

Strategies for Spoken Error Correction in English Classroom

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Abstract

In Middle school, spoken language is paid less attention to by the teacher, which causes many students cannot recognize whether they have made mistakes in pronunciation. It's inevitable for students to have errors in speaking. However, the teacher should take proper measures to correct students' errors and cannot ignore them based on teaching objectives and the severity of errors. This study takes the method of specific case analysis and error analysis. The paper introduces the types and source of errors, the principles of error correction and strategies for error correction in English class.

Keywords

Spoken Errors; Error Analysis; Error Correction Strategies.

1. Introduction

In English classroom, students may make oral errors when communicating with teachers or classmates. If teachers correct every errors students have made, it will inevitably undermine students' enthusiasm for communication, hurt their self-esteem, and affect their fluency in expression. However, if teachers ignore these errors or don't correct them in time, these errors will be changed into fossilization. Then, why do students make mistakes? What errors should teachers correct and when to correct or how to correct? Faced with these problems, This article will start with analyzing the causes of spoken errors, the principles of error correction, and the timing of error correction, and explore error correction techniques in middle school English oral teaching.

2. Types and Causes of Errors

2.1. Definitions of Errors

Error is "a linguistic form or combination of forms which in the same context and under similar conditions of production would, in all likelihood, not be produced by native speakers' counterparts". Besides, according to Brown, there are some differences between mistakes and errors. One refers to a performance error that is either a random guess or a 'slip of tongue', and it is failure performance to a known system. It's a result from a temporary breakdown and can be self-corrected. The other means that the kind of error cannot be caused by hesitation. It has direct relation with the learners' language competence. Thus, it does not result from carelessness nor hesitation, but lack of knowledge in the target language and cannot be self-corrected[1]. Specifically, spoken errors can be defined as "the oral errors that students make in their spoken language that deviate from the target language, are incorrect, cannot be self-correct, or are unaware of the occurrence of deviation".

2.2. Types and Source of Spoken Errors

2.2.1. Interlingual and Intralingual Errors

Language learning is a long-term and complex internalization process. Different learners may make all kinds of errors in the process of learning language. In terms of error analysis by Brown, errors are classified into interlingual errors and intralingual errors[1]. Interlingual errors

refers to the process of acquiring a foreign language due to the influence of one's mother tongue. During the process of learning English, Chinese students are often influenced by their Chinese mother tongue and often make two types of mother tongue interference errors: phonetic interference and semantic interference. And semantic interference is particularly evident. We often refer it to Chinglish. For instance, please open the lock. This sentence is incorrect. As the word "open" cannot be matched with lock. It should be changed into "unlock". Compared with it, in the process of second language learning, errors that occur due to the influence of one target language item on another are called intralingual errors. It is the result of learners using the target language incorrectly or incompletely. Learners will create structures that are incorrect or do not exist in the target language based on the knowledge they have learned in the past. For instance, based on these two sentences "He is coming and he comes", students may create the sentence: He is comes. This error is called intralingual error.

More specifically, the causes can be concluded as follows, including over-generalization, ignorance of rule restrictions and incomplete rule applications. Firstly, over-generalization refers to English learners attempting to express new concepts using their acquired English knowledge. That is to say, learners may think they have mastered a certain language rule, but in reality, they do not truly understand it. For instance, the learner knows the grammar: He sings. He wants. And he may create the sentence "He can sings." This error is called over-generalization. Secondly, ignorance of rule restrictions refers to the learner's failure to adhere to certain language structure specific limitations, resulting in the creation of incorrect sentences, like I made him to do it. Students cannot understand the special usage of 'make'. Thirdly, incomplete rule applications refers to the application of certain rules is too simplistic, resulting in sentences that deviate from the normal track.

2.2.2. Induced Errors

Language errors of students may also be caused by improper teaching by teachers or practice by students. This type of error is called an induced error. For example, students may not be able to master a certain language phenomenon due to the teacher's unclear explanation. But if teachers overly emphasize or train a certain language phenomenon, it can also mislead students into using the language phenomenon in inappropriate situations. For example, when teaching the use of auxiliary verbs in teaching, if the teacher repeatedly says "I am a teacher. I am having an English class." Based on this, this sentence "I am get up at six in the morning." can be created. This kind of error belongs to induced errors.

2.2.3. Communication Strategy-based Errors

Sometimes, although a student's speech has no grammatical structure or vocabulary issues, it does not conform to the context and is even difficult to accept in communication. Such errors belong to communicative errors. For instance, when we talk with a foreign, asking a question about "Are you married" or "How much do you earn every year?" The other party may be very averse or unwilling to answer, as these questions involve personal privacy in European and American culture and are not suitable as topics for conversation. The main reason for communication errors is that students do not understand the culture or customs of the target language country.

3. Principles for Error Correction

Students will make oral errors at different stages of language learning, and making mistakes is an inevitable experience for students in the learning process and a normal phenomenon in the development of their communicative abilities[2]. What oral errors need to be corrected in class may be the most difficult question to answer. That's because it not only involves how to distinguish between overall and partial errors, but also how to distinguish between systematic

and linguistic errors. In addition, teachers should also reasonably grasp the timing of error correction and timely change the subject of error correction.

3.1. Treatment of Different Errors

It's important to figure out what we should correct when making spoken errors. The first thing is that we should treat overall errors and partial errors differently. Overall errors refer to errors in the main components of a sentence that can make the sentence or discourse difficult or incomprehensible, just like reverse word order, misuse or omission of conjunctions, and excessive syntactic generalization. For instance, I like ride a bike but my friend said she doesn't, therefore, we are late for school. In this sentence, there are grammatical errors, omission and obscure meanings, which causes we cannot understand what they have said. In this way, we need to correct them and help students recognize their wrong ways of language use. Besides, partial errors refer to errors that occur in the use of sentence components but do not cause comprehension problems. It results from misuse of words, like article, noun, adjective and adverb, etc. For instance, there is a wide river in the south of the village. In this sentence, the word "wide" cannot be used to modify the river. It's incorrect but it doesn't have an effect on our understanding of this sentence. Under the circumstance, it's unnecessary for us to require students to correct their errors. Therefore, the first important principle is that we should distinguish the differences between overall errors and partial errors.

Besides, it's vital importance to treat systematical errors and speech errors differently. Systematical errors mention that errors caused by learners who have not yet mastered or fully mastered the target language system, also known as language proficiency errors. These types of errors can occur repeatedly in the process of learners learning and using the language, reflecting the current development process of their interlanguage. It is generally difficult for learners themselves to detect and correct such errors. For instance, the boy dreamed to become a doctor. In this sentence, students cannot master the grammatical structure: dream of doing something. Therefore, the error students made results from the misuse of language structure. However, language errors refer to learners being influenced by certain emotional factors, such as fatigue, carelessness, distraction, and environmental factors. All of them can result in language output errors. For example, he is my sister. In this sentence, there is a slip of tongue. But It cannot influence our understanding. Therefore, it's unnecessary to correct them. Therefore, the second principle is that we should treat systematical errors and mistakes in different way.

3.2. Subjects of Error Correction

When it comes who to correct, it's important for us to change the subject of error correction in spoken class. That's to say, teachers can flexibly change the subject of error correction in English classrooms by using self correction, peer correction, and teacher correction methods alone or alternately. Firstly, the teacher should encourage students to do self-correction by giving them enough time. But when students are unable to correct by themselves, teachers can guide them to correct mistakes with each other. The forms of peer correction include group correction, whole class correction, and correction competitions. Mutual correction among classmates can provide students with time to think, listen, and communicate with classmates, while reducing their dependence on teachers. When students are correcting each other's mistakes, teachers can ask students to record their oral mistakes and convey the correct form to the student who made the mistake after the student finished speaking. In this teaching case:

Student 1: What time do he usually do her homework? You confused his and her.

Student 2: And you confused does and do here.

It's evident that correcting in this way cannot interrupt their speaking and it's conducive to relieving their stress emotion. But remember that when students cannot correct errors on their

own, the teacher should give clear guidance and help so that students can systematically master the language points that they easily make mistakes in.

3.3. Time of Error Correction

As to the time to correct spoken errors, there are three alternatives: immediate correction, delayed correction and postponed correction. A famous educator also discusses that mastering the time of correcting errors is important in spoken class. Generally, it's best not to interrupt students during fluency work unless communication breaks down. If the student has got most of his language right but has made a trivial mistake, it is sometimes wise to let the mistakes pass. If there are some common mistakes that other students might also have problems with, the teacher can take a note in his/her mind and try to do the correction after the student's performance. However, during accuracy work, we may need to intervene more because the purpose of the activity is to get what is learned right[3].

4. Strategies for Spoken Error Correction

When students practice speaking, teachers should not expect their expressions to be error free, but allow them to make mistakes. Teachers should adopt a tolerant attitude towards students' oral errors and avoid losing confidence in oral practice due to excessive correction. Based on Lyster and Ranta research, the paper further studies different ways and techniques for correcting errors combining with teaching practice, such as explicit correction, recasts, pinpointing, elicitation, repetition, pumping, clarification requests, waiting and metalinguistic feedback[4].

4.1. Explicit Correction

Explicit correction means when a student makes a language error, the teacher interrupts language training or practical activities to positively correct their errors[5]. This error correction method is commonly used in mechanical exercises aimed at helping students master the correct language form or in various exercises that focus on precise language output. When applying explicit correction, the following teaching instructions can be used: You should say... / No, you shouldn't say that. / Read after me. / Pay attention to ... / Oh, you mean... / We don't say... in English. We say...

And here is a specific example:

T: What did you have for breakfast this morning?

S: I have a bottle of milk, an egg and two cakes.

T: Oh. You should say "I had a bottle of milk..." Read after me, please.

S: Oh, sorry. I had a bottle of milk, an egg and two cakes.

In this example, the teacher points out the students' spoken error directly. After that, students can recognize their own errors and immediately correct them.

4.2. Recasts

Recasts refers to the teacher's implicit correction of errors in student language expression, which is the correction after partial affirmation of the student's expression[6]. This method is based on the language expression of students, correcting some components or words while keeping the original meaning unchanged. And here is an example as follows:

S: He is watch TV.(the first expression).

T: He is watch TV? Patrick is watching a football game on TV.(Recasts).

S: He is watching TV.(the second expression).

T: Right. Go on please.

4.3. Pinpointing

The teacher repeats the words of the students, intentionally emphasizing and prolonging the pronunciation of the incorrect parts or using rising tones to indicate special emphasis. It has been found that this method of pointing out the location of errors is commonly used in students' self correction. This method can not only correct students' oral errors, ensure smooth oral narration, but also take into account their needs.

Example:

T: Where did you spend your holiday this summer?

S: I go to Qingdao for my holiday.

T: You GO (?) to Qingdao?

S: Oh, I went to Qingdao for my holiday.

In the example, students cannot use the simple past tense correctly. After that, the teacher emphasizes the verb so that students can make a response to their error.

4.4. Elicitation

Teachers can inspire students to correct their mistakes in the following ways. First, ask questions about the incorrect parts of a student's speech, such as "use gaze or gestures to signal the student to continue answering questions". Second, provide several relevant options for students to choose.

Example:

T: Excuse me, what is she doing?

S: She is cleaning a class.

T: She is cleaning a class? (Pause for moment) Ok. But how does she clean classes? (The teacher use gesture and sight to imply students to continue to answer the question).

S: No answer.

In this example, the teacher just elicits students by using gesture and pay attention to students.

4.5. Repetition

After discovering a language error in a student, the teacher can ask the student to answer again and guide them by using these prompt phrases such as "Once more. / Pardon? / Repeat, please."

Example:

S: I made my birthday cake last night when I was in bed.

T: Er? Who made your birthday cake? Once more.

S: My mother.

T: Oh, your mother. And then repeat it please.

S: My mother made my birthday cake last night when I was in bed.

In this example, the teacher guide students to correctly express the subject of the sentence.

4.6. Pumping

When students are unable to answer questions accurately without making grammatical errors, teachers should encourage them to continue answering until they provide a more reasonable and logical answer.

Example:

T: Who told you the news?

S: The sports meet will be held in our city next summer.

T: Good, but who told you the news, Mary or Mike?

S: Mary told me the news.

In this example, the teacher want to get the subject of telling the news, but the student answer the time. Therefore, the teacher further ask the detailed person about whether Mary or Mike. In this way, the student can understand the key point about the question.

4.7. Clarification Requests

When a teacher is unable to understand what a student is saying or discovers an error in their expression, they can send a clear message to the student requesting them to correct the error. In this case, the teacher can usually use the following instructions: What? / I'm sorry? / Pardon me. / What do you mean by...?

Example:

S: I want be a scientist when I grow up.

T: Er? I'm sorry? I want.

S: I want to be a scientist when I grow up.

In this case, the students cannot master the language structure: want to do. Thus, the teacher further indicate the use of the word.

4.8. Waiting

Some oral errors are just language errors. When hearing a student's language error, the teacher should try to extend the waiting time as much as possible and let the student correct it on their own. When students speak English, It is best not to interrupt students when they speak it. When necessary, teachers can use body language or short prompts that express disagreement or confusion to help students become aware of their mistakes and guide them to correct by themselves.

Example:

T: Well, please say something about your aunt.

S: OK. My aunt is a pretty long .. tall woman. He .. she is a ... an accountant. She work ... works on ... in a car factory. She usually go... goes to work by a car ... by car. She likes travel...traveling.

In this example, it's common that students cannot sometimes express their ideas fluently due to feeling of tension, poor preparation and lacking of language organization, etc. In this case, the teacher should give students more time to express themselves and does not interrupt their speaking.

4.9. Metalinguistic Feedback

Metalinguistic feedback refers to the situation where a teacher does not directly provide the correct answer when a student makes a language error, but instead analyzes the grammar of the student's language error, such as pointing out misuse of parts of speech and tense errors misuse. Here are common classroom language use: Can you find your error? / No, not ... We don't say ... in English. / Do we say that in English?

Example:

S: I go to visit my grandparents with my uncle last weekend.

T: Do we say "go" here? "Go" is "present tense". I'm afraid you used a wrong tense.

S: I go ... went ... I went to visit my grandparents last weekend.

T: Yeah. I went.

In this example, the teacher analyzes the grammatical errors and guides students to correct them so that students can express it correctly.

5. Conclusion

Through specific error analysis of teaching process, the paper shows that the teacher should flexibly adopt corrective feedback and strategies on the basis of individual differences and teaching objectives. That's to say, both direct correction and indirect correction can be used in classroom instruction. Specifically, these strategies include repetition, clarification requests, pumping, elicitation, pinpointing and recasts, etc.

In summary, when teaching English, teachers should carefully analyze the severity of students' oral errors and the reasons for their errors, fully grasp the timing of error correction, adopt flexible and diverse error correction strategies, help students overcome language barriers caused by errors, develop self correction ability, and improve their oral proficiency.

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