors, even minor ones, that are directly relevant to the pedagogical focus of the lesson.[43] Saudis and Iranians, due to interference from their native languages, tend to use the redundant object in relative clauses. Sentences

such as, "I can't find the book that I bought it yesterday" are common for intermediate level Middle Easterners. During a class of free conversation, just to take this sentence and locate the error for the student's consideration would take more time and effort than it is worth. But when the subject of the lesson is the formation of relative clauses, not to deal with this kind of error would be doing an injustice to the students.

Such are the factors to be borne in mind when faced with the problem of what types of errors should be corrected.[44] With a moderate amount of pre-class planning and a generous sprinkling of post-class reflection, these considerations, perhaps confusing at first glance, soon become part of an automatic, overall approach to errors.

PART IV: WHEN?

Suppose then, the teacher has articulated for himself the kinds of errors to be handled in class. The next issue is when to deal with them. Again, an apparently straightforward issue can become complicated if handled without respect for the errors being made and the learners making them.

It is the writer's experience that errors should not be corrected during the first few hours with a new class.[45] Except in rare cases, a new class means new errors. The teacher should mentally take note of the errors he is hearing and establish their frequency. In this way, he will avoid

spending needless class time trying to eliminate the careless performance error that would probably not be made again anyway. Saying that errors should not be corrected does not mean the teacher must accept all utterances made by the students. Even during the process of getting to know a new class and its weak areas, simply accepting a student's incomprehensible utterance as if it were perfectly clear is as unfair to the learner as it would be impolite to a native speaker.

In addition to noting the frequency of errors, it is also very helpful to determine their causes. The nature of the correction depends very much on whether the source of the error is interference from the NL, cross-association of forms presented, defective analogous thinking on the part of the student, an ambiguous source, or some combination of these. And the corollary to this, that knowing the source of the error is a good way to facilitate its correction is equally true.

Another benefit of postponing the formal handling of errors until after a rapport is established is to create an atmosphere of security in class. The need for security has been a focus for many approaches ever since the awareness of the importance of the learner's affective side emerged. While many modern educational theorists regonize this need, they seem reluctant to acknowledge that the concept of security may be culture-bound. Do Koreans and Iranians feel

"secure" in the same way and in the same kind of atmosphere? The writers agree that there is a definite need for security in the class, but they feel that the kind of atmosphere that represents hinges on the backgrounds of the students involved.

Having thus allowed a period of adjustment to the learners and their errors, when the time comes to begin treating the mistakes, the teacher still faces some decisions on when to give feedback. An indisputable point is that the student who is speaking should not be interrupted for a correction. Does that sound basic? Maybe, but it is the authors' experience that most teachers, even experienced ones, can be found interrupting students from time to time. More frequent than that, however, are the cases of other students jumping in and blurting out the corrected form. (In this respect, the spontaneity of the Saudis and other Arabs, may become a liability.) Everyone in the room must be made to realize that interrupting another is both impolite and pedagogically harmful. The latter point was proved when researchers found that learners' errors could be decreased by NOT correcting, simply by allowing enough time (for example, five to ten seconds) for the student to repair the utterance himself.

Continuing in this negative vein, another time not to correct is when a normally quiet student summons up sufficient courage to overcome his inhibitions and begins to speak.

Any negative feedback which might have the effect of discouraging this kind of student from further attempts at communication should be avoided. As mentioned in section one, interlanguage is the system of laws and rules approximating the TL, internalized by the learner, and used to express himself in the TL. Observers concur that IL is dynamic, that the student is constantly reformulating its laws in his own mind, according to the feedback he receives. Furthermore, it has been noticed that many errors in a student's interlanguage seem to disappear by themselves whether or not they are corrected by the teacher. (The fossilized errors do not disappear and become a more or less permanent fixture of the IL.) So, it is argued, don't worry about most errors because they will self-destruct sooner or later.[46]

The argument seems spurious. If the learner needs feedback to reformulate his ideas of the workings of the TL, isn't the teacher in the best position to provide that feedback? The important thing is for the teacher to develop an awareness of when the learner is at the point where his interlanguage can tolerate the feedback. A teacher who can do this will be able to avoid the kind of situation in which the students are bombarded with so many corrections that they turn off and tune out.

PART V: HOW?

Having considered the issues of kinds of errors to be

treated and the appropriate times to deal with them, another perhaps more crucial problem now faces the teacher: How does he handle the mistakes deemed important enough to warrant correction? In the final part of this paper, EC techniques evolved by the writers[47] will be put forth for consideration. Before we get into the techniques themselves, a word needs to be said about the purpose of EC. A curious situation has arisen from the general acceptance of the validity of the cognitive approach's recognition that learners continually refine their knowledge of the TL by means of the feedback they receive as they test that knowledge. Everybody accepts the need for feedback, yet not everybody is as tolerant towards correction. Disregarding the differences between the terms (the semantic neutrality of "feedback" vs. the aggressive connotation of "correction"), it seems clear that when the learner is at the point where "feedback" can be internalized, it should be given. If the student is ready to refine rules, receive an explanation of why his utterance was inappropriate, discover how it should be changed, and learn other ways the new rule works in the TL, it would be much more beneficial to him than a simple, non-judgmental sign that the utterance was somehow wrong. The writers feel that the purpose of EC is more than eliciting a short-term response from the student. It should be to aid the learner in storing this "new" information in the long-term memory. Only by doing this can

learners incorporate the corrected form into their IL.

There are two sides to EC techniques: the form and the content. Although in practice they cannot be separated, for the purpose of clarity they will be discussed separately here. Some aspects of the form, by which is meant the attitudes the teacher projects about the student, the error, and the correction, will be looked at first.

Keeping in mind the positive role errors play in language learning, the teacher must exhibit a supportive attitude before correcting learners. For a semantically inaccurate but syntactically deviant response, the teacher can begin by saying something like, "Yes, okay, good. Good answer. But the grammar needs some work." This kind of phrase has the advantage of unambiguously telling the student that the content of the answer was understood and it was right, but there was a grammar mistake. Similarly, in the example cited earlier in this paper of the Iranian who said "cooker" instead of "cook", the teacher can encourage the student's strategy of forming the agent by adding "er" to the verb, with some positive feedback like, "Good thinking. That's an example of good thinking because English verbs can usually be made into the agent by the addition of 'er'. But in this case 'cook' is the exception." In this way the teacher communicates to the students that their successes are understood and appreciated before their weaknesses are commented on.

The aim of introducing corrections in a supportive way is to set up an atmosphere of security in the class. Only in a secure atmosphere will students feel free to venture out and test their knowledge of the TL. This is true enough of Japanese and Korean ESL learners, who generally lack the fluency to be confident with the TL. But Middle Easterners do not generally suffer from this kind of diffidence. As the writers see it, the purpose of establishing security in a class of Saudis is to allow them to accept the teacher as "knower" and to accept what the knower knows about the TL. The teacher knows, for example, that a Saudi's disregard for grammatical accuracy can put the student at a social disadvantage. Sometimes, however, the student can not appreciate this. Diglossia in their NL makes it very difficult for Saudis to accept the fact that "He don't play football" is not perfectly acceptable, but still needs some work. There must be a certain amount of trust for these students to believe that the teacher is not being overly fastidious, that in fact, the teacher has the welfare of the student in mind. One strategy to help the student understand is to talk about the socio-linguistic aspects of language. If a learner realizes that a fragmented or ungrammatical utterance in the TL may alienate him from native speakers, some headway can be made in the area of EC.

The decision of whether or not a certain form is correct cannot be given over to a student who may be confused

by an erroneous analogy with a diglossic situation in his NL. Even under the guise of letting learners proceed at their own pace, it seems an abandonment of our duties as teachers to hold students completely responsible for editing their own errors.

Another way of fostering an atmosphere in which errors become natural to the learning situation is to use humor in the feedback. For example, a humorous way to deal with errors in something recently explained in class is to have the erring student go through a dialogue greatly exaggerating the nature of the peccadillo and promising never to make that mistake again. In a case where the student has once again failed to use the auxiliary ("Where you go yesterday?"), the following previously memorized dialogue must be said:

> S. I'm very sorry, dear teacher, for making that mistake. You've explained the rule to us many times.
>
> T. Well, nobody's perfect.
>
> S. But we must try to be! I promise NEVER to forget to use DO, DOES or DID again.
>
> T. And I will try to help you.
>
> S. Thank you, kind teacher.[48]

An approach that uses humor makes a clear point in a way that students and teachers can enjoy together and thus defuses any tension in the situation.

When bringing a student's attention to an inappropriate form somewhere in the middle of an utterance, an effective

way to insure that the correction has a chance of moving into the student's long-term memory is to be clear about what should be amended and, at the same time, subtle: don't give the correct form; give a way to discover that form by which the student will be able to cue himself the next time.

A final cautionary note about the teacher's attitude towards the applicability of the rules he or she casts before the learners: be prudent in the use of such absolutes as "always" and "never". Both students and textbooks seem to take certain perverse pleasure in undermining the credibility of teachers who are foolish enough to begin explaining a rule with a phrase such as, "In English you never find...". The exceptions to that rule NEVER spring into a student's mind as fast.

With those words on the medium of the message, let us look at some actual messages: techniques that have proven successful in the classroom. We must begin with some ways to let the student know that he has used an inappropriate form. (We are not, of course, considering the cases in which the teacher chooses to ignore the error.) This can be done in various ways, depending on the nature of the feedback. Again, if the utterance was correct in some way it is wise to begin with some positive feedback. "Good answer, bad grammar", is a concise way of conveying to the student that he was at least semantically correct. "Good sentence, but that doesn't answer my question", tells a

student that the grammar of the utterance was acceptable. (This may be significant for the student who was testing an IL hypothesis with his answer.) These simple sentences offer more than matter-of-fact feedback to the student. They give a sense of how his answer was wrong as well as a sense of achievement at having succeeded in some way.

In a case where the student's utterance is both semantically and syntactically wrong and the teacher cannot readily understand how it was generated, the best course of action is for the teacher to repeat the utterance prefaced by, "Did you say...?" By doing this the teacher communicates to the student that the utterance was heard correctly. As a next step, the teacher must let the student know that, although heard, the utterance was not understood.

Once there has been an indication of an unacceptable form, the problem is efficient location of that form. Of course, for the student to get maximum benefit out of the feedback he should be allowed time to repair the utterance alone. If students are able to do this, they are on the way to learning the value of monitoring their own speech. Presuming they are unable to do so and further feedback from the teacher is required, what are the options open to the teacher? These have been enumerated in Chaudron (1977). More appropriate to our purposes, however, was the study by Cathcart and Olsen in which they evaluated thirteen common reactions to learner errors. Seven of these reactions

centered on locating the error for the students. Interestingly enough, when asked to rate these "corrections", the three most "useful" corrections chosen by the students were ones in which the teacher spoonfed the answer to them. The students were thus required to do very little thinking. But spoonfeeding does not help students avoid the same error next time.

The error looked at in the Cathcart and Olsen study was: "I go to the bank yesterday." The three corrections preferred by students were, "I went to the bank..."; "Go is present, you need past tense"; and "Don't say go, say went." Experience shows that this kind of correction does little to help the student attain the feedback. It would be better to try to impress on the student the importance of morphologically including the time reference in the verb itself. The sentence, "I go to the bank yesterday", is ambiguous insofar as it would be difficult for an unbiased observer who happened on the scene to know definitely whether the student is trying to say, "I went to the bank yesterday", or "I go to the bank every day". The teacher's approach should reflect this cross-signaling. Instead of saying, "Your verb is wrong", the time confusion can be communicated by asking the student to clarify. A simple "When?" (rising intonation) indicates there was an error regarding time. Used for the first time, this technique needs some follow-up. The sequence often goes like this:

S. I go to the bank yesterday.

T. When? (rising intonation)

S. Yesterday.

T. Oh, not every day?

S. No, yesterday.

T. Okay. Sorry, what happened yesterday?

S. I go to the bank.

T. You go to the bank every day?

S. No, I went to the bank yesterday.

Despite the extra time this kind of technique takes until students get used to the cues used by the teacher, there are many advantages to using it over others: it tells the student right away that the problem had to with time and it reinforces that actions done every day (iterative) and actions done yesterday (non-iterative, past) must be expressed by different forms of the verb. By thus establishing categories for the student to assimilate, the chances of the correction's storage in the learner's long-term memory are greatly increased.

Sometimes errors are so endemic to a group of learners that correcting them at every appearance would take up an inordinate amount of class time. The trouble that Saudis have with the third-person singular present tense "-s" marker, and the omission of the copula are two examples. These are performance errors which students can be expected to edit out of their speech if given the necessary stimulus

to do so. If the teacher chooses to handle these errors instead of allowing them, there is a technique which is economical in terms of time and effective in terms of showing the students just how often they are making the mistake. The teacher can put a large number 1 on the bulletin board in the classroom and tell the students that #1 is the signal for a missing verb (to be). Large Number 2 can stand for the dropping of the third person singular "-s" marker. During the first few days of these numbers being constantly the center of attention, the students begin to realize the frequency of the error. This awareness is accompanied by a visual reminder for them to monitor their own speech patterns.

Quite a few references have already been made to ways by which teachers can help students retain new information. Whether the feedback from the teacher will be quickly lost or retrievable when needed can be influenced by the teacher's ability to deal completely with the error in all its aspects. By this is meant the teacher's ability to understand the error's source and to furnish a rule which governs the situation, together with some further examples of the rule. By way of example, let's look at a common error made by Iranians, the use of the redundant object pronoun in relative clauses. In sentences such as, "That's the man that I saw him yesterday", if the teacher is aware that the student's NL makes use of such redundant pronouns, part of the presentation and practice is affected by this awareness. The teacher might

contrast the sentence on the blackboard as it should be in English with it as it would be if it were a literal adaption of a Farsi structure. The teacher can point out that while it is good Farsi, it isn't right in English. Likewise, anticipating a sentence like, "That's the man that I saw him yesterday", the teacher should avoid any practice that might inadvertently encourage the students to include the "him". For example, the teacher may wish to try some exercises in which the students are required to combine the two sentences into one using a relative clause. But the teacher should avoid using sentences that include the pronoun rather than the head noun. This has the effect of dampening the NL interference with regard to this point, since the utterance, "That's the man that I saw the man yesterday", would not be so acceptable even in Farsi.

The point being made here is that the source of an error affects the handling of it. It is likely that an ESL teacher teaching a homogeneous group in Iran or Japan will know something of the students' NL and will, therefore, be able to understand errors caused by interference. It is much less likely that the average ESL teacher with a mixed group in the United States will know enough of the language background of the various students in the class to pick up NL interference errors when then occur. Teachers can learn a great deal from the simple technique of asking students how they came up with a certain response. A student can tell

the teacher if the problem is one of interference, or if it stems from a strategy employed by the student, which the teacher may, in fact, want to encourage once understood. The following incident might help to illustrate the point. In a class of Japanese students the sentence, "Unless the paint is completely dry, do not apply the second coat", appeared in the text. The writer asked if everyone understood the meaning of the connector "unless". One student responded that "unless" meant "until". Because the writer was expecting a response along the lines of "'unless' means 'if...not'", the student's answer puzzled him. The student then pointed out that "until" could be substituted for "unless" in the sentence. Acknowledging the logic used by the student, the teacher explained that "until" connotes time whereas "unless" connotes some type of condition.

The correction techniques mentioned above generally apply on an individual level, between the teacher and an individual student. However, there are techniques that allow a teacher to deal with more than a single student at a time. Two of these will be mentioned here.[49]

One problem which confronts the teacher who would like to gather evidence about which areas to concentrate correction on, is how to accumulate data. A good way to do this is appointing a "class recorder" to note down mistakes made by the other students during free conversation classes. The "recorder" is appointed on a rotating basis, giving

everyone opportunities to sit back and look at the form of what is being said. Over a period of weeks, a body of data is gathered which shows the teacher the errors which recur and those that seem to edit themselves out. This technique also has the advantage of encouraging students to develop skills in monitoring speech.

In order to show students the patterns that errors have in their IL, students can keep error correction diaries. Simply by writing down the teacher's feedback on unwanted forms, each student will be able to see in unequivocal terms the areas that he needs to concentrate on. The diaries can be reviewed periodically by the teacher and the student. At these sessions, the teacher can offer strategies to help him eliminate the error.

With all of these techniques, it should be remembered that the best way for a teacher to work with unwanted forms is to base a correction on the evidence presented by the error and the awareness of the cultural background of the speaker. Only by doing this can the teacher anticipate an effective result.

SUMMARY

The focus of this paper has been the treatment of errors in the ESL classroom. The authors have tried to make teachers aware of the different types of error they will be confronted with, and the significance of this awareness in terms of working effectively with those errors.

We have looked at some of the current ESL approaches in an attempt to see what the assumptions behind them imply for classroom EC. We have tried to integrate those assumptions with an overview of researchers' recommendations of how best to deal with second language learners' errors, and with the writers' experiences as teachers.

An underlying question through the paper has been: does the cultural background of the learner, his preconditioning and education, have any influence on how errors should be treated? The writers have answered this question affirmatively. Experiences with groups of widely divergent cultural backgrounds furnish evidence to support the idea that not only in overall approach but also in EC techniques as well "...no one approach can be expected to produce the same results in all cases; nor should one approach be used to the total exclusion of another."[58]

FOOTNOTES

1. Hendrickson, James, M., "Good Analysis for ESL Teachers", ERIC, ED 135 259 (1976):5.

2. George, H.V., Common Errors in Language Learning: Insights from English. (Rowley, MA., 1972), p.5.

3. Corder, S.P., "The Significance of Learner's Errors." IRAL vol.v/4 (1961). In Error Analysis, edited by Jack C. Richards (London, Longmans, 1974), p.26.

4. George, p.161.

5. Corder, p.35.

6. Selinker, Larry, "Interlanguage", IRAL vol.X/3 (1972).

7. Ibid., p.36.

8. Selinker gives examples of "fossilization", such as: French uvular /r/ in their English IL, English rhythm in the IL relative to Spanish, etc.

9. Corder, p.35.

10. Burt, Marina and Kiparsky, Carol, The Gooficon: A Repair Manual for English. (Rowley, MA., 1972), p.6.

_____ and Olson, Margareta, "Intelligibility: A Study of Errors and Their Importance". EDRS:ED 072 681.

11. Johansson, Stig, "The Identification and Evaluation of Errors in Foreign Languages: A Functional Approach." In Errata: Papers in Error Analysis, edited by J. Svartik. (Lund, Sweden, CWK Gleerup, 1973), p.110.

12. The terms "approach", "method", and "technique" are used here in the sense given them by Edward M. Anthony in the article "Approach, Method and Technique", which appeared in English Language Teaching, 17.63-67 (January 1963). The article was distributed as part of the Methods Course for the MAT, Fall 1981.

13. Robinette, Betty Wallace, Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages: Substance and Technique. (Minneapolis, 1978), p.163.

14. Schachter, Jacqueline and Celce-Murcia, Marianne, "Some Reservations Concerning Error Analysis", in Readings on English as a Second Language, edited by Kenneth Croft (Cambridge, MA., 1980), pp.120-121.

15. Robinette, pp.161-163.

16. Curran, Charles, A., Counseling-Learning in Second Languages. (Apple River, ILL., 1976), p.12.

17. Curran, Charles, A., Counseling-Learning: A Whole Person Model for Education. (New York, 1972).

18. Curran, op. cit. (note 16), pp.71-72.

19. Curran, op. cit. (note 16), p.6.

20. Curran, op. cit. (note 16), p.8.

21. "Understanding response" is a technique of counseling based on the Rogerian philosopny of providing non-threatening feedback (to the one being counseled), designed to verify that what he said and the associated feelings were understood.

22. Curran, op. cit. (note 16), p.97.

23. Curran, op. cit. (note 16), p.91.

24. Gattegno, Caleb, The Common Sense of Teaching Foreign Languages. (New York, 1976), pp.VII-VIII.

25. Gattegno, pp.7-8.

26. Stevick, Earl, A Way and Ways. (Rowley, MA., 1980), p.45.

27. Stevick, p.38.

28. Stevick, pp.48-49.

29. From a handout of the MAT Methods Course (Fall, 1981), an article by Zemke, Ron, "Suggestology", which appeared in the journal Training HRD, January 1977.

30. Zemke, op. cit. (note 29).

31. Zemke, p.19.

32. Zemke, p.21.

33. Zemke, p.22.

34. Bohan, Robert C., "How to Change Sabah Al Khair into Good Morning", ERIC ED 169 594.

35. Schachter, Jacquelyn, "An Error in Error Analysis", Language Learning 24 (1974).
Consider also the following: "The Asian student's attitude is...to leave himself open to making a mistake and 'losing face' before his teacher is a frightening thought."
from "Bridging the Asian Language and Cultural Gap", Los Angeles Unified School District, 1974, ERIC ED 095 709.

36. While this is true for structures, it is less true for lexical items where the need to 'talk around' the unknown word frequently arises.

37. Meinhoff, Michael and Meinhoff, Joan, "Observations of Students in English as a Second Language at Kuwait University: 1974-1976", ERIC ED 139 273, 1976.

38. Cathcart, Ruth and Olsen, Judy, "Teachers' and Students' Preferences for Correction of Classroom Conversation Errors", in On TESOL 76, edited by John Fanselow and Ruth Crymes, (Washington, DC, 1976).

39. Meinhoff, op. cit. (note 37).

40. Meinhoff, op. cit. (note 37).

41. For a discussion of cross-association, see George, op. cit. (note 2), pp.154-155.

42. While "cooker" would most probably be a local error for American speakers of English, for the British it may be a global error, since in England the word "cooker" is used for "stove".

43. For a complete discussion of these considerations see Cohen, Andrew D., "Error Analysis and Error Correction with Respect to the Training of Language Teachers", ERIC ED 121 104 (1975).

44. The focus of this paper is the correction of learners' linguistically deviant forms. "Communicative competence", however, includes much more. Extra-linguistic features of the language (proxemics, haptics, kinesics, oculisics, etc.) can also create problems for students. "Errors" in these areas are beyond the scope of this paper and cannot be considered here.

45. The exception, of course, is a direct request for feedback from a student.

46. Holley, Freda M. and King, Janet K., "Imitation and Correction in Foreign Language Learning", The Modern Language Journal 55 (1971):494-498.

47. And some techniques borrowed from colleagues and teachers.

48. This technique is borrowed from Alexander Lipson, who explained and demonstrated it at SIT in the Fall of 1975.

49. The writers wish to express their thanks to Dr. Alvino Fantini for these two techniques.

50. Robinette, op. cit. (note 13), pp.164-165.

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