

PRESENTATION/POSTER

CORRECTIVE FEEDBACK IN PRONUNCIATION TEACHING: A VIETNAMESE PERSPECTIVE

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Limited research has investigated teachers' and learners' beliefs about corrective feedback in pronunciation teaching. The current study addresses this gap by examining teachers' and students' perspectives on corrective feedback in pronunciation teaching in an EFL context where it has not hitherto been researched, namely Vietnamese tertiary education. Data included observations and video-recordings of six 90-minute communication classes, and interviews with both teachers and students. Teacher interviews included stimulated recall based on video-recordings of their lessons. Student focus group interviews provided insights into how the students perceived the efficacy of the pronunciation instruction they received. The study highlighted the teachers' stated beliefs about the effectiveness of their practice of primarily delivering corrective feedback through recasts and/or prompts. The students were also able to articulate clear perspectives on corrective feedback in pronunciation teaching, but overall these did not align with those of the teachers. The paper concludes by discussing the implications of this misalignment.

INTRODUCTION

Corrective feedback (CF) refers to teachers responding to learner erroneous utterances (Ellis, 2006). Although CF has been showed to be beneficial for second language learning (Li, 2010; Lyster, Saito, & Sato, 2013), limited research has investigated teachers' and students' beliefs and attitudes towards CF in pronunciation teaching, and no such research of which we are aware has been carried out in the Vietnamese EFL context. Given that millions of teachers and learners are currently teaching and studying English from primary schools to universities throughout Vietnam, it is necessary to look into teachers' and students' perspectives of CF in pronunciation teaching in this EFL context and to examine Vietnamese EFL learners' pronunciation instructional needs.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Research has shown ESL/EFL pronunciation teaching to be typically reactive and unplanned in response to individual student's pronunciation errors, usually in the form of recasts (giving model pronunciations) and/or prompts (encouraging self-correction by giving meta-linguistic clues). For example, Foote, Trofimovich, Collins, and Urzúa (2016) found that ESL teachers in Canada mainly corrected students' pronunciation errors of individual sounds through recasts and/or prompts. Murphy (2011) also found that over 90% of the 36 teacher participants in four different private schools in the Dublin area of Ireland corrected learners' pronunciation errors when they read aloud. A study in Malaysian EFL context also showed that the teachers at a university corrected students' segmental errors through repetition (Wahid & Sulong, 2013). Overall, these research findings revealed that teachers limited their pronunciation instruction to particular types of teaching technique, the most common being CF through repetition.

This approach finds some support in classroom-based studies which have shown CF to be effective in improving learners' pronunciation. For instance, Saito and Lyster (2012) examined the effects of L2 pronunciation instruction with CF on learners' outcomes. Sixty-five adult intermediate Japanese ESL learners in Montreal, Canada were divided into three groups (one control and two experimental) with each group receiving four hours of pronunciation instruction. The two experimental groups worked on the same activities, but one of them additionally received CF in the forms of recasts. Pre-test and post-test results showed that learners who received instruction with CF significantly improved their pronunciation but those without did not. In addition, learners receiving CF also outperformed the control group on similar task items. Positive findings for CF were also reported by Dłaska and Krekeler (2013) in a study involving 169 intermediate adult learners of German. An analysis of post-intervention oral reading by the participants showed that learners who received explicit individual CF from the teacher were found to be easier to comprehend than those who did not. However, neither of these studies investigated teachers' and students' beliefs and attitudes about CF in pronunciation teaching, the topic of the current study.

THE CURRENT STUDY

Research questions

The research addresses the following research questions:

1. How do EFL teachers at a Vietnamese university teach pronunciation?
2. How do the (a) teachers and (b) students perceive the effectiveness of CF in the form of recasts and/or prompts in pronunciation teaching?
3. How do the students expect to be taught pronunciation?

Participants

Six Vietnamese EFL teachers, both male ($n = 1$) and female ($n = 5$), participated in the study. The teachers, aged from 29 to 52, were given the pseudonyms 1A, 2B, 3C, 4D, 5E, and 6F for the purpose of this report. All had an MA degree in TESOL ($n = 3$) or Applied Linguistics ($n = 3$) and had been teaching at the university from six to 23 years. Twenty-four students (six groups) voluntarily participated in focus group interviews. The students, aged from 19 to 23, included both male ($n = 12$) and female ($n = 12$), and had been studying English from seven to 14 years at the time of data collection.

Data collection

Data was collected through classroom observations, stimulated recall (SR) interviews with the teachers, and focus group (FG) interviews with student participants from each of six classes. The classroom observations consisted of non-participant observation of two 45-minute periods for each of the six classes, each taught by a separate teacher (a total of 540 minutes of observation data). The classes were elementary and pre-intermediate level, and covered vocabulary, listening, speaking, and grammar, but not writing. All the observations were audio-video taped, with author 1 also taking unstructured field notes.

One day after each observation, the observed teacher was interviewed for about 30 minutes. In the interviews, each teacher first watched and was asked to comment on two selected excerpts

from an audio-video recording of their previous lesson in which pronunciation instruction was present. One excerpt involved a recast and the other a prompt. In the second part of the interview, the teachers were asked general questions about their pedagogic decision-making in relation to pronunciation teaching and how effective they perceived it to be, and why. For the purpose of this paper, we focused on the teachers' answers to the question "Do you think correcting students' errors like this [recasts and/or prompts] is effective and why?"

The student FG interviews each lasted for about 20 minutes each and were audio recorded. The groups first watched the two excerpts of their teacher teaching from the previous class and were given a brief explanation of the nature of the recasting and prompting that were illustrated in these excerpts. Then each student was asked in turn to comment on their perception of the value for their pronunciation learning of CF through recasts and prompts. During the interviews, they were also asked to elaborate on how they would like to be taught pronunciation.

Data analysis

A qualitative content analysis approach was adopted for the present study data. This involved an iterative, cyclical and inductive process of identifying and refining themes and categories in the observation and interview data (Duff, 2008). For the purpose of coding the observation data, author 1 adopted Foot et al.'s (2016) four-category scheme to identify and code parts of each lesson where pronunciation instruction was present. These included: (1) *Planning*: pre-planned versus reactive; (2) *Target*: segmental versus supra-segmental; (3) *Specific form* (sound contrast); and (4) *Impact*: involving individual students versus the whole class. Based on classroom-based research by Saito (2011), all instances of the teachers giving CF to students' pronunciation were further coded as recasts or prompts. Another Vietnamese EFL teacher was trained to code a sample of pronunciation teaching episodes from the lessons. A comparison of coding by the two coders showed an agreement percentage of over 98%.

Note that this paper reports on a subset of findings from a larger scale research project on pronunciation teaching at tertiary level in Vietnam. We briefly report on the observational data, but our main focus is on teacher and learner cognition with respect to the specific topic of CF through recasts and/or prompts.

RESULTS

The teachers' pronunciation teaching

The observational data shows that all the teachers only used a reactive focus-on-form approach (Basturkmen, Loewen, & Ellis, 2004) to pronunciation teaching. In other words, the teachers responded to individual students' pronunciation errors through recasts and/or prompts, rather than working from a pre-planned syllabus. The pronunciation teaching episodes identified for each teacher are summarised in Table 1.

Table 1

The teachers' pronunciation teaching episodes

| Instructor | Recasts | Prompts | Total |
|---------------------|---|--|--|
| Teacher 1A | Segments: 13 Linking: 2 Word stress: 2 | Segments: 6 Linking: 2 | Segments: 19 Linking: 4 Word stress: 2 |
| Teacher 2B | Segments: 8 Word stress: 1 | Segments: 6; Intonation: 1 | Segments: 14 Intonation: 1 Word stress: 1 |
| Teacher 3C | Segments: 4 Linking: 1 | Segments: 2 | Segments: 6 Linking: 1 |
| Teacher 4D | Segments: 8 Word stress: 2 | Segments: 5 | Segments: 13 Word stress: 2 |
| Teacher 5E | Segments: 11 | Segments: 3 Word stress: 2 Intonation: 1 | Segments: 14 Word stress: 2 Intonation: 1 |
| Teacher 6F | Segments: 11 Word stress: 1 | Segments: 6 Word stress: 1 | Segments: 17 Word stress: 2 |
| All teachers | 64 Segments: 55 Word stress: 6 Linking: 3 | 35 Segments: 28 Word stress: 3 Linking: 2 Intonation: 2 | 99 Segments: 83 Word stress: 9 Linking: 5 Intonation: 2 |

As shown in Table 1, a total of 99 pronunciation teaching episodes were identified across the teachers, 83 of which were focused on segmental errors of individual sounds, nine on word stress, five on linking, and two on intonation. Clearly the teachers were most focused on correcting errors in the production of individual sounds at the word level. The following teaching episodes illustrate this.

Episode 1: (*Note: T = teacher; S = student; Ss = students*)

- T: Okay. Now, which four adjectives do we use to describe this car?
- S1: It's stylish and powerful (*pronounced as /pɒwəfʊl/ with no lexical stress*).
- T: Say 'powerful' (*emphasized lexical stress and vowel production*).
- S1: Powerful.
- T: That's right. What else? You, please.

Episode 2:

- T: When you make your presentation, if you pronounce incorrectly, then you won't get good scores. Beside content, you must pronounce intelligibly for people to understand. Remember? Say these words again for me, please. How do you say this? (*pointing to the first word in the list*)
- Ss: Male (*pronounced as /meʊ/*).

T: No. Look at the vowel and the final sound. Say...?
 Ss: male.
 T: Good. This word? (pointing to the second word in the list)
 SS: image (pronounced as /imeɪ/).
 T: not 'mei' but...?
 Ss: image (*pronounced vowel correctly but dropped the final sound*).
 T: Yes. What about the final consonant?
 Ss: image.
 T: That's right. Now, say 'image'
 Ss: image.

This pattern of focusing on segmental errors and of correcting these errors through repetition or awareness raising for self-correction was identical across the observed classes of all six teachers.

We will now turn to examine the teachers' perspectives of CF through recasts and/or prompts in pronunciation teaching.

The teachers' perspectives of CF in pronunciation teaching

In response to the question about the effectiveness of their pronunciation teaching, all the teachers stated that giving CF through recasts and/or prompts was effective. They were then asked to elaborate on why they said so. Four different reasons were given by the teachers as presented in Table 2.

Table 2

The teachers' stated beliefs about the effectiveness of CF in pronunciation teaching

| Reasons for giving CF | Frequency | Teacher(s) mentioned |
|--------------------------|-----------|------------------------|
| 1. Time constraints | n = 6 | 1A, 2B, 3C, 4D, 5E, 6F |
| 2. Students' errors | n = 6 | 1A, 2B, 3C, 4D, 5E, 6F |
| 3. Students' awareness | n = 6 | 1A, 2B, 3C, 4D, 5E, 6F |
| 4. Students' proficiency | n = 2 | 2B, 5E |

Note: n = number of teachers

The first point all the teachers made was that time constraints dictated the approach they took. As Teacher 6F stated,

- (1) *“There’s been an overload of knowledge in the curriculum [...] Teaching time is too limited but there’re so many students in class. There’re only four periods each week but what must be taught is too much [...] So I think correcting students’ pronunciation errors like this [through recasts and/or prompts] is the most effective way.”* (Teacher 6F)

As shown in this and other comments, all the teachers found that saw that time constraints combined with an overloaded curriculum and large classes all meant that there was no better way to correct students' pronunciation than by providing a model and encouraging self-correction.

Second, all the teachers believed that giving CF in the form of recasts and/or prompts is useful because the errors they correct are common amongst the students. For instance, Teacher 4D explained:

- (2) *“As I’ve just said, there’s not enough time to transfer all the content in the curriculum to students, and so correcting students’ pronunciation errors like this [through recasts and/or prompts] is the fastest and most effective way. Also, these [pronunciation] errors are common amongst Vietnamese learners, so all the students in class will be aware of the errors and can correct themselves.”*
(Teacher 4D)

Overall, the teachers were all willing to teach pronunciation but insisted on staying on schedule in implementing the curriculum. To achieve both these goals, the teachers reported that the focused reactive pronunciation instruction they carried out was effective because it allowed them to balance both these goals.

Third, all the teachers believed that giving CF helped raise learner awareness of pronunciation errors, which was effective in encouraging students to self-correct. As Teacher 3C noted,

- (3) *“Correcting a student’s pronunciation errors not only works for that student but it also makes all other students aware of such errors and so they can correct themselves. This way could help me save time for other tasks.”* (Teacher 3C)

The belief that raising awareness can help improve learners’ pronunciation has been supported by scholars such as Ducate and Lomicka (2009), Kennedy, Blanchet, and Trofimovich (2014), and Ramírez Verdugo (2006). In this EFL context, the teachers believed that pushing students to pay attention to practicing pronunciation leads to improvements. Teacher 1A, for instance, said that if teachers make students aware that pronunciation errors cause misunderstandings and/or communication breakdowns, then their attitudes towards pronunciation will be changed positively and they will pay more attention to practice.

Finally, Teachers 2B and 5E reasoned that since students were at a low level of English proficiency, CF through recasts and/or prompts was effective. The teachers believed that students who are not very good at English benefit from CF such as recasts and/or prompts whereas teaching pronunciation explicitly works more effectively with students of higher proficiency. Teacher 5E, for example, said:

- (4) *“[...] Most students of our university are not very good at English. So, I think the best way is to correct their pronunciation errors. This is more or less useful for their pronunciation learning. They’ll know where they’re mistake and so become more conscious in practicing pronunciation. I think teaching pronunciation explicitly works more effectively with better students [...]”* (Teacher 5E)

In brief, the teachers’ stated beliefs show that giving CF through recasts and/or prompts is beneficial to students’ pronunciation learning. The following section reports on the students’ thoughts and beliefs about CF in the form of recasts and/or prompts in pronunciation teaching.

The students' perspectives of CF in pronunciation teaching and their instructional needs

In response to the question of how effective CF is in pronunciation teaching, all the 24 student participants gave negative responses. Their rating ranged from *not very effective* to *not effective at all* as visualised in Figure 1.

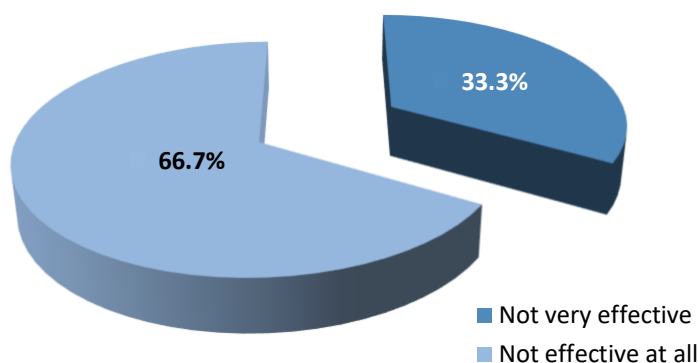


Figure 1. The students' stated beliefs about the effectiveness of CF in pronunciation teaching.

First, Figure 1 shows that one third of the students ($n = 8$) reported that giving CF was not a very effective approach to pronunciation teaching. Student 3 from FG5, for instance, explained:

- (5) “[...] What we only do is to listen and repeat after the teacher like a machine. Later on, we’ll forget all about it because we aren’t taught pronunciation theory and don’t have opportunities for communication practice either.” (Student 3, FG5)

This and other extracts show that the students saw teachers correcting pronunciation errors to be a temporary solution and so believed they did not benefit much from it. From the students’ responses it appears that they sought instruction that could bring about more long-term effects to their pronunciation skill. Also implied in the students’ comments were their expectations of more explicit teaching of pronunciation along with opportunities for communication practice.

Second, two thirds of the students ($n = 16$) stated that CF through recasts and/or prompts as their teachers did was completely ineffective. According to the students, repeating model pronunciation was too mechanical and difficult for them to remember, and so not at all beneficial to their learning. They believed that their pronunciation could not be improved through this teaching strategy. The following comments illustrate this collective view:

- (6) “I think it’s completely ineffective. Teachers’ correction of our errors through repetition is too mechanical. I think pronunciation requires time but teachers don’t seem to care about it and so they don’t spend time teaching pronunciation explicitly in class.” (Student 3, FG3)
- (7) “It’s not effective at all. Repetition drills are just like the way of teaching a parrot how to speak. I can only pronounce the words that teachers have taught. When seeing a new word, I don’t know how to read it correctly. So, I don’t think my pronunciation improves through this approach.” (Student 4, FG6)

Overall, the students showed negative attitudes towards CF through repetition in pronunciation teaching. They reported finding it mechanical and thus not beneficial to their pronunciation skill. What the students said they expected was that teachers take better care of their pronunciation skill by spending more time teaching pronunciation explicitly in class.

The question, then, is how the students expected to be taught pronunciation and why. In response, all the students stated that they wanted pronunciation to be taught in such a way that can improve not only their pronunciation but also listening and speaking skills. The following comment is representative:

- (8) *“I don’t know how to say but I expect teachers to teach pronunciation in such a way that provides us with more communication practice. The way that helps me improve pronunciation, listening, and speaking skills at the same time [...]”*
(Student 1, FG1)

As mentioned above, although the students did not use the term “the communicative teaching of pronunciation”, it was implied in their responses that they believed that teaching pronunciation communicatively not only helps improve their pronunciation but also communication skills.

Elaborating on why they wanted to be taught pronunciation communicatively, the students said it is better than the approach that bases itself mostly on repetition. According to the students, if pronunciation is taught communicatively, learners’ listening and speaking skills improve ($n = 18$), classroom tension reduces and learner motivation increases ($n = 12$), learner comprehension of teacher instruction speeds up ($n = 7$), and interactions are promoted ($n = 4$). Figure 2 provides a visual representation of the students’ stated beliefs about the communicative teaching of pronunciation.

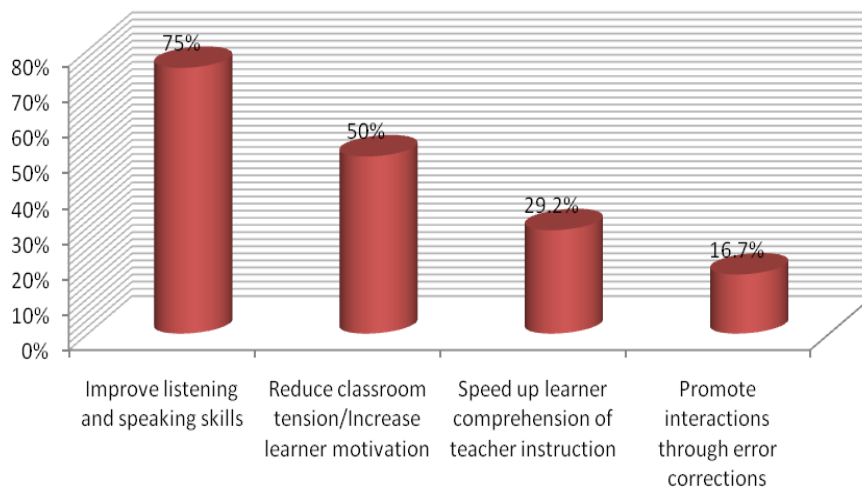


Figure 2. The students’ stated beliefs about communicative pronunciation teaching.

First, 18/24 of the students believed that it is more practical for pronunciation to be taught communicatively so their listening and speaking skills can simultaneously improve. As the students saw it, the communicative teaching of pronunciation provides more opportunities and allows them to practice pronunciation through communication situations. The following extracts are representative:

- (9) *“Pronunciation should be taught communicatively. This way is more practical because we can apply what we’ve learned in communication. And when we have more opportunities for practice, our listening and speaking skills will be improved.”* (Student 1, FG6)
- (10) *“I’d prefer teachers to teach pronunciation communicatively because it’s practical and more interesting. Learning through repetition is very boring, and we’ll forget everything quickly. When teachers give us more communication practice, our listening and speaking skills can improve.”* (Student 2, FG4)

Second, 12/24 of the students stated that the communicative teaching of pronunciation helps reduce classroom tension and increase learner motivation. According to the students, when pronunciation is taught communicatively, the classroom atmosphere is more interesting and welcoming. Thus, learners will be more motivated in coming to class. They said:

- (11) *“I expect teachers to teach pronunciation communicatively because students will have more opportunities for practice in communication situations. Also, the classroom atmosphere will be more interesting, making students more motivated coming to class.”* (Student 2, FG2)

The students’ primary concern in characterising their preferred approach to pronunciation teaching was the classroom atmosphere. They believed that if classes are interesting, then they will be motivated to attend. Moreover, they will be more active in class and thus teacher’s instruction is more beneficial to their learning as they become more productive learners.

Third, seven students also believed that the communicative teaching of pronunciation speeds up learner comprehension of teacher instruction. They said teacher instruction is more comprehensible this way and thus they can absorb the knowledge faster and the outcomes will be better. For example:

- (12) *“I’d prefer pronunciation to be taught communicatively because it makes me more interested in learning. The lessons will be more comprehensible and I can absorb the knowledge transferred by my teacher more quickly. So, the results will be much better.”* (Student 3, FG3)

Finally, teaching pronunciation communicatively also promotes interactions in the classroom through peer and teacher corrections as articulated by four of the students. They commented:

- (13) *“I think pronunciation should be taught more effectively. Repetition drills are boring, mechanical, and not practical. But when teaching [pronunciation] communicatively [...] there’ll be more interactions between teachers and students. We can correct each other and teachers correct our errors too [...]”* (Student 3, FG5)

This and similar comments show the students’ belief about how the communicative teaching of pronunciation encourages interactions in class. They reported that communication practice helps them identify their own pronunciation problems which need correction from peers and the instructor. In this sense, interactions amongst pair/group members and between the teacher and students will be facilitated.

In sum, the students did not value CF through recasts and/or prompts. Instead, they expressed a strong need for more explicit communicative teaching of pronunciation.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The study found that the teachers' pronunciation teaching was restricted to error correction through repetition. Their stated beliefs show that they believe this is an effective way to address pronunciation in their English classes. The value the teachers put on error correction finds support from a general claim that CF is beneficial for improving pronunciation (Lyster et al., 2013; Saito & Lyster, 2012). However, Foote et al. (2016) have argued that instructors can be over-reliant on CF and this fails to address pronunciation proactively. They claim that without explicit instruction that first helps students understand a target feature, the feedback teachers give is less likely to be beneficial to student learning. If this is the case, then our finding that the teachers relied in CF is not encouraging.

The study has also found that the students were not in favour of CF as a pronunciation teaching approach and considered it as unhelpful to their learning. Although L2 pronunciation acquisition can be facilitated by repetition drills (Trofimovich & Gatbonton, 2006), the students found these drills too mechanical, boring and ineffective and so expected pronunciation to be taught communicatively so that they can improve not only pronunciation but also listening and speaking skills. This approach to pronunciation teaching has been supported by scholars such as Isaacs (2009), Celce-Murcia, Brinton, and Goodwin (2010), and Avery and Ehrlich (2013). Spada and Lightbown (2008) have argued that communicative activities may be the best choice for learners to develop fluency and automaticity necessary for oral communication outside the classroom. In this EFL context, although the students have little need to use English for oral interactions outside the classroom, their favourable attitudes towards the communicative teaching of pronunciation are encouraging. The value that the students put on this teaching approach is consistent with learners in an American ESL setting who were reported to want more real-life communication situations to practice the target pronunciation features (Vitanova & Miller, 2002).

Perhaps the most important aspect of our findings is the dissonance between the views of the teachers and students on the efficacy of current pronunciation teaching practices. Regardless of which views find the most support in the research literature or which approach is the most effective and realistic, this result suggests that there is room for dialogue between teachers and students so that each can gain greater understanding of the views of the other and modify practices and expectations accordingly.

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