
***Feedback: A Major Strategy in Teaching
Foreign Languages***

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I. Introduction:

Learning, the conscious process of acquiring knowledge, is marked, in the main, by two main characteristics: the provision of positive feedback through the correction of errors, and handling language points one at a time (Johnson and Johnson, 1998: 4). As for the first characteristic, it should be noted that feedback has been the subject of a considerable amount of recent experimental research accompanied by a wide literature on the general topic of the concept. According to Dececco (1968: 253), most of the research on feedback highlights it as the domain of the knowledge of results which supposedly subsumes two meanings. First, simplification of learning as the learner is told of every step of the progress he is achieving. Second, ease of learning when the learner is told whether his response is correct or incorrect and, in the latter case, the information provided, mainly concerning the errors committed, is supposed to lead to correction.

In the field of foreign language teaching, feedback forms an essential and useful tool for developing the teaching and subsequently the learning of the varied linguistic skills as it sheds light on understanding the structure of classroom

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events and interpreting what remedial procedures teachers usually take for the betterment of the learning process.

II. Aims of the Research:

The current research aims at theoretical presentation of the topic of 'feedback'. It further aims at highlighting the role that feedback can play in teaching foreign languages. Types and function of feedback and the ways of bringing about feedback form further topics that the present research attempts to attend to.

III. Definition of Feedback:

Owing to its widespread use in the domain of psychology as a concept of much relevance to the sensory organs, the term 'feedback' is often referred to as sensory feedback. Bilodeau (1965: 15) states that the term 'feedback' has become quite common since both the recognition of results and reinforcement belong to the sensory feedback. As such, there have been several definitions of feedback, among which is Dececco's definition (1968: 253) which entails that feedback is the information available to the learner that makes possible the comparison between his actual performance and criterial performance.

A further definition of 'feedback' is that provided by Harris and Hodges (1981: 113), who view 'feedback' as the information used to control or to change processes and results. Good examples of feedback are evaluation at the end of the syllabus and the teacher's instructions.

Finally, Al-Khateeb (1982: 19) defines 'feedback' as the process of providing learners with results knowledge on the progress they make while dealing with any learning task.

IV. Types of Feedback:

Quoting Vigil and Oller (1976), Brown (2000: 232) states that the feedback learners get from their teachers can be either positive, neutral, somehow in between, or negative. The two main types and levels of feedback are listed below:

(1) Affective Feedback:

Positive: Keep talking; I'm listening.

Neutral: I'm not sure. I want to maintain this conversation.

Negative: This conversation is over.

The above-listed types of affective feedback can be stated as follows: a person can indicate positive affective feedback ("I affirm you and value what you are trying to communicate") but give neutral or negative cognitive feedback to indicate that the message itself is unclear. Negative affective feedback, however, regardless of the degree of cognitive feedback, will likely result in the termination of communication. As such, one of the first requirements for meaningful communication is an affective affirmative feedback by the other person (Brown, 2000: 232).

(2) Cognitive Feedback:

Positive: I understand your message; It's clear.

Neutral: I'm not sure if I correctly understand you or not.

Negative: I don't understand what you are saying; it's not clear.

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Morrison and McIntyre (1973: 24-25) further state that another main type of feedback is that of **information**. It is derived from the effects of the performer's own behaviour upon that of the other person. This type of feedback has the function of regulating and guiding the subsequent acts. It is an essential feature at two stages: (1) within the teacher's component, where there is self-assessment of behaviour; and (2) between teacher and learner, where the teacher receives information on the learner's acts. Thus, there is a cyclical description of the relations between the teacher and the learner in which their acts are seen as interdependent.

Al-Ghareeb (1967: 452) has also mentioned three types of feedback. They are:

1. Feedback resulting from consequences identification and the extent of success in performing the required work. This is usually given at the end of the performance, i.e. after the individual finishes doing the response.
2. Feedback resulting from the individual's knowledge of a certain amount of information that helps in a better realization of the situation. This should happen under certain conditions. For instance, information giving is concomitant with step by step response.
3. Sensory Feedback: This comes through what the senses provide the individual with knowledge coming from inside. The individual's practice of the response is active and guarantees providing this type of sensory FB.

Annet (1964: 115) also distinguishes between two types of feedback:

1. Intrinsic feedback the information got by the student through the work. For instance, when the learner correctly answers more than 20 questions out of 255 questions. This answer is intrinsic reinforcement.
2. Extrinsic feedback means the information provided by the teacher to the learner to increase his effectiveness and efficiency. An example is when the teacher points out that the learner's answer is not in the right direction. This means that the feedback may be provided to the learners by the teacher himself or it may come from the task itself. It may take the image of information about the extent of the appropriateness of the response. This information may take several forms such as:
 1. The teacher judges the learner's response, whether right or wrong.
 2. The teacher provides the learner with the correct response.
 3. The teacher asks the learner another new question.
 4. The teacher explains how the right response should be.

All these events come together in providing the learner with the information that allows him to judge his performance, whether right or wrong, i.e. it provides him with the basis to evaluate his performance.

Qassim (2006: 41-2) points out that there are varied classifications of feedback provided by teachers. According to her, Sinclair and Coulthard (1975; Internet) state that there is an evaluative feedback used by the teacher in discourse, which usually consists of accepting, evaluating and commenting. Also, Richards' (1994: 95) classification includes saying that

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something is correct or incorrect, praising, modifying a students' answer, repeating, summarizing and criticizing. She also quotes Kennedy (1993: 157-165) as saying that there are two main types of feedback: (1) pedagogic feedback which refers to acknowledgement or comment made by the teacher with the purpose of correcting or evaluating the learner's performance. It includes the following five types: Positive feedback 1 that evaluates the learner's production negatively; Positive feedback 2 that evaluates the learner's production negatively; Positive feedback 3 that corrects the learner's production; Positive feedback 4 that gives the learner a clue for the right answer and then Positive feedback 5 that prompts the learner to respond. (2) Interactional feedback that refers to the comment made by the teacher with no evaluative or corrective purpose and which may enhance the learner's linguistic production. It includes expressions of agreement, disagreement, or acknowledgement. Finally, she points out that Altricher and Posch (1989: 28) distinguish two other types of feedback concerning the situation awareness, namely (1) corrective feedback which likely to apply to situations where there is perhaps a better answer to something such as the need to show an awareness of learners' errors and being able to correct them sensitively or ensuring that there is a purpose behind using such activity, and (2) confirmatory feedback which is given in the context of praise. Likewise, Kim and Kim (2005: Internet) refer to the need for more decisive types of feedback due to the fact that students are passive in the classroom; they naturally feel uncomfortable with cooperative interaction that requires them play an active role.

Finally, Lyster and Ranta (1997: 2-3) point out that there are four main types of Corrective Feedback:

1. **Explicit Correction:** Clearly indicating that the learner's utterance was incorrect, the teacher provides the correct form.
2. **Recast.** Without indicating that the learner's utterance was incorrect, the teacher implicitly reformulates the learner's error, or provides the correction.
3. **Clarification Request:** By using phrases like "Excuse me?" or "I don't understand," the teacher indicates that the message has not been understood or that the learner's utterance contained some kind of mistake and that a repetition or a reformulation is required.
4. **Metalinguistic Cues:** Without providing the correct form, the teacher poses questions or provides comments or information related to the formation of the learner's utterance (for example, "Do we say it like that?" "That's not how you say it in French," and "Is it feminine?").

V. The Function of Feedback:

Perhaps the basic and important function of feedback is to correct the learning track. Al-Gareeb (1967: 452) points out that there are three main functions of feedback:

1. Making movement or behaviour in the direction of a certain goal or in a limited (identified) way.
2. Comparing the traces of this movement in the right direction of the movement and identifying the fault.
3. Using the former clue to the fault to redirect organization.

Ji (2004: Internet) states that the target of feedback is to fulfil two main functions. Teachers' praise may actually inform learners about the appropriateness of their perceptions rather than encourage and reinforce it. So learners when given the appropriate praise to their achievement are encouraged to actively participate more in classroom events and thus two functions will be gained, namely motivational and instructional functions. Finally, learners perceive the appropriate praise as a means of obtaining information about correct answers and desirable interaction.

VI. Methods to Bring about Feedback:

Qassim (2007: 40) states that for the concept of feedback to be effective, it should meet three main requirements, namely quantitative evaluations, qualitative evaluations and reflection about and interpretation of the evaluations themselves. To be more specific, there are several ways to get feedback. According to Looman and Joseph (1989: 23), they are:

1. Noticing students' faces and movements. The messages sent by the learners to the teacher in the class represent the best clue about the direction of the lecture and way of presentation. Yawning, moving chairs, sighing, whispering and showing signs of weakness and tiresome are examples of weak interaction in the class.
2. Teacher's Questions: There are two ways to get feedback from learners. Examples of these questions are when the teacher poses the following questions: Am I in a hurry?

Should I slow down a little to make learners understand the lesson.

3. Learners' Questions: To give learners many chances to communicate and then to listen to them is a very important matter in the teaching process as it helps in building strong relations between the teacher and the learners. Teachers provide varied chances throughout the lesson, some of which are devoted to clarify the content and others to provide affective assessment to the students. To achieve this, the teacher allows learners to provide them with the chance to raise varied questions about the content, the teacher himself and constructing personal (comments within these activities). The teacher's answering of students' questions and comments helps in reinforcing relations in addition to the fact that they arouse teachers' attention and increases his care by improving his teaching methods or the learners' questions and comments represent useful feedback about the teaching method in the class.

VII. Importance of Feedback in Foreign Language Learning:

In spite of the availability of other forces in the process of foreign language learning, teachers should rightly attach great importance to the feedback they give to their learners. They, i.e. teachers, should not, as Morrison and McIntyre (1973: 213) outline, use assessment largely for their own ends and neglect to feedback the results to learners. In other words, tests and exercises should not be returned to learners with virtually meaningless ticks, crosses and marks since such

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behaviour on the part of teachers can lead to the waste of golden opportunity for developing the motivation for learning on the part of learners. The same authors add that learners rarely lack advice from teachers on their behaviour; what they sometimes do lack is information, feedback, that will tell them how well they are working in learning the foreign language. According to them, the most consistent finding is that videotape feedback leads to significantly greater improvements in learners' performance of a skill than are obtained when no such feedback is provided.

Quoting Leon and Martin (1971), Els et al. (1987: 264) state that research carried out in the Netherlands has demonstrated that learners who receive feedback on their imitation of certain intonation contours achieve better results than those learners who receive no feedback.

Johnson and Johnson (1998: 220) state that since motivation is goal directed, it is also partly dependent on information about success and failure. Thus many learners need immediate feedback on how well they are performing or who they compare with others; many learners, however, only act on their own perception of success.

To conclude, there should of course be a place in the teaching of foreign languages for feedback on what was done correctly, or rather, that something was done correctly, and this is usually referred to as positive feedback which according to Vigil and Oller's model (quoted in Brown, 2000: 232-233) holds that a positive affective response is imperative to the learner's desire to continue attempts to communicate. Cognitive feedback then determines the degree of

internalization. Negative or neutral feedback in the cognitive dimension, will, with the prerequisite positive affective feedback, encourage learners to try again, to relate, to reformulate, or to draw a different hypothesis about a rule. Positive feedback in the cognitive dimension will potentially result in the reinforcement of the forms used and a conclusion on the part of learners that their performance is satisfactory to the teacher.

V. Error Correction as a Feedback Strategy:

Attitudes towards learners' errors have changed considerably in recent decades. Approaches based on behaviourist principles (particularly audiolingualism) advocate the initial avoidance of errors, and their diligent correction should they occur. More recent attitudes have displayed more tolerance; advocates of communicative language teaching, for example, recognize the need for fluency practice, and this may lead to occasions to pass uncorrected, though perhaps only temporarily.

Brown (2000: 235-239) states that one of the major issues involved in carrying out foreign language instruction is the manner in which teachers deal with students errors. Should errors be treated? How should they be treated? When? For a tentative answer to these questions, as they apply to spoken (not written errors), consider again the feedback model offered by Vigil and Oller (1976) whose model for a theory of error treatment implies that cognitive feedback must be optimal in order to be effective. Too much negative cognitive feedback- a barrage of interruptions, corrections, and overt attention to

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malformations- often leads learners to shut off their attempts at communication. They perceive that so much is wrong with their production that there is little hope to get anything right. On the other hand, too much positive cognitive feedback-willingness of the teacher-hearer to let errors go uncorrected, to indicate understanding when understanding may not have occurred, serves to reinforce the errors of the speaker-learner. The result is the persistence, and perhaps the eventual fossilization of such errors. The task of the teacher is to discern the optimal tension between positive and negative cognitive feedback: providing enough (positive feedback to encourage continued communication, but not so many that crucial errors go unnoticed, and providing enough (negative feedback) to call attention to those crucial errors, but not so many that the learner is discouraged from attempting to speak at all. The affective and cognitive mode of feedback are reinforcers to learners' responses. As learners perceive "positive reinforcement", they will be led to internalize certain speech patterns. However, ignoring erroneous behaviour has the effect of a positive reinforcer; therefore, teachers must be very careful to discern the possible reinforcing consequences of neutral feedback. What must be avoided at all costs is the administration of punitive reinforcement, or correction that is viewed by learners as an affective negative feedback-devaluing, dehumanizing, or insulting them. We must not stifle our learners attempts at production by smothering them with corrective feedback. A sensitive and perceptive language teacher should make the language classroom a happy optimum between some of the over-politeness of the real

world and the expectations that learners bring with them to the classroom. The teacher's task is to value learners, prize their attempts to communicate, and then provide optimal feedback for the system to evolve in successive stages until learners are communicating meaningfully and unambiguously in the foreign language.

IX. Conclusion:

Many strategies are available to teachers to direct the process of foreign language learning towards noticeable betterment and effectiveness. As such, in the preceding pages, reference has been made to the concept of feedback and the role it can play in bringing about effective foreign language learning. The major types of feedback, feedback function, and the methods to bring about feedback have all been further points of departure in order to familiarize teachers with more instructional procedures and techniques concerning feedback in their attempt to improve their teaching. Added to that, focus has been on error correction as a major strategy in foreign language teaching which enables teachers to instill, in their learners, more motivation to get engaged in the new language they are learning and in the managing and carrying out of its varied skills and tasks.

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التغذية المرتدة (الاسترجاعية): طريقة مهمة في تدريس

اللغات الأجنبية

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المستخلص

تشكل التغذية المرتدة (الاسترجاعية) جزءاً لا يتجزأ من عملية تطوير التدريس بشكل أساس ومن ثمّ تعلم المهارات المختلفة للغة الأجنبية. وهي تلقي الضوء على فهم المدرس لما يجري في الصف الدراسي من أحداث وتفسير الإجراءات العلاجية الواجب اتخاذها لتحسين عملية التعلم. وعليه، تمّ تحديد نوعين من التغذية المرتدة: التغذية المرتدة التعليمية التي تشير إلى تعليقات المدرس وملاحظاته بهدف تصحيح وتقويم أداء المتعلم، والتغذية المرتدة التفاعلية التي لا يقصد منها التصحيح أو التقويم وإنما تقوية الأداء اللغوي للمتعم وتضمن عبارات الموافقة وعدم الموافقة والثناء. ولتحقيق كلا النوعين من التغذية المرتدة، يتم التركيز على تصحيح الأخطاء كاستراتيجية رئيسة في تدريس اللغات الأجنبية تمكن القائمين بالتدريس على تحفيز المتعلمين بشكل أحسن للانهماك في تعلّم اللغة الجديدة وتدبير وتنفيذ مهامها ومهاراتها المختلفة.

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