

## The Formulation of a Classroom Observation Instrument for Recording Purpose of Recording Error Correction in EFL Classes

Jason Murray

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### Abstract

The paper investigates error correction in English as a Foreign Language Discussion classes and methods employed by teachers when addressing errors. The paper will begin with discussing general attitudes and perceptions toward error correction. The body of the paper primarily focuses on formulating an observation instrument (OI), which is able to effectively record error corrections. From the results, the OI will be evaluated and modified at three stages of the formulation. It is hoped that the formulations and analysis will improve the OI in areas such as ways in which teachers navigate error correction through the stages of the lesson, ways in which the errors are corrected, and the effectiveness (i.e., is the error likely to be repeated again?) of the correction. The paper will conclude with an overall reflection of the investigation and will assess the effectiveness of the OI as a tool for trainee teacher development purposes, with a focus on measuring error correction.

*Keywords:* error correction, English as a Foreign Language, teacher development, observation instrument

### Introduction

One of the most important aspects in English as a Foreign Language class is error correction. It is also considered invaluable for motivating students and assisting with learning. However, error correction poses teachers obstacles when addressing errors. For instance, not all students like to be corrected, yet want to improve their accuracy and fluency. If the chosen correction is not given correctly, it could potentially affect students' confidence and inhibit fluency. The teacher also has to consider how much error correction is adequate. Insufficient correction might leave students feeling dissatisfied, and potentially, the students will continue to make the same mistakes. In Hendrickson's 1978 review of feedback, he asks a series of questions for the teacher to consider:

*Should learners' errors be corrected?*

*When should learners' errors be corrected?*

*Which errors should be corrected?*

*How should errors be corrected?*

*Who should correct learner errors?*

However, there have been many disputes among linguists over these questions. Lyster and Ranta (1997) and Ellis (2001) provide us with examples of the various types of feedback. For example, implicit, recast, clarification request, metalinguistic clues, elicitation, and repetition. From the various types of feedback, past surveys have indicated that recast is the most common, though its effectiveness is disputed. Recasts deploy repetition as correction. Mackay and Philip (1998) argue that repetition is mechanical and question whether the student is simply repeating without learning. Hornby and Sally (2009) provide a thought-provoking example by definition when separating the words. For example, Error is a formal way of saying mistake, and Correction is a change from

something more accurate than it was before. With the aforementioned linguist's comments considered, we can say that the error is a violation to the set of rules, and as the linguists/teachers write the EFL textbooks and set language rules for teaching and learning, it is the teacher's role to address the errors. Furthermore, if students are being tested and evaluated on the set of rules from the textbooks, that alone justifies the importance of error correction. The aims of the investigation is for teacher development purposes and to elucidate the practice of error correction in EFL classes. In addition, it is hoped that the OI will facilitate in answering the research questions for this paper.

### Research Questions

Which stage in the lesson did the error happen?

What was the language error?

Who corrected the error?

How was the error corrected?

How effective was the correction?

**Observations:** The class observations were conducted at Rikkyo University in Tokyo. The English Discussion program promotes the Communicative Approach methodology and follows a unified curriculum (Brereton, 2019). All the teachers tailor their lessons to ensure that the students have a high degree of student speaking time (SST) and for the classes to be as student-centered as possible. On average, there are 10 students in each class. The English Discussion program is credit-based and is mandatory for all freshmen students. The class levels range from Level 1, the highest, to Level 4, the lowest. Prior to the observations, the teachers were not given explicit details of the research as not to influence their actions and impact the OI. The objectives for each lesson is for the Discussion Skills (function language) and Communication Skills (comprehending, clarifying, and paraphrasing language) to be incorporated in the discussions. An important consideration when planning observations was to observe a variety of lessons and levels, which would enrich the gathered data as a result.

### Observation Instrument Plan for Design One

Design One was organized to be as broad as possible; 4 columns were used. The first column was the *stage* to record when the error took place. The second column focused on the *language errors*. It was important to find out any patterns of errors, which would make the investigation more comprehensive for the observer. The third column could identify the teacher's *correction strategy*. The effectiveness of the feedback given to students could also be noted. Furthermore, it would make interesting reading for the observer to see the various correction techniques. In the fourth column, a *Correction: Teacher/Student* was included in order to be able to record the number of corrections made by the either the teacher or the student.

**Classes Observed:** Three Discussion Classes - Level 2 (x1), Level 3 (x1) and Level 4 (x1).



## Evaluation of Observation Instrument Design One

Various data were recorded from the three observations. On reflection, it was challenging and time-consuming writing the relevant information in the appropriate columns. The student's utterances were also recorded. However, it was difficult to accurately record the teacher's correction strategy. Throughout the lesson, error corrections were missed due to constantly writing down data. Another area of the OI that was over-looked was class notes, which would be beneficial when evaluating the OI. After the first two observations, strategies were developed where specific references could be used for the teacher's feedback as opposed to writing in dialogue form. The reduced time spent writing made it possible to assemble information much more accurately and comprehensively than before. Recording information in the *stage* column was quite straightforward, and as expected, corrections were always given after activities. The *Correction: Teacher/Student* column was proving to be inconclusive. The lower-level classes were mainly teacher-centered as opposed to student-centered. From the first two observations, 99% of the corrections were by the teacher. As a result, the *Correction: Teacher/Student* column needed to be redesigned.

**Classes Observed:** Three Discussion Classes - Level 2 (x1), Level 3 (x1) and Level 4 (x1).

## Observation Instrument Plan for Design Two

From the evaluation of Design One, significant changes needed to be made in order to measure quantitative data smoothly. After consideration, the *stage* box was not amended, as most of the class levels were low Pre-Intermediate (Level 3) to Elementary (Level 4). The low-level classes were very structured, and as a result, data could be measured accurately and without any restrictions. Furthermore, as there is a lot corrective feedback variation from class to class, analyzing and noting that many teachers felt comfortable when using a particular correction method significantly influenced the recorded data on the OI. The *correction strategy* column was a concern and needed to be refined, so noting all the different types of corrective feedback were made. The inclusion of a key would reduce writing (i.e., recording letters as opposed to words), which would save considerable time. The *correction strategy key* was implemented as follows (with meanings): *EC= Explicit Correction*. The teacher makes it clear to the student that their utterance was incorrect and directly corrects. *R= Recast*. The teacher informs the error implicitly and provides the correction. *CR=Clarification Requests*. The teacher may indicate an error by asking the student to repeat the information, pretending not to have understood the information. *MC= Metalinguistic Clues*. The teacher does not directly give the correction but will ask a question directly referring to the incorrect utterance. *E= Elicitation*. The teacher will elicit the mistake by asking questions. Repeating the student's utterance until the mistake. The teacher's pause will indicate the error and allow the student to reformulate the utterance. There are similarities between metalinguistic clues and elicitation. The difference being that elicitation correction requires the student to repeat their utterance. A metalinguistic clue requires only a yes/no response. A slight change was made to the *correction* column. The amendment enables the student's response to the feedback and corrected/uncorrected errors to be recorded.



## Evaluation of Observation Instrument Design Two

Recording the errors were considerably easier for Design Two, and the amount of time writing while observing lessons significantly reduced. As mentioned from the Design One evaluation, the *stage* column contributed to inconclusive results, as there were no clear-cut stages during the first two observed lessons. The *stage* column worked effectively when the observed lessons were structured. The low levels were much more structured, and a range of errors at various stages of the lesson could be recorded. The high levels tended to be more of a mixed bag or content-based instruction, and there was not any variation between discussing the homework at the beginning of the class to the wrap-up activity at the end of the class. While observing, all the abbreviated stages had been included on Design Two without difficulty. Recording language errors significantly improved. The errors could be noted with more accuracy than before due to the *correction strategy* column. After each lesson, analyzing the errors and highlighting the types of errors in red pen were made. Errors in areas such as pronunciation, grammar, and vocabulary were accounted. Modifying the *language error* column in order to reduce writing time and to monitor the types of errors was considered. The size of the *language error* box needed improving, as there was insufficient space to record dialogue between student and teacher accurately. The inclusion of the *correction strategy* column made very interesting reading. Recordings of the correction strategies from each teacher and the effectiveness of a particular strategy provided interesting analysis. For example, the most common strategies used and the ones which were the most effective were clearly visible on the OI. It was also interesting to note the variation of strategies used by teachers. For instance, in the first observation, 12 corrections were recorded and the recast strategy was used 9 times. In the second observation, 10 errors were recorded and the elicitation strategy was used 6 times. It was clear that some teachers felt comfortable employing a particular correction strategy as opposed to using a variation of correction strategies. The *correction* column allowed recordings of the number of corrected and uncorrected errors. From the findings, comparing effective and ineffective correction strategies was possible. Overall, the *correction* column was very successful and the results were very useful, though the *correction* column could still be improved, which would make gathered data from Design Three much more conclusive.

**Classes Observed:** Four Discussion Classes - Level 3 (x2) and Level 4 (x2).

## Observation Instrument Plan for Design Three

For Design Three, sufficient writing space in the *language error* box was a consideration. It is intended to include dialogue between student and teacher, which would help measure successful and unsuccessful error corrections. The *correction method* box and the *stage* box would remain the same. The *correction method* box proved to be very successful in Design Two and saved crucial time measuring the information accurately. The *stage* box had been successful in structured lessons for low levels. The majority of lessons observed have been structured low-level classes. For *language error*, a tick system is included. The tick system would assist identifying the types of errors at speed. Furthermore, being able to analyze the most frequent errors with clarity and the effectiveness of the correction would be advantageous. The *correction* box needed modifying in order to obtain more conclusive data. An *uptake* key box was included. The uptake would focus on the student's response immediately after being corrected and the student's actions from the teacher's corrective feedback.

|  |                     |
|--|---------------------|
| <b>Observation Instrument-Error Correction</b> | <b>Design Three</b> |
|--|---------------------|

| Level | Class time | Number of students |
|-------|------------|--------------------|
|       |            |                    |

| Correction Method Key             |
|-----------------------------------|
| EC= <i>Explicit Correction</i>    |
| R= <i>Recast</i>                  |
| CR= <i>Clarification Requests</i> |
| MC= <i>Metalinguistic Clues</i>   |
| E= <i>Elicitation</i>             |

| Stage Key               |
|-------------------------|
| F= <i>3-2-1 Fluency</i> |
| P2= <i>Practice 2</i>   |
| D1= <i>Discussion 1</i> |
| D2= <i>Discussion 2</i> |

| Uptake Key                  |
|-----------------------------|
| TR= <i>Teacher Repaired</i> |
| SR= <i>Student Repaired</i> |
| U= <i>Unrepaired</i>        |

| Language Error Key   |                            |
|----------------------|----------------------------|
| G= <i>Grammar</i>    | P= <i>Pronunciation</i>    |
| V= <i>Vocabulary</i> | M= <i>Miscommunication</i> |

|                   |  |          |
|-------------------|--|----------|
| Stage             |  | DIALOGUE |
| Language Error    |  |          |
| Correction Method |  |          |
| Uptake            |  |          |

|                   |  |          |
|-------------------|--|----------|
| Stage             |  | DIALOGUE |
| Language Error    |  |          |
| Correction Method |  |          |
| Uptake            |  |          |

|                   |  |          |
|-------------------|--|----------|
| Stage             |  | DIALOGUE |
| Language Error    |  |          |
| Correction Method |  |          |
| Uptake            |  |          |

|                   |  |          |
|-------------------|--|----------|
| Stage             |  | DIALOGUE |
| Language Error    |  |          |
| Correction Method |  |          |
| Uptake            |  |          |

|                   |  |          |
|-------------------|--|----------|
| Stage             |  | DIALOGUE |
| Language Error    |  |          |
| Correction Method |  |          |
| Uptake            |  |          |

|                   |  |          |
|-------------------|--|----------|
| Stage             |  | DIALOGUE |
| Language Error    |  |          |
| Correction Method |  |          |
| Uptake            |  |          |

The key would focus on the following three areas: The teacher repaired error correction (TR), a student repaired error correction (SR), and unrepaired student error (U). In order to record the data smoothly, accurately, and to be able to identify each error easily, the layout design needed to be amended. Using five boxes, the design would be much more compact. Four of the boxes, *Stage*, *Language error*, *Correction method*, and *Uptake*, simply required a tick. The enlarged *dialogue* box would allow writing the dialogue between the teacher and the student. Counting corrections identified from previous observations, the average number of recorded errors were between 10/12. OI Design Three can record six error corrections; therefore, at least two OI (12 errors) would be required per lesson.

### **Evaluation of Observation Instrument Design Three**

The findings from Design 3 were very conclusive, and the OI could be used more effectively than that for the previous designs. The *dialogue* box proved invaluable, as it was possible to virtually record the exact dialogue between the teacher and the student, and as a result, it helped assess the *uptake* accurately. As the key was abbreviated, the abbreviations could be easily memorized, so recordings could be done without the need to refer to the key. Other notable data from the OI indicated that effective correction would generally occur when the teacher asked questions directly to the student. Elicitation was by far the most effective method of correction. The least effective corrections occurred when the teacher gave feedback after speaking activities. For example, when incorrect utterances were written by the teacher on the whiteboard. The students could identify the errors in written form and in groups or individually, generally repairing the error that can be harmful when learning a language. Although the uptake of these errors was SR (student repaired), it is more likely that the student will repeat the error in the future. Furthermore, almost all recast and explicit corrections were unrepaired. Overall, the Design 3 OI could function as intended. However, if I were to make a further amendments, then recording data at various stages of the lesson would be a consideration. For instance, omitting the *Warm-up* stage of the lesson as it generally provided inconsequential data. On reflection, the *uptake* area of the OI has made me more aware as to how and when to give feedback. Although I am an experienced teacher, I now consider my own corrective strategies when teaching with much more cognizance.

### **Conclusions and Implications**

From this investigation, approaches and methods used in lessons varied considerably, which greatly affected the OI. For instance, the OI was more effective when observing structured lessons, such as when employing presentation, plan, and production and test, teach, and test methodologies. However, the OI was least effective during a content-based lesson. As a result, data were insufficient, and many areas on the OI were largely redundant. In addition, the data indicated that the number of errors corrected contrasted considerably from teacher to teacher. That statistic could imply either that some teachers are less concerned about correcting errors or that some teachers have received comprehensive training and some teachers have not had adequate training. For further research in error correction, the OI tool, after redesigning, could be used to pursue further investigations. For instance, measuring the success/failure of the teacher's error correction techniques and a more in-depth account of the methods of correction. The OI recorded five methods of correction. From the observations, notes were also taken on teachers' behavior. For example, some teachers were very



theatrical when addressing an error. For example, using over-the-top intonation as a way to draw the students' attention to the error. The correction was applied by finger correction, head shaking, or gesticulating. The errors were generally repaired. On reflection, the teacher's strategies were very effective, as errors were dealt with in a light-hearted manner. Overall, much insight on corrective feedback techniques and the transformed OI served as a useful tool during the research. It is hoped that the developed OI could assist a trainee EFL teacher for teacher development purposes to become more competent when giving effective error correction. As a result, the teacher would feel more accomplished with gaining an overall understanding into error techniques, which would generate more awareness and a good attitude toward learners' error correction. The investigation from this paper indicated that the students' need for error correction is essential for learning. However, the argument remains that there is not one universal rule for all teachers to follow, though showing understanding and sensitivity toward students' feelings is recommended.

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