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Oral Feedback in the English Classroom
Teachers’ Thoughts and Awareness

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Abstract

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Abstract: The main aim of this paper was to find out if and how teachers in upper secondary school use oral feedback when they correct their students’ oral mistakes. I also wanted to find out which approach the teachers find most useful and if they use different approaches depending on the error made by the student.

I have found that the majority of the teachers find oral feedback as an important tool to help students achieve a higher proficiency in a second and foreign language. My results also show that feedback is most often used when the student makes errors regarding content and pronunciation. Most of my respondents are aware of the necessity of applying different feedback approaches to different errors made by the students. My investigation shows that teachers chose to give feedback on different occasions, both directly, but more commonly, indirectly, to a single student or later on to a full class. Most teachers also prefer a mix of feedback approaches depending on the specific student and situation.

My intention with this study has also been to determine what factors influence the students’ uptake. My respondents have, among several factors, stressed the importance of comfortable learning situations, students’ personal interest and size of group.

Nyckelord: Feedback, oral feedback, errors, oral mistakes, correction, interlanguage, teacher, teaching approaches, feedback approaches, second language teaching, foreign language teaching
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1 Introduction and aims

Mastering a foreign language has become increasingly important to many people for different reasons. Therefore, teaching English as a foreign language in Sweden starts early in school or even in pre-school. In the aims of the English subject formulated by the National Agency for Education, we can read the following:

“The subject of English thus plays a central role in the Swedish school. The subject aims at developing an all-round communicative ability and the language skills necessary for international contacts, and an increasingly internationalised labour market, in order to take advantage of the rapid developments taking place, as a result of information and communications technologies, as well as for further studies.” (Skolverket: Språk 2000)

In upper secondary school, students practise their speaking skills as one important aspect of their foreign language education. When students pronounce words incorrectly, make syntax errors, or use words in a context where they do not belong, it may be necessary for the student to receive feedback that makes him/her aware of the error and thus provides information about how to avoid making the same mistake again.

In a teaching situation it can be helpful for teachers to be aware of what different types of errors the students are making when deciding whether to correct the mistakes or not. One type of error is systematic error, which belongs to the learning stage where the student finds him/herself at the moment, and has to do with incomplete knowledge of the language. The other type of error is the mistake. Mistakes are caused by other factors such as carelessness, tiredness, distractions or other circumstances that are not part of the knowledge itself (Hedge, 2000:289). But how do teachers react to students’ errors? Do they react at all? And with what effect?

1.1 Aims

The main aim in this essay is to find out if and how teachers in upper secondary school use oral feedback when they correct their students’ oral errors. I want to find out which approach the teachers find most useful and if they use different ways depending on the error made by the student.
2 Background

2.1 First language acquisition versus second and foreign language acquisition

All children living under normal conditions learn to speak a first language without overt instruction. The key to learning a language seems to be interaction with other people via language (Yule, 1985:137). A child tries to understand the rules of the language from what s/he hears and then tries to use those rules when speaking.

Usually, children learning a first language are not given any instruction on how to speak and it does not seem that corrections from parents or other adults in the child’s surroundings will have any effect on how the child speaks. Vygotsky claimed that a child learns from the environment in which he or she is brought up in. The child is capable of performing actions independently, but with guidance from parents, or other adults, s/he can search and learn things important in the socio-cultural milieu which the adult represents. Vygotsky formulated what the difference is between “the child’s actual and potential levels of development”, where the actual development is what the child can do without instruction, and the potential development is the child’s ability to do things with help from another person. The gap between those two stages has been defined as the zone of proximal development. The child does not learn because of specific instruction, but rather, due to the process being a result of the interaction (Lantolf & Appel, 1994:10-13).

When teenagers and adults start to learn a second or foreign language, they are usually exposed to this new language only a few hours a week compared to the situation when learning a first language. Also, the students have another language, their first language, to rely on for their daily communication with other people (Yule, 1985:150). Littlewood (1985:22) argues that the approach used by a person trying to learn a second language is similar to the way in which children learn to speak their first language. Every child will make mistakes before mastering his/her first language fluently. According to Littlewood learners of a foreign language usually use the rules for their first language when trying to understand and speak a second language. It is usually not easy to acquire a second language when the critical period is passed and the features and rules of the first language will therefore result in a “loss of flexibility or openness to receive the features of another language” (Yule, 1985:151). However, there are many other factors such as beliefs, aptitude, learning styles, personality
and motivation which influence the ability to learn a new and foreign language (Ellis, 1999:522-523). Motivation is one of the most important factors as it can both encourage learning and also be a result of previous learning experiences. When motivation causes learning it can be either because of personal interest or needs, or it can be because of external sources such as material rewards (Ellis, 1999:36).

Krashen claims that there are two different ways for adults to develop competence in second languages. “The first way is via language acquisition, that is, by using language for real communication. Language acquisition is the “natural” way to develop linguistic ability, and is a subconscious process” (Krashen, 1985:26). This means that when acquiring a language the person is not aware of the process itself, but only that s/he is communicating. “The second way to develop competence in a second language is by language learning. Language learning is “knowing about” language, or “formal knowledge” of a language” (Krashen, 1985:26). This type of learning is conscious and is more a way of being aware of rules for a specific language. Yule also argues that ‘acquisition’ is “the gradual development of ability in a language by using it naturally in communicative situations”, while ‘learning’ “applies to a conscious process of accumulating knowledge of the vocabulary and grammar of a language” (Yule, 1985:151). Acquisition in this sense is when a child picks up a foreign language in social interaction over a long period, whereas learning is more the situation which takes place when students learn a second language in school.

When learning to speak a second or foreign language, we all make errors and they are a natural part of mastering a new language. The errors can be of various kinds, for example pronunciation, syntax, or word choice errors. Feedback is needed to avoid fossilization. Interlanguage is a term used to refer to “both the internal system that a learner has constructed at a single point in time (‘an interlanguage’) and to the series of interconnected systems that characterize the learner’s progress over time” (Ellis, 1999:350). The term fossilization is used when describing “the process by which non-target forms become fixed in interlanguage” (Ellis, 1999:353), e. g. linguistic items and rules which the speaker tends to keep from his/her native language when learning a second language.

2.2 Definitions of feedback

Feedback as a regular term can be defined as “a method used openly, and with responsibility, to express one’s views with the aim of facilitating/promoting more appropriate actions in the
future, in relation to a goal and a vision” (Nilsson, 2004:23, my translation). Feedback is useful in many different situations, not just in school. When using feedback in working life it is often used when management is speaking to employees and vice versa. In a working life situation, feedback is useful to help management receive comments from the employees about a specific situation or the executive qualities over all. Employees, on the other hand, often receive feedback from management about a specific task, or an employee’s role in his/her working team. In sports it is necessary for athletes to receive feedback to be able to develop and succeed. An athlete needs someone who can give him/her positive feedback and praise for doing a good job, as well as negative feedback to help the person realize what can be done differently to achieve a better result.

When teachers use feedback, it can also be positive or negative. ‘Positive feedback’ should be used to praise students for doing a good job. Helping students to develop good self-confidence when learning a second language is an important part of a teacher’s job. Another part of feedback is ‘negative feedback’ which is used to help students understand what has to be changed in an utterance. This type of feedback is more like the type of feedback described below. Feedback in a teacher-student learning environment can be defined as “information given to learners which they can use to revise their interlanguage” (Ellis, 1999:702). Negative feedback in school is most often used when a teacher gives a student some kind of information about something being incorrect in an utterance and sometimes also instruction about how to correct the mistake. Another type of feedback used in school is peer response, where students give feedback to each other.

2.3 The teaching of oral skills
In the aims for the English subject in upper secondary school it says that a student should acquire

“an ability to master a language’s form, i.e. its vocabulary, phraseology, pronunciation, spelling and grammar. Competence is also developed in forming linguistically coherent utterances, which in terms of their contents and form are progressively adapted to the situation and audience”. (Skolverket: Språk 2000)

It also says that “English should not be divided up into different parts to be learnt in a specific sequence”. As stated above, both content and form are important and the teacher needs to help the students to find strategies how to achieve these goals, but how this should be done is not
formulated in the aims of the subject. Goals to aim for, when it comes to oral production specifically, is to help students “develop their ability to take part in conversations, discussions and negotiations and express with subtlety their own views and consider those of others” and “develop their ability to speak in a well structured way, adapted to the subject and situation” (Skolverket: Språk 2000).

Approaches to teaching speaking skills in second language teaching have changed over time. Many teachers still emphasize accuracy and focus on form. On the other hand, communicative language teaching approaches have had considerable impact on language teaching, resulting in no or very little attention to form and error correction. Traditionally, errors have been seen as something negative, but when a communicative approach has been adopted this view has changed. Further insights as to second and foreign language acquisition have resulted in a belief that an error should rather be seen as “a clue to the active learning progress being made by a student as he or she tries out strategies of communication in the new language” (Yule, 1985:154). In other words, the movement has been from a form-focused teaching approach to a meaning-focused approach (Lightbown & Spada, 1999:153). A form-focused teaching approach focuses more on correctness regarding pronunciation and grammar, while a meaning-focused approach focuses more on vocabulary and meaning. Both approaches are significant and therefore a balance is needed. It is of great importance that the teacher is aware of when form-focused instruction is appropriate and in what situations meaning-focused instruction would have a better effect. The meaning-focused approach tolerates more mistakes and errors.

2.4 Different ways of giving feedback
Four major types of corrective feedback are presented in Lightbown&Spada (1999:107).

- **Clarification requests** is “where the teacher indicates to the learner that an utterance has been misunderstood or that there is an error in it and that a repetition or a reformulation is needed”. A clarification request includes phrases such as ‘Pardon me…’. It may also include a repetition of the error as ‘What do you mean by…?’
- **Recasts** is “where the teacher repeats a student’s utterance, using correct forms where the student has made an error, but does not draw attention to the error and maintains a central focus on meaning”.
• **Elicitation** is “where the teacher uses questions to elicit completion of students’ utterances, asks questions to elicit correct forms, or asks students to reformulate their utterances”.

• **Metalinguistic feedback** is “where the teacher points to the nature of the error by commenting on, or providing information about, the well-formedness of a student’s utterance”. Metalinguistic feedback also includes metalanguage, which could be ‘It’s singular, not plural’.

**2.5 Effects of feedback**

If the person receiving the feedback is motivated, and the feedback is given in a useful way, there are reasons to believe that feedback can be an effective way for students to draw conclusions on how to achieve a better knowledge of a second language. There are several components that can have an effect on the student’s uptake. **Uptake** refers to “a learner’s immediate response to corrective feedback on his/her utterances” (Lightbown & Spada, 1999:179), while **corrective feedback** is used as “an indication to a learner that his or her use of the target language is incorrect” (Lightbown & Spada, 1999:172). The approach chosen by the teacher, the atmosphere, and the type of situation in which the speaking performance is taking place will influence the effectiveness of feedback.

It is necessary to be aware that feedback is not appropriate in all situations. For example, when a learner is making a speech, there is no use interrupting and giving feedback since the learner is focusing on his/her speech, and therefore not able to concentrate on any feedback given (Hedge, 2000:164). The teacher must also be sensitive and not correct the learner too much, as this can take the attention away from aspects of content and distract more than help. A teacher trying to correct all mistakes might also end up with learners feeling discouraged and depressed and this will take the interest away from learning (Ur, 1996:171).

**2.6 Previous studies on feedback**

Previous studies in the field of oral feedback show that certain errors made by the students are given much more attention than others. Content and word choice errors are more often corrected than phonological or grammatical errors, while many errors are not dealt with at all (Chaudron, 1986:81).
The situation and the atmosphere in the classroom have an influence both on the type of correction used by the teacher and the response by the student (Van Lier, 1988:211). The teacher’s personal style is another factor which influences the student’s uptake (Nystrom, 1983:169). One single teacher often uses a mix of different types of feedback, or uses the same type of feedback regardless of the type of error made by the students (Ellis, 1999:585). Teachers also tend to correct errors during one part of a lesson, but not in other parts, or stop giving feedback if uptake does not seem to occur (Ellis, 1999:586). The time for one-to-one interaction with each student is often limited and also affects the possibility for the teacher to give high quality feedback (Linnarud, 2002:2).

There are many factors involved when students learn a second language and researchers are not sure of all factors playing a part in the learning process. The learner needs to participate in communicative interaction, but there is no clear evidence as to other factors needed for the best uptake (Linnarud, 2002:1). There are studies made on feedback, but not many of them show the effect of feedback. Chaudron (1986:79) points out that the effect of feedback is low. Only 39 percent of corrected errors resulted in any uptake by the students in his study. Similar results from a study made by Alamari (in Ellis 1999:641) show that 20 percent of the students did not understand the feedback given and only 15 percent wrote down the correction in their notebook. The effectiveness also seems to depend on what part of the language is being dealt with on each specific occasion (Ellis, 1999:641). Nevertheless, regardless the type of error, it appears obvious that the student needs to be aware of the mistake otherwise there is a risk of fossilisation where the student is unable to change at a later date (Linnarud, 2002:2).

3 Method and material

The main aim of my study was to find out if and how teachers in upper secondary school use oral feedback when they correct their students’ oral mistakes. I wanted to find out which approach the teachers found most useful and if they used different approaches depending on the error made by the student. A questionnaire (see Appendix 1), where teachers answered questions regarding this subject, was used to give answers to my aims. Observations in classrooms were also used. The latter were mainly used to determine if the teacher used the approach they thought they use.
3.1 Questionnaire
In order to meet my aims I made a questionnaire which contained fourteen questions. I made my questionnaire prior to my pilot study but did not find anything during the study that made me think I should change any questions. All teachers teaching English at two different schools were asked to answer the questionnaire. The questionnaire was handed out to twenty teachers. They were given the questionnaire afterwards; otherwise they would have known what I was observing.

3.2 Pilot study
In order to be prepared for classroom observations, I carried out a pilot study at the school where the observations were to take place. This test took place one week before the real observations and the study gave me ideas of how I needed to structure the observations.

Firstly, I had to determine if a tape-recorder would be useful at all; where to put it in the classroom and to check if the recording would come out with a volume possible to hear. I realized that the best place was to put the tape-recorder on a desk in front of the teacher in the classroom. Most of the time, it was possible to hear both the teacher and the students quite well. When the teacher moved around in the classroom, the sound became less good but still possible to hear. During the pilot study I did not observe any feedback from the teacher, but still I decided that a tape recorder would be useful in case I did not recognize everything when doing my observations. Secondly, I became aware that a check-list including the major points of feedback would be useful during the observations, so I made one based on Penny Ur’s check-list (1996:249) (see Appendix 2).

3.3 Classroom observations
My observations took place at an upper secondary school. The school is a theoretical school and it provides a wide range of programs. The classes I observed are two classes studying their second year at the school, and one class studying their first year. My impression was that the students had a very good knowledge of English. I also observed the two teachers teaching these classes, both of whom had more than sixteen years of teaching experience. I asked the teachers if I needed to have written permission from the students and the school in order to record the lessons, but I was told that as long as I informed the students that I would just listen to the class and the teacher as a group this was approved without any permission. So before starting the observation and the tape-recorder, I informed the students that I would not
identify any individual student utterances. I made clear that what was interesting to me was the dialogue between the students and the teacher. However, I did not tell them, or the teacher, exactly what I was observing as I thought this might influence the teacher’s behaviour in the classroom.

3.4 Delimitations
In this investigation I have delimited myself to visiting only two different upper secondary schools. The material, both my questionnaire and my observations are not as many as what would have been needed to provide a scientifically substantial result. Sixteen questionnaires and three observations should therefore function more as an indication of what teachers think of oral feedback in the classroom and what approaches seem to be regarded as useful when students make oral mistakes.

4 Results and analysis
This section is divided into several parts. Some of the answers will be presented in ordinary text, while other answers are easier to view in figures. In places where all sixteen respondents have given one answer each I have used ordinary bar charts. Where the respondents have marked more than one option I have chosen pie charts as these show the percentage and will in this way give a more fair view of the result.

4.1 Questionnaire
I handed out my questionnaire to a total of twenty teachers who are teaching English at the two different schools and I received sixteen answers; which corresponds 80 percent. Considering that this was at the end of the semester and most teachers were busy marking students’ papers and thinking about grades, I think this percentage is satisfactory. The questionnaire contains fourteen questions. Question numbers 3, 4, 5, 6, 7 and 11 will answer if the teachers think that feedback is important at all and what approach they prefer. These questions helped me determine if teachers in upper secondary school use oral feedback when they correct their students’ oral mistakes and which approach they find most useful. Question numbers 8, 9, 10, 12 and 13 helped me determine when the teachers use different feedback approaches and if that depends on the error made by the student. Question number 1,
considering if the teacher is a male or female, is not dealt with as the number of questionnaires answered was so small and it would therefore not be possible to prove if male teachers prefer and use other feedback approaches than female teachers do.

4.1.1 How long have the teachers been teaching English?

The chart below shows that most of the teachers whom I asked to answer my questionnaire have been teaching for many years, in fact eleven of the teachers in my investigation have been teaching more than sixteen years (question 2). Only two teachers have less than five years experience of teaching English as a second and foreign language.

![Chart 1. Years of teaching English.](image-url)
4.1.2 Do teachers find oral feedback useful?

Oral feedback was very important for eight teachers, while one teacher did not think it was important at all (question 4) (see chart 2). The most important reasons for giving feedback, according to the teachers, were to confirm that they have understood what the student has said and also if the teachers are preparing for the National Test’s speaking part. Some teachers also commented that it depended on the situation, if feedback was important or not. The teacher who answered that feedback was not so important commented that s/he usually takes notes when the students speak and instead, s/he always gives positive or negative feedback when working with students in groups of three or four students at the time.

Chart 2. The importance of giving feedback.

Most teachers prefer to give oral feedback indirectly later on to the single student or indirectly in a full class activity (question 6). Only two teachers prefer to give feedback directly. Three teachers marked that both types of indirect feedback was useful depending on situation and student. One teacher did not mark any alternative at all even though he/she thought oral feedback was important (see chart 3).

Chart 3. When do teachers give feedback?
4.1.3 How do teachers use oral feedback?

Seven teachers answered that a meaning-focused teaching approach is the approach they find most useful and only one teacher said s/he used a form-focused teaching approach (question 3). Eight teachers filled in that they preferred a mix of both approaches. According to one of the teachers who uses a mix of the two approaches, a meaning-focused teaching approach can be useful to start with and when s/he is sure that the student has the courage and self-confidence s/he focuses more on correctness.

The chart below shows what teachers usually comment on when giving oral feedback (question 5). Most commonly, oral feedback is used when the student makes errors regarding content (41%) and pronunciation (28%). Not so many teachers think it is necessary to comment on grammar (14%) and vocabulary errors (17%).

![Chart 4. What do teachers usually comment on when giving oral feedback?](image-url)
When a teacher uses a meaning-focused teaching approach, the most useful way of correcting the student would be to use clarification requests or recasts. On the other hand, if a teacher uses a form-focused teaching approach, elicitation or metalinguistic feedback is more useful. Most teachers prefer to use recasts (question 7). The chart below shows which approach different teachers prefer. Two teachers did not mark any alternative, which means that there are only fourteen answers to this question.

![Chart 5. Preferred approach when giving oral feedback.](image)

When asking what type of feedback will produce the best student uptake, I received mainly two different answers as well as a lot of comments (question 11). Seven teachers thought that recasts was the approach that would give the best student uptake. A reason given by one of the teachers for choosing this approach is that it does not embarrass the student. Two teachers answered clarification requests. The rest of the teachers answered that it depends on the situation, the specific student and his/her learning strategies and what the teacher is commenting on. Some of the teachers also pointed out that a mix is needed.
4.1.4 When do teachers use different approaches?
The charts below show when teachers prefer to use different feedback approaches (questions 8, 9 and 10). When correcting, or giving feedback on grammar skills the most commonly used approach is recasts (35%). Clarification requests and metalinguistic feedback is also used quite often (25% each), while elicitation is not so frequently used (15%) (see chart 6).

![Chart 6](image)

Chart 6. What approach is most useful when focusing on grammar skills?

More than half of the teachers (58%) prefer to use recasts when focusing on vocabulary mistakes. Some of the teachers also use elicitation (16%) and clarification requests (21%) and only 5% use metalinguistic feedback (see chart 7).

![Chart 7](image)

Chart 7. What approach is most useful when focusing on vocabulary?
The answer to the question as to what approach the teachers prefer to use when focusing on pronunciation is very clear. 69 percent answered recasts and 19 percent answered clarification requests, while almost no one uses elicitation or metalinguistic feedback (6% each) (see chart 8).

![Chart 8. What approach is most useful when focusing on pronunciation?](chart)

In response to question number 12 there were a lot of suggestions regarding factors which influence the students’ uptake. Factors such as response from classmates, comfortable learning situation, size of group, type of tasks and how much English is spoken in the classroom, were mentioned. Also personal factors such as attitude, expectations, ambition, intelligence, social security, alertness, self-confidence and encouragement were referred to as being important for any uptake to occur.

Almost all the teachers answered that they almost always adapt the type of oral feedback depending on the needs of individual students (question 13). Some teachers pointed out that when there are many students in each class, it takes time to get to know each individual student, which means that it is not possible to vary the type of feedback until you know the specific student well enough.

Finally I asked the teachers to give comments regarding oral feedback in the second language classroom (question 14). Some teachers pointed out the importance of making it natural to speak another language and to make the students feel confident in the classroom. It is also important to remember that each student is different. Another comment was that feedback should always be encouraging and constructive.
4.2 Classroom observations
Because of the limited amount of time, it was not possible to find more than three occasions of teachers who were concentrating on oral production in the classroom. With only three observations recorded on tapes, it was not possible to find any evidence of teachers giving oral feedback in the classroom. To be able to find oral feedback, many more observations would have been needed. It is therefore not possible to determine whether the teachers use the type of oral feedback approach they say they are using.

5 Discussion
In this paper I have investigated questions regarding oral feedback when teaching English as a second and foreign language in upper secondary schools in Sweden. My main aim has been to find out if and how teachers use oral feedback when students make oral mistakes. My secondary sources show that the changes from a form-focused teaching approach towards a meaning-focused approach have had considerable impact on language teaching and have resulted in very little attention being given to form and error correction (see 2.3). However, I have found that the majority of the teachers find oral feedback to be important tools for helping students achieve a higher proficiency in English.

My results also show that feedback is most often used when the student makes errors in content and pronunciation. Chaudron claims (see 2.6), that content and word choice errors are more often corrected than phonological or grammatical errors.

My aim was also to explore what approach teachers find most useful and if they use different approaches depending on the error made by the student. My results demonstrate that most of my respondents are aware of the necessity of applying different feedback approaches to different errors made by the students. I had expected to see more clear answers to when the teachers preferred different approaches when concentrating on specific skills, but this was not the case. The teachers use recasts more frequently than other approaches, but clarification requests and a mix of different approaches are also used quite often. A reason for using recasts, recording to one of my respondents, is not to embarrass the student. Even though recasts is the approach my respondents seem to prefer, regardless of skills being focused on, I
interpret the answers to mean they are aware that different approaches are more useful in some cases than in others. In my secondary source Ellis states that teachers often use a mix of different types of feedback, or uses the same type of feedback regardless of the type of error made by the students (see 2.6).

My intention with this study has also been to find out what factors influence the students’ uptake. My respondents have, among several factors, stressed the importance of comfortable learning situations, students’ personal interest and size of group and this is in line with Van Lier’s, Nystrom’s and Linnarud’s observations discussed in my background (see 2.6). On the other hand, there are studies in my background which emphasize that it is difficult to prove the effectiveness of feedback.

Just as Hedge points out (see 2.5), it is important to be aware of when feedback is useful and when it will not result in any uptake. My results show that teachers choose to give feedback on different occasions, directly and more commonly, indirectly to a single student or later on in a full class. Most teachers also prefer a mix of feedback approaches depending on students and situations.

I have also received comments about the importance of giving feedback in an encouraging and constructive way. This goes along with Ur’s interpretation when she argues that if all mistakes are corrected, the student might feel discouraged and depressed and will lose interest in learning (see 2.5).

I can see from the answers I have received, that the alternatives of different feedback approaches on my questionnaire, in some cases have been difficult to understand for the respondents. More explanations regarding the different approaches might have helped the respondents, and would most surely have given the investigation more thoughtful answers. I am sure that the respondents know of the different approaches regarding oral feedback, but maybe one never thinks of them in those terms. Also, when one is not being used to talking about how to give feedback it is not easy to be aware of which approach one usually uses.

If I had had time to make more observations it would have been interesting to see if the teachers whom I observed actually used the feedback approach they claimed they use according to the questionnaire.
Also, with a larger number of respondents it would have been interesting to combine some of the questions to see if teachers who have been teaching for many years use teaching approaches, when giving feedback to their students, which differ from those used by teachers with shorter teaching experience.

Another possibility, with a larger number of respondents, would have been to investigate if male and female teachers react differently to students’ oral mistakes.

6 Conclusion

In conclusion, feedback is still believed to be very important by teachers, even though research shows that the change from a form-focused to a meaning-focused teaching approach has meant that errors made by the students are not given as much attention today as before. My respondents are aware of important factors necessary for students’ uptake and try to meet the needs of each individual student. Nevertheless, my investigation also shows that teachers prefer one approach more than the other ones and will hold on to that approach regardless of what skills are being practiced.

I believe that feedback of any type will always be important, positive as well as negative, as long as it is used in an adequate way. The challenge is to create a comfortable learning situation; help the students achieve good self-confidence and me as a teacher to be entrusted with the students’ faith and reliance. Also, it is necessary to choose the most appropriate approach in the right situation. I understand that this is not always obvious.
List of references


Appendix 1

Dear teachers in English,

I am studying at the University of Karlstad to become a teacher and right now I am doing research for my C-essay in English. I am writing this essay in the field of Oral Feedback in the Second Language Classroom. What I wish to find out is “If teachers give oral feedback to their students”, and “How they do this, e.g. what method do they use”?

I will hand out this questionnaire to all teachers teaching English at two different upper secondary schools in two different towns. The name of the towns will not appear in my study. Don’t put you name on the paper, as all the answers will be dealt with anonymously.

Thanks a lot!
/Susanna Rydahl

Fill in the alternative which suits you best.

1. I am:
   □ female
   □ male

2. I have been teaching English for:
   □ less than 5 years
   □ 6 – 10 years
   □ 11 – 15 years
   □ 16 or more years

3. In oral interaction, what kind of teaching approach do you prefer?
   □ Meaning-focused teaching approach, e.g. ’It is more important that students have the courage to speak, regardless of correctness’.
   □ Form-focused teaching approach, e.g. ‘It is more important to help students to speak correctly, than to get them the courage to talk’.
   □ A mix of both approaches.
   □ Other method……………………………………………………………………
4. How important do you think it is to give oral feedback when your students speak English?

☐ Not important
☐ Rather important
☐ Fairly important
☐ Very important

Comments:

........................................................................................................................................
........................................................................................................................................
........................................................................................................................................
........................................................................................................................................
........................................................................................................................................

5. What do you usually comment on when you give oral feedback?

☐ Content
☐ Vocabulary
☐ Pronunciation
☐ Grammar

6. When do you give oral feedback to students making oral mistakes in the classroom?

☐ Directly, e.g. ‘feedback when the error is made, in front of the whole class.’
☐ Indirectly, e.g. ‘feedback later on to that single student’.
☐ Indirectly in a full class activity.
☐ Not at all.
7. When you give oral feedback, which approach do you prefer to use? Mark the one which you think you use most of the time. On page 5 and 6 you will find a more detailed explanation of the four different approaches. What method do you prefer to use?

☐ Clarification requests. You indicate to the learner that what he/she just said has been misunderstood, or that it contains an error and that a change is needed. A clarification request includes phrases such as ‘Pardon me…’. It may also include a repetition of the error as ‘What do you mean by…?’

☐ Recasts. You repeat what the student just said, but use a correct form, vocabulary or pronunciation, where the student made an error.

☐ Elicitation. You ask questions to elicit the right form, vocabulary or pronunciation. For example, “Excuse me”,…continued by repeating the students utterance, but leaving out the word which needs to be changed.

☐ Metalinguistic feedback. You tell the student what is wrong by using rules for the explanation, e.g. ‘It is singular, not plural’.

8. When focusing on grammar skills, I usually use:

☐ Clarification requests

☐ Recasts

☐ Elicitation

☐ Metalinguistic feedback

9. When focusing on vocabulary, I usually use:

☐ Clarification requests

☐ Recasts

☐ Elicitation

☐ Metalinguistic feedback

10. When focusing on pronunciation, I usually use:

☐ Clarification requests

☐ Recasts

☐ Elicitation

☐ Metalinguistic feedback
11. In your opinion, what type of feedback will give the best student uptake?

12. What other factors influence students’ uptake?

13. Do you adapt your feedback to the needs of individual students?

14. Other comments regarding oral feedback in the second language classroom.
Detailed explanation of the four different approaches

- **Clarification requests** is where the teacher indicates to the learner that an utterance has been misunderstood or that there is an error in it and that a repetition or a reformulation is needed. A clarification request includes phrases such as ‘Pardon me…’. It may also include a repetition of the error as ‘What do you mean by…?’

  **An example would be:**
  
  T – How often do you wash the dishes?
  S – Fourteen.
  T – Excuse me. (Clarification request)
  S – Fourteen.
  T – Fourteen what? (Clarification request)
  S – Fourteen for a week.
  T – Fourteen times a week? (Recast)
  S – Yes. Dinner and supper.

- **Recasts** is where the teacher repeats a student’s utterance, using correct forms where the student has made an error, but does not draw attention to the error and maintains a central focus on meaning.

  **An example would be:**
  
  S1 – When you’re phone partners, did you talk long time?
  T – When you were phone partners, did you talk for a long time?
  S2 – Yes, my first one I talked for 25 minutes.
  S1 – Why you don’t like Marc?
  T – Why don’t you like Marc?
  S2 – I don’t know, I don’t like him.
• **Elicitation** is where the teacher uses questions to elicit completion of students’ utterances, asks questions to elicit correct forms, or asks students to reformulate their utterances. 

  **An example would be:**
  
  S – My father cleans the plate.
  
  T – Excuse me, he cleans the???
  
  S – Plates?

• **Metalinguistic feedback** is where the teacher points to the nature of the error by commenting on, or providing information about, the well-formedness of a student’s utterance. For example, when a teacher says ‘Can you see where you made a mistake?’. Metalinguistic feedback also includes metalanguage, which could be ‘It’s singular, not plural’.

  **An example would be:**
  
  S – We look at the people yesterday.
  
  T – What’s the ending we put on verbs when we talk about the past?
Appendix 2

Observation sheet

Class observed:

Teacher:

Teacher’s responses to mistakes:  

1. Does not react at all.  
   Observation

2. Asks questions like ‘Pardon me…’ or ‘What do you mean by…?’  
   Observation

3. Repeats the students’ utterance, but in a correct way.  
   Observation

4. Asks questions to make the student complete the utterance, change to correct form, or reformulate his/her utterance.  
   Observation

5. Provides information about how to form a correct utterance, by use of language rules.  
   Observation

When/how does the teacher correct mistakes?

1. Directly  
   Observation

2. Indirectly, to that single student  
   Observation

3. Indirectly in a full class  
   Observation

4. Not at all  
   Observation