10th grade students' attitudes towards teachers' error correction in classroom oral activities at Do Son Boarding High School, Hai Phong \ Thái độ của học sinh lớp 10 trường THPT Nội Trú Đồ Sơn đối với việc chữa lỗi của giáo viên trong các hoạt động nói. M.A Thesis Linguistics: 60 14 10 \ Đỗ Thị Hồng Hà

1. Rationale of the Study

The teaching and learning of English language is always on its progress to search for effective methodologies. One of the issues which has constantly attracted great concern and discussion among many linguists, educational researchers and teachers is the correction of learners' errors.

It has been widely accepted that error making is inevitable and it appears essential to the language learning process. The correction of learners' errors has also been recognized as an integral part of language teaching. So far, a number of studies have been conducted to seek for effective methods of correcting learners' errors with the aim of fostering more successful language learning. The research findings have revealed that learners' perceptions and attitudes towards instructional methods have a great influence on their achievement (Schulz's, 1996, 2001). Teachers need to know learners' beliefs about language teaching and learning because a mismatch between students' expectations and the realities they encounter in the classroom can prevent improvement in language acquisition (Horwitz, 1988).

In reality, such mismatch has been found in many settings including Vietnam, and as a result, it has brought about unsatisfactory learning outcomes. This problem is not an exception in the context of Do Son Boarding High School where I have been working as a teacher of English.

Rooted from the problem existing in my context and the awareness of the significance of oral error correction as well as the need for teachers to learn about their students' perceptions and preferences for error treatment, I would like to conduct an investigation into *"10th grade students' attitudes towards teachers' error correction in*

classroom oral activities at Do Son Boarding High School, Hai Phong". The fact that there has been limited research into this subject matter in the context of Vietnam has also inspired me to carry out this study. It is hoped that the research outcomes will be able to assist teachers to gain more insights into the issues of oral error correction so that they can adjust or adopt appropriate methods catering for students' needs with the aim of improving language learning.

2. Aims of the Study

The specific aims of the study are:

• to find out what students think about the correction of oral errors delivered by their teachers

• to understand how students respond to the current methods of correcting oral errors employed by their teachers.

• to explore in what ways students expect their oral error correction to be delivered (e.g. which errors to correct, when to correct, how to correct).

3. Scope of the Study

It is clear that oral error correction is a broad issue. A study on students' attitudes towards oral error correction apparently opens for a variety of subject matters which cannot be entirely discussed within the scope of a minor thesis. Therefore, in this study, I would like to restrict the focus to investigating the attitudes towards teachers' methods of spoken error correction among a group of 10th grade students at Do Son Boarding High School in Hai Phong city.

4. Research Questions

In an attempt to achieve the aims stated above, the present study aims to address three research questions:

1. What are the students' perceptions of the role of oral errors and teachers' oral error correction?

2. What are the students' reactions to the current practices of teachers' oral error correction?

3. What are the students' preferences for teachers' correction of oral errors?

5. Methods of the Study

In order to seek for answers to the research questions, various sources of data were used from a survey questionnaire, semi-structured interviews and classroom observations.

6. Significance of the Study

The issue of teacher's oral error correction has presented certain problems for both EFL teachers and students due to the mismatch between teachers' actual practices and students' expectations. As a result, the teachers' error treatment in classroom oral activities has not reached adequate efficiency. This study therefore hopes to find out reasonable answers to the research questions so that teachers can gain more awareness of the significance of students' beliefs and their influence on the language teaching and learning. By comparing students' attitudes and preferences with actual classroom practices, teachers are hoped to find out their own appropriate ways for delivering oral error correction to their students.

7. Design of the Study

The thesis contains three main parts as follows:

• Part A provides an introduction of the study including the rationale, the aims, the research questions, the significance, the scope, the methods and the study organization.

• Part B consists of two chapters. Chapter 1 presents the theoretical background for the thesis and Chapter 2 describes the methodology underlying the research.

• Part C presents the summary of the findings and some pedagogical suggestions for teachers delivering error correction in classroom oral activities. The limitations of the study and some recommendations for further research are also discussed in this part.

PART B: DEVELOPMENT

CHAPTER 1: LITERATURE REVIEW

1. Definition of "Error"

There have been different definitions of "error" in language learning. It is typically defined as a deviation from a standard form of the language.

In foreign and L2 teaching situations, however, the "deviation" aspect of the "errors" from a given "standard" of the language presents some problem. Allwright and Bailey (1991) explain that the target language model at which the EFL learners are aiming may not be the native speaker norm for the teaching is mostly done by non-native speaking teachers. The global varieties of the English language also influence the conception of correctness. Allwright and Bailey (1991) additionally states that changes in language teaching methodology also have an effect on deciding what an error is.

2. Types of Errors

Errors have been classified in many ways basing on psycholinguistic origins, language skills, language components and the CLT point of view.

Basing on psycholinguistic considerations, Richard and Littlewood group errors into three types as "intralingual", "interlingual" and "developmental".

Categories of errors can be made in the four skill areas of the language: speaking, writing, reading and listening.

Errors are also categorized on the basis of language components such as phonological, syntactic, morphological, semantic, lexical and stylistic errors.

Under the CLT point of view which considers errors as those which block communication, Burt and Kiparsky (1972) distinguish between "global" and "local" errors.

3. Distinction between "Error" and "Mistake"

There are ways for teachers to distinguish between the terms "error" and "mistake" in spite of the fact that it is quite difficult to signify a clear differentiation.

The term "error" refers to the error of competence which is due to the learner's defective knowledge of the target language. He uses the term "mistake" to indicate the error of performance which is a result of "memory lapses, physical states such as tiredness and psychological conditions such as strong emotion". The errors of competence are considered systematic while the errors of performance unsystematic. Mistakes are considered unimportant to the language learning process and they can be self-corrected by the learners with almost absolute assurance. Whereas, errors are hardly amended by the learners themselves and it is therefore necessary for the teacher to help the learners reconstruct their incomplete knowledge of the language.

4. Perspectives on Errors and Error Correction

There are basically two different viewpoints on learners' errors in the fields of second and foreign language learning. On the one hand, errors are considered undesirable and a sign of failure either on the learner's or the teacher's part and therefore to be avoided. On the other hand, making errors is regarded as an integral and essential part of the learning process. Along with the stream of these different schools of thoughts, the correction of errors is also viewed differently. Some believe that error correction can be effective and beneficial to language learning. The others, however, cast doubts on the role of error correction: whether it helps language learners improve their learning. In this section, a presentation of major views on errors and error correction from the perspectives of pedagogy and L2 acquisition theories will be made.

5. The Role of Oral Error Correction

When it comes to error correction it specifies correcting both oral and written errors. This study, however, is particularly concerned with the correction of oral errors.

The role of oral error correction has become a controversial issue among many linguists, researchers and language practitioners. Some researchers imply that teachers should not correct students' spoken errors. The supporters of this debate include Allwright (1975), Fanselow (1977), and Hendrickson (1978). However, Lyster, Lightbown, and Spada's (1999) claim strong support for the provision of oral error correction and

consistently report a desire for it. A number of recent studies have also demonstrated the positive effect of oral error correction. They have shown that the correction of oral errors can contribute to L2 language acquisition. (Sheen, 2010).

The correction of oral errors obviously requires much consideration because of the fact that spoken errors in normal communication often happen even when people are speaking in their mother tongue. The place of oral error correction in the classroom depends on what is considered the main objective of the target language learning that teachers expect their students to achieve.

6. Techniques of Oral Error Correction

There are different ways of delivering error correction in language classrooms. This study utilizes three major types of error correction suggested by Lyster and Mori (2006): explicit correction, recasts, and prompts. Explicit and recasts supply learners with target reformulations of their non-target output. Prompts, on the other hand, include a variety of signals other than alternative reformulations that push learners to self-repair (e.g. elicitation, metalinguistic clues, clarification requests and repetition). Such techniques as using gestures and facial expression proposed by Edge (1989) and Mumford and Darn (2005) are also included in this classification. Following are further description and illustration of these error correction types which can be applied for the correction of oral errors in language classrooms.

7. Previous Studies on Students' Attitudes towards Teachers' Oral Error Correction

There has been an increased interest in the area of students' attitudes and preferences for teachers' correction of oral errors. Researchers imply that it is necessary for teachers to ascertain students' specific perceptions, beliefs and expectations in order to adjust teachers' instructional practices appropriately. However, the previous studies have mainly focused on the settings of colleges and universities. In Vietnam in particular, to my knowledge, there is also relatively little research into this issue in the contexts of high schools. Thus, the present study is one attempt to add to the literature on this important topic.

CHAPTER 2: THE STUDY

II.1. Methodology

II.1.1. Context of the Study

The study was conducted at Do Son Boarding High School in Hai Phong city with the participation of 10th grade students.

The English language teaching and learning in my school follow the national curriculum. In reality, it has not reached much satisfaction as required due to both internal and external factors such as students' lack of language proficiency, low motivation in speaking activities, large-sized classes, not well-equipped classrooms, and the neglect of speaking improvement due to pressure of examination success on the part of both teachers and students.

Towards successful language teaching and learning, it is essential for the teachers to investigate the issues concerned and find out effective solutions.

II.1.3. Subjects of the Study

The subjects in this study were 120 students both male and female from three classes of grade 10 in Do Son Boarding High School in Hai Phong city. Half of them have been learning English since grade 6 and the rest since grade 3. These students vary in terms of background, ability, interest, learning styles and attitudes, and so forth.

The teacher participants consisted of two female teachers from the English group of my school. One teacher has been teaching English for 9 years and the other 5 years. Both of them voluntarily and enthusiastically participated in this study.

II.1.4. Data Collection Instruments

The main instrument for collecting data in the study was the questionnaire which comprised 10 questions of such types as multiple-choice questions, open-ended questions,

ranked questions and scaled questions. It was translated into Vietnamese with the help of the two teacher participants and clearly instructed to ensure students' understanding of all the questions before answering them. The student identity was not required so that students could feel free and comfortable to express their opinions, hence more honest responses.

In order to gain more in-depth information about students' attitudes towards their teacher's treatment of errors, I decided to interview a small group of students selected randomly from each class. The interviews were designed in a semi-structured form which can allow for richer interactions and more personalized responses while remaining in control of the interviewer. Vietnamese was used in the interviews to guarantee good understanding.

The other supplementary instrument for data collection was classroom observations which were carried out in three classes of 10th grade during the study. The main purpose of this instrument was to seek for more detailed information about what the teachers actually did and how the students responded to teachers' instruction.

II.1.5. Data Collection Procedure

In the first place, the questionnaires were pilot-tested with 20 student participants to check whether there emerged any problems for the respondents in answering the questions. After the pilot testing, the questionnaires were delivered to 120 student participants of 10th grade in their classrooms. The survey was conducted at the end of the class meeting periods of the three classes with the head teachers' permission.

The next step was the conduction of semi-structured interviews with a small group of ten students randomly selected from the three classes.

During the research, classroom observations were conducted with the three 10th grade classes in several periods. In each class observed, the researcher acted as a non-participant observer and took notes of the teacher's instruction concerning frequency of delivering correction, the types of errors which were in focus of the teacher's correction and the teacher's employment of correction techniques.

II.2. Findings and Discussion

The following results address the three research questions in the study.

II.2.1. Students' perceptions of oral errors and oral error correction

Regarding students' perceptions of oral errors and oral error correction, the data analysis reveals that most of the students are aware of the usefulness of oral errors in language learning and hold positive attitudes towards the correction of errors in oral classroom activities. For these students, spoken errors are inevitable and an integral part of their learning for speaking is an important yet difficult skill. Although there remain some students not being fully aware of the significance of errors, all students participating in the study expressed a strong need for the correction of their spoken errors. They all believe that error correction can help them improve language learning.

II.2.2. Students' reactions to teachers' actual practices of oral error correction

Concerning the students' reactions to their teachers' correction of oral errors in actual practices, the collected data uncover some noticeable findings. The students in general are not quite satisfied with their teachers' correction of oral errors. It is a matter of fact that many students do not get much comprehension of their teachers' error treatment. This is mainly due to students' inadequate proficiency and concentration, and, importantly, teachers' unsuitable methods of error correction. As a result, their speaking ability has not got much improvement.

II.2.3. Students' preferences for teacher correction of oral errors

With regard to students' preferences for oral error correction, the data analysis also provides remarkable results. Considering error types to be corrected, the students express highly positive attitudes towards teacher correction of all errors. They have a strong preference for the correction of grammatical and phonological errors rather than lexical and semantic errors. In view of timing for correction, the students prefer immediate correction than delayed treatment of errors. These findings are commonly explained by the fact that the students are more concerned with language accuracy than appropriate use of language in real-life settings. In terms of error correction methods, the students stress the need for having errors corrected in explicit ways for the sake of clearer understanding. They also hold favorable attitudes to some types of implicit correction techniques providing that they are employed appropriately to their ability and needs. Of all the correction forms, the students in this study prefer teacher correction and self-correction with the help of the teacher to the correction from other students in the classroom.

The findings from classroom observations and interviews with students together with the researcher's personal experiences indicate that teachers' actual practices in oral error correction have not sufficiently come up to the students' expectations as revealed.

PART C: CONCLUSION

1. Summary of the Findings

The findings of the study revealed that the students were aware of the significance of oral errors in language learning and they had strongly positive attitudes towards teacher correction of oral errors. However, the teachers' treatment of errors has not brought about as much satisfaction as the students wish. In addition, the students showed a clear preference for teacher correction of grammatical and phonological errors over other types of errors. They also expressed a strong need for having oral errors treated right after they have finished speaking. The most favored correction method was for the teacher to clearly explain and explicitly correct the errors made by the students.

2. Recommendations for Teachers' Error Correction in Oral Classroom Activities

2.1. Knowing about the Students

It is obvious that individual students differ from each other in terms of personalities, language proficiency, cognitive abilities, interests, learning styles, and so forth. Accordingly, the attitudes and preferences for error correction are also varied among the students. This diversity has been proved to potentially influence the effectiveness of teachers' error correction strategies. Therefore, teachers who wish to deliver effective correction of their students' errors should consider its effects on each individual student. They should know well about their students so that they can adapt or adopt appropriate ways of error correction in order to meet the students' needs. It is suggested that teachers should spare some time to explore what students think and feel about their correction practice as well as what they expect it would be through such instruments as questionnaires, informal interviews and personal observations.

2.2. Working out Appropriate Error Correction Strategies

Firstly, teachers should know what types of errors and how much of the errors that students need to be corrected. The students in this study expressed highly favorable attitudes towards the correction of grammatical and phonological errors. Teachers are therefore suggested to have students engage in oral activities incorporated with form-focused practice to help students increase language accuracy. However, learning language is not merely mastering the forms of the language but using the language appropriately in meaningful contexts as well. Thus, teachers need to make students more aware of the real goal of language learning so as to balance their preferences more reasonably. More importantly, teachers should direct their actual instructional practices towards achieving that goal in order to orientate students in the right way. Teachers are also encouraged to be more tolerant towards the students' oral errors so that they can feel more comfortable and confident about using the target language. Although the students in the present study want to receive error correction as much as possible, teachers should concentrate on errors that are regularly repeated and those considered the most serious. It is necessary for teachers to remind students that making errors is a natural part in the process of acquiring the target language and that correcting all errors within limited class time is not feasible.

Secondly, teachers are advised to decide on appropriate time to correct students' spoken errors. The findings of this study reveal that students expect their errors to be corrected as soon as possible. The practical advice for teachers is to consider the goal of the activity when deciding the correction time. If the activity focuses on fluency, it is better to delay the correction until the end of the activity so as to avoid interrupting the student's flow of speech. If the emphasis of the activity is on accuracy, teachers are recommended to correct the error right after it has been made or it will be repeated.

Finally, how to deliver correction appropriate to different students needs to be taken into the greatest consideration among the teachers. In this study, the students show a strong need for teachers' explicit correction of their oral errors. That is, students want the teacher to point out and explain the errors clearly and definitely. However, they also want to get chance for handling the errors by themselves through some implicit ways of correction. The possible solution for teachers is that they should consider students' language proficiency and learning anxiety as well as types of errors when deciding on the degree of explicitness. Implicit correction is also suitable for less serious errors while more

threatening ones need more explicit treatment. However, implicit correction techniques must be employed with great care since it may cause misinterpretation and confusion on the part of the students.

Apart from the suggestions claimed above, it is noted that more practice in the areas where errors occurred is necessary for students to better understand and remember the correct forms and use of the language in the long run.

2.3. Creating a Supportive and Pleasant Classroom Environment

To become good speakers, students need an environment that makes them feel encouraged to speak. For this matter of fact, teachers are advised to create a supportive and pleasant atmosphere in the classroom by giving students encouragement and positive feedback in order to build students' confidence and motivation in language learning. Teachers' giving negative comments or comparing one student's performance with that of the other can increase students' anxiety and thus discourage them from participating in the classroom activities.

3. Limitations of the Study

In the first place, the conduction of the study is restricted to only three 10th grade classrooms at a boarding high school. Inevitably, the small size of participants in a specific context makes it difficult to generalize the findings to other settings.

Additionally, the study may not touch upon all aspects of students' attitudes to oral error correction due to time constraint and limited scope for a minor thesis.

What is more, some of the suggested correction techniques have not been put into practice. As a result, students' evaluation of these techniques may not provide complete validity. Also, classroom observation may be not completely objective for both teachers and students may behave differently during the observed lesson.

4. Recommendations for Further Research

The findings of the present study can hardly be generalized due to its restricted context. Therefore, studies on the same issue yet in different settings with various subjects are needed to get better generalizations of the research results.

The present study has provided some information about students' perceptions, reactions and preferences for oral error correction. The researcher wish to shed more light on these issues in future studies with the main focus on the influential factors. Also, the

recommended techniques of oral error correction need to be checked for their effectiveness in further research for the sake of more appropriate application.

This minor study aims at finding students' attitudes towards oral error correction. It is expected that another research with a wider scope will consider the teachers' attitudes as well to achieve an overall picture of the issue.

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