

# Analyzing EFL Learners' Errors: The Plausibility of Teachers' Feedbacks and Students' Uptakes

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**Abstract**—The present study was an attempt to investigate the types of error receiving more feedback by language teachers, the types of feedback leading to the greatest amount of uptake, and finally what types of errors lead to what types of teacher corrective feedback. To this end, an observational, analytical and descriptive study was conducted. Six classes with 6 different instructors were chosen. The number of participants was 60 female students at intermediate level from two branches of Jihad Language Institutes. Homogeneous groups of language learners were selected. Each class was observed for 5 sessions and the interaction among students and teacher was recorded. The coding scheme was according to Lyster and Ranta' (1997) model with some additional parts. Two other types of feedback were added, translation and multiple feedback. Also a combination of errors, multiple errors, were added. The analysis of the database revealed first, lexical errors received the most amount of feedback type (78%). Second, elicitation feedback led to the greatest amount of uptake. Third, phonological and grammatical errors mostly received recast and explicit correction. Lexical errors received explicit correction (39%). Multiple and L1 errors were provided by recast (48 and 40% respectively).

**Index Terms**—corrective feedback, different types of feedback, uptake

## I. INTRODUCTION

Learner's errors and feedbacks followed an error are two significant parts of learning process; therefore, coping with errors and understanding how to tackle them could be considered as a means at teachers' disposal to know how to assist learners. It is through the corrective feedback that students become aware of their inadequacies and are assisted to overcome the problems they face in their language learning experience. Corrective feedback is defined by Lyster & Ranta (1997) as "the provision of negative evidence or positive evidence upon erroneous utterances which encourage learners' repair involving accuracy and precision and not merely comprehensibility". Chaudron (1977) defines it as "any reaction of the teacher which clearly transforms, disapprovingly refers to, or demand improvement of the learner utterance" (p.31). It is described by Lightbown & Spada (2003) "as any indication to a learner that his/ her use of the target language is incorrect" (p.172), it is classified into two categories based on the way they are corrected, explicit and implicit. Carrol & Swain (1993), Dekeyster (1993), Lyster (2004), Lyster & Ranta (1997), Mackey (2000), Mackey & Oliver (2002), Mackey & Silver (2005), Nassaji (2009), Nassaji & Swain (2002), and Takimoto (2006) investigated the effectiveness of corrective feedback. Havranek (2002), Havranek & Ceink (2001), and Oliver (1995, 2000) investigated their studies on the realm of corrective feedback about the factors which are noticeable to promote or impede language learning.

Sheen (2004) stated that the effectiveness of corrective feedback on language acquisition could be measured directly and indirectly: 1) Immediate post-tests (Carrol & Swain,1993; Long *et al.*, 1998); 2) delayed post-tests (Doughty & Varela,1998; Han,2002; and Macky & Philip,1998); 3)learner perception/noticing of corrective feedback by means of (stimulated) recall ( Macky *et al.*,2000; Philip, 2003); and 4) uptake (Ellis *et al.*,2001; Lyster, 1998b; Lyster & Ranta,1997; Mackey *et al.*,2003; Panova & Lyster, 2002; Suzuki,2004; Sheen, 2004; Sheen, 2006; and Tsang, 2004) .Uptake is defined by Lyster & Ranta (1997) as "a student's utterance that immediately follows the teacher's feedback and that constitutes a reaction in some way to the teacher's intention to draw attention to some aspects of the student's initial utterance" (p.49). Carroll & Swain (1993) stated that uptake provides an opportunity to learners to practice what they have learned and fill the gap in their interlanguage. Panova & Lyster (2002) believed that the notion of uptake helps the researchers recognize different degrees of the learners' participation while they are corrected.

Recast is defined by Lyster & Ranta (1997) as "the teacher's reformulation of all or part of a student's utterance, minus error" (p.46). Ellis *et al.*, (2006), Han (2002), Long (1996), Lyster & Izquierdo (2009), Lyster & Mori (2006), McDonough & Mackey (2006), Mackey (2000), Nabei & Swain (2002), Nicholas *et al.*, (2001), Philip (2003), and Sheen (2006) investigated their studies on recast. In most of these studies, recast was appeared as the least effective corrective feedback in terms of successful uptake.

## II. PURPOSE AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Lyster & Ranta (1997) studied the relationship between different corrective feedbacks and learner uptakes. Their studies gave a systematic picture of student-teacher interactional moves, including the types of feedback provided for different types of errors and the types of feedback leading to uptake. Their studies indicated that recasts were the least effective type of feedback in terms of learner uptake, in spite of its high frequency of occurrence. Lyster & Ranta's study was carried out with young learners sitting at elementary level in French immersion classroom. Hence, it seems that there is a need to investigate a study in EFL context with English learners sitting at intermediate level to examine if the results confirm the Lyster & Ranta's study. Furthermore, in the present study, the instruction is a mixture of both meaning-based and form-based; whereas, in Lyster & Ranta's it was meaning-centered. Therefore, the present study aims to shed light on the answers to the following research questions.

- 1: What types of errors receive more feedback by language teachers?
- 2: Which feedback types lead to the greatest amount of uptake?
- 3: What types of learner errors lead to what types of teacher corrective feedback?

## III. METHODOLOGY

### A. Participants and Setting

This study was conducted in 6 classes with six different teachers. There were 60 students (about 8-12 students in each class). The participants were female adults aged 23-29 sitting at intermediate level in two branches of Jihad Language Institutes in Karaj. All students did not have any experience of being in target language environments either for a short time or a long time. The learners were studying English for two reasons, to be able to cope with their daily needs at work and to succeed at their university subject matters for their higher education. To assess the participants' level of proficiency, PET was administered to 85 learners at the beginning of the study. Before administering the test to the major group, the test was first piloted in a smaller group of students, consisting of 34 students whose proficiency level was similar to that of the main participants of the study. The reliability of the objective parts of the proficiency test was estimated through KR-21 formula which was 0.87.

The teachers were selected based on their willingness to cooperate in this study. All instructors were non-native speakers and their first language was Persian. All had either BA or MA degrees from state universities in Iran with a score of 7 or upper in IELTS exam.

### B. Instrumentation

In this study, the interaction between teacher and students was recorded by means of a high-quality recorder. Then all interaction was transcribed for the purpose of data analysis. Students in each class were interviewed by the researchers to indicate their attitudes toward the way they were corrected. The researchers also got some information about each student's L1, background knowledge of English, the aim of learning English, and having the experience of spending time in target language environment or not. It is worth mentioning that this intimate interview between the researchers and students was conducted at the end of the term to avoid any impact on students' interaction in the class.

### C. Procedure

Having made sure of the homogeneity of the participants, the researchers observed and recorded about 45 hours of six teachers' classes in two branches of Jihad language Institutes for 6 weeks. First, the interaction between teacher and students was recorded by a high-quality recorder. Second, the recorded voices were transcribed. Third, all students' errors were identified and classified into different types. Fourth, all types of teachers' feedback following learners' errors were identified and their effects on students' learning (uptake) were examined. Finally, the researcher analyzed the data.

### D. Collecting Data

Lyster and Ranta's (1997) model was used for coding the data; in this model (Fig.1) the sequence begins with a learner's utterance containing at least one error following either teacher's corrective feedback or topic continuation. In the case of providing feedback from teacher, it could be either followed by uptake or topic continuation. Learners' non target utterance is either *repaired* or remained as a *needs repair* utterance. It is worth mentioning that two categories of feedback types, including, translation and multiple feedback; and one category to error types, namely, multiple error was added to Lyster & Ranta's category.

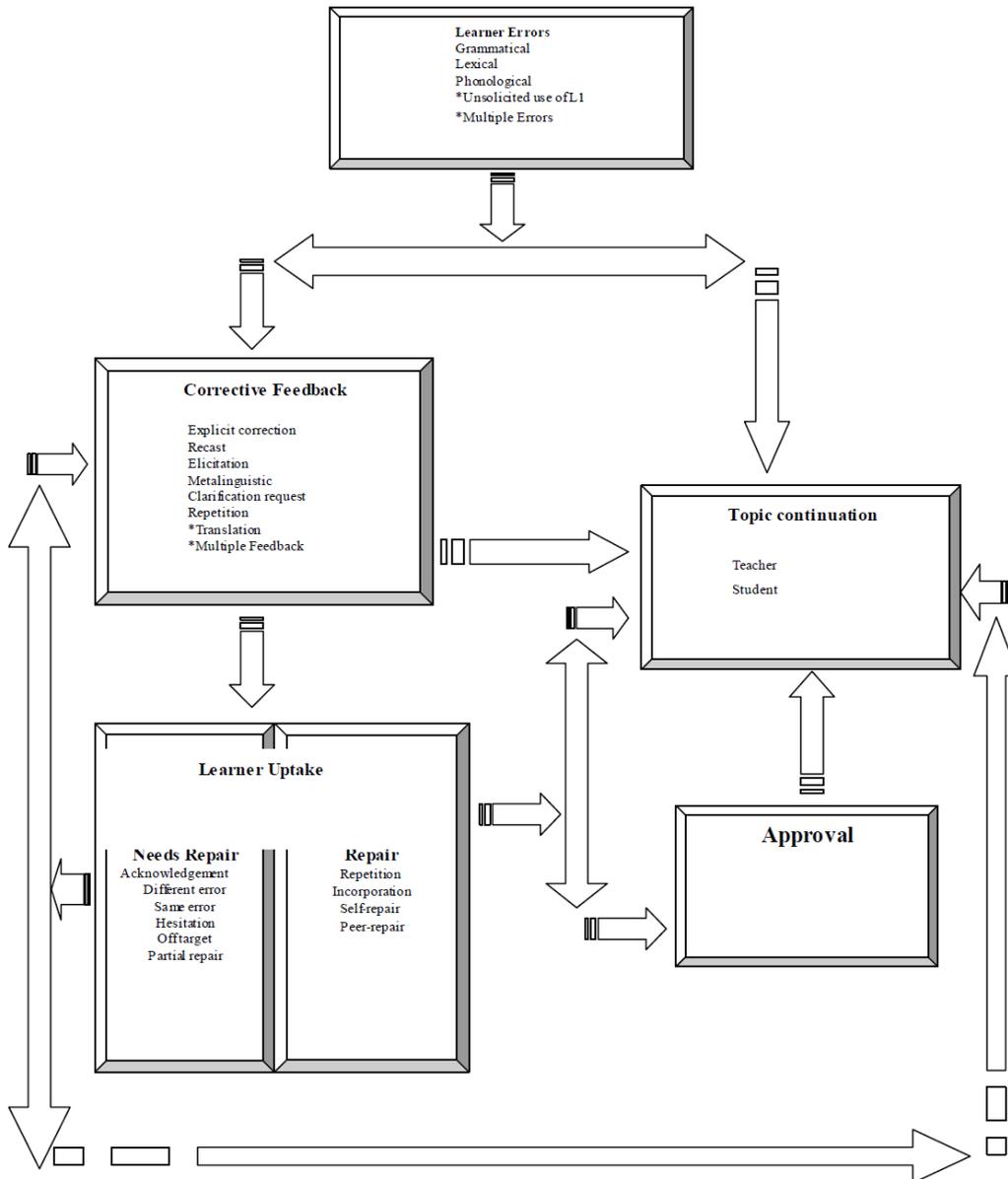


Figure 1. Error Treatment Sequence (From “Corrective Feedback and Learner Uptake: Negotiation of Form in Communicative Classrooms,” By Lyster and Ranta, 1997)  
 \*This model was modified by the researchers in two parts, Learner Errors and Corrective Feedback

IV. RESULTS

After analyzing the data, five types of error including phonological, grammatical, lexical, multiple errors, and unsolicited use of L1 were recognized. Graph 2 presents the percentage of each type of errors committed by students. Among these 5 types of errors, phonological errors were committed by students mostly and unsolicited use of L1 was the least one (43% and 6% respectively).

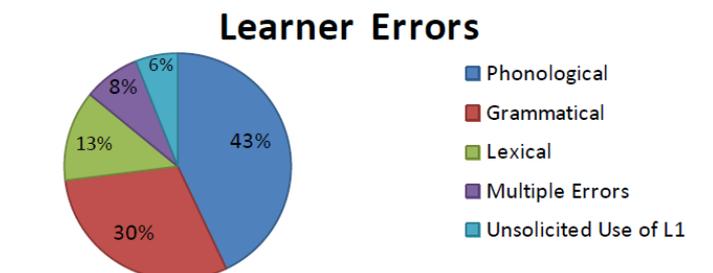


Figure 2. The Percentage of each Error Type

Fig. 3, gives us a general view about the percentages of different feedback types given to students while committing errors, including recast, explicit correction, clarification request, metalinguistic feedback, elicitation, repetition, translation and multiple feedback. This graph also gives a percentage of those errors which were not provided feedbacks since instructors did not want to stop their students' speech. As the graph illustrates, 38% of errors received no feedback. Explicit correction and recast were two most frequent feedback types used by the instructors (20 and 16 % respectively). In comparison to other types of feedback, metalinguistic feedback and elicitations are two feedback types that occurred the least (both 2%).

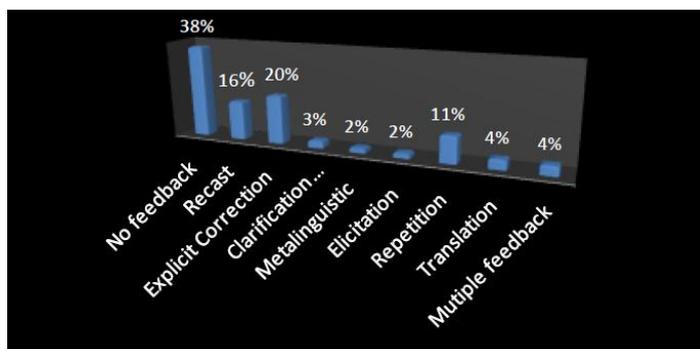


Figure 3. The Percentage of Different Types of Feedback

Graph 4 summaries the findings of this study in terms of students' total number of errors, teachers' provision of feedback, uptake moves-*repair* and *needs repair*. In this study, 1064 error episodes were found by the researcher in which 401 (38%) error cases were left without feedback. 663 (62%) students' errors were provided by 7 types of feedback and a combination of feedbacks (multiple feedback). After the students were provided different types of feedback, they either paid attention to teachers' feedback (uptake) or they did not (no uptake). From 663 teachers' feedback, 167 (25%) of feedbacks remained without uptake. This graph shows that approximately 40% of students' errors did not receive feedback by the instructors. The reasons for this ignorance or not giving feedback may be due to some factors such as topic continuation, not interrupting students' flow of speech, and motivating students to continue talking. From among 663 numbers of feedbacks offered, 496 had uptake, whereas 167 of teachers' feedbacks were not paid attention to by students.

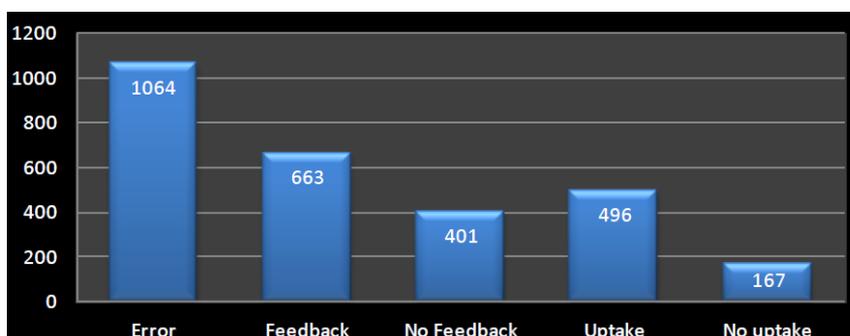


Figure 4. The Frequency of Occurrence of Errors, Feedbacks, and Uptakes

The following Graph (Fig. 5) presents a better picture of uptake. The whole percentage is shown in terms of no uptake and uptake, *repair* and *needs repair*. The first column graph indicates those feedbacks remained with no uptake (25%). The second and third column graphs revealed the percentage of uptake divided into two categories, *repair* and *needs repair*. 75% of teachers' feedback led to uptake, 40% *repair* and 35% *needs repair*.

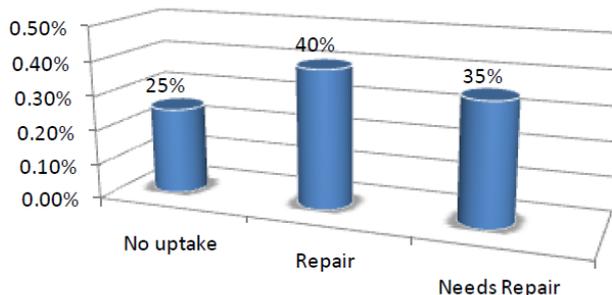


Figure 5. The Percentage of No uptake, Repair and Needs repair

**Comparing the Frequency and Percentage of Uptake in this Study with Lyster and Ranta`s Study**

Table1, illustrates the frequency of *repair*, *needs repair*, and *no repair*. As it was mentioned before, 25% of the teachers` feedbacks led to no feedback which was different from Lyster & Ranta`s (1997) study in that 0.45% of feedback provided by teachers in their study was left without uptake. This showed that in this study, students were more motivated to respond to teachers` feedback either in *repair* or *needs repair* form. Table 2, shows that in Lyster and Ranta` study, the total percentage of repair was 0.27% while in the current study it was 0.40% showing the higher rate of learning. In the results of Lyster & Ranta` s study, the subjects did not respond to 69% of recasts and 50% of explicit correction, and there were cases of no uptake for other corrective feedback types such as repetition (22%), metalinguistic feedback (14%), and clarification requests (12%). It is worth mentioning that Lyster &Ranta did not consider two types of feedback; namely, translation and multiple feedback- due to the scarcity of these two types of feedback.

TABLE 1  
THE FREQUENCY AND PERCENTAGE OF UPTAKE IN RELATION TO CORRECTIVE FEEDBACK TYPE

Learner uptake type	Corrective Feedback Type								Total
	Recast	Explicit correction	Clarification request	Metalinguistic feedback	Elicitation	Repetition	Translation	Multiple feedback	
Repair	28 16%	80 37%	24 78%	14 70%	22 88%	60 51%	28 62%	10 27%	266 40%
Needs repair	61 36%	103 48%	2 6%	3 15%	3 12%	26 22%	17 38%	15 41%	230 35%
No uptake	83 48%	33 15%	5 16%	3 15%	0 0%	31 27%	0 0%	12 32%	167 25%
Total	172 100%	216 100%	31 100%	20 100%	25 100%	117 100%	45 100%	37 100%	663 100%

TABLE 2  
UPTAKE FOLLOWING CORRECTIVE FEEDBACK IN LYSTER AND RANTA (1997)

Learner uptake type	Corrective Feedback Type						Total
	Recast	Explicit correction	Clarification request	Metalinguistic feedback	Elicitation	Repetition of error	
Repair	66 18%	18 36%	20 28%	26 45%	43 46%	11 31%	184 27%
Needs repair	49 31%	7 14%	44 60%	24 41%	51 54%	17 47%	192 28%
No uptake	260 69%	25 50%	9 12%	8 14%	25 0%	8 22%	310 45%
Total	375 100%	50 100%	73 100%	58 100%	94 100%	36 100%	663 100%

**Analyzing Error Types Receiving Feedback**

Table 3 presents the percentages of error types receiving feedback types. The data revealed that phonological and grammatical errors were mostly provided by explicit and recast. Lexical errors received mostly explicit feedback (32%). The least feedback provided for lexical were multiple feedback and metalinguistic. (0 and 2.5% respectively). Multiple error and unsolicited use of L1 received mostly recast. Both error types received no repetition feedback (0%).

TABLE 3  
THE FREQUENCY AND PERCENTAGE OF ERROR TYPES LEADING TO FEEDBACK

Learner Error	Teacher Feedback								Total
	Recast	Explicit Correction	Clarification Request	Metalinguistic	Elicitation	Repetition	Translation	Multiple feedback	
Phonological	65 23%	94 34%	9 3%	4 2%	7 3%	60 22%	21 7%	17 6%	277 100%
Grammatical	41 20%	61 29%	11 5%	9 4%	8 4%	48 23%	14 7%	17 8%	209 100%
Lexical	37 33%	44 39%	8 7%	3 2.5%	6 5.5%	9 8%	5 5%	0 0%	112 100%
Multiple error	18 48%	8 22%	1 3%	2 5.5%	2 5.5%	0 0%	3 8%	3 8%	37 100%
L1 error	11 40%	9 32%	2 7%	2 7%	2 7%	0 0%	2 7%	0 0%	28 100%
<b>Total</b>	172 26%	216 33%	31 4%	20 3%	25 4%	117 18%	45 7%	37 5%	663 100%

V. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Regarding the first research question and data obtained, it was revealed that lexical errors led to the most feedback types. About 22% of the lexical errors were left without feedback and 78% received feedbacks. From this percentage of feedback, about 31% was provided by explicit correction and the least feedback type was provided by multiple feedback (0%). The reason for providing more feedback for lexical errors could be related to students' high desire to receive more feedback not for grammatical errors but for lexical errors. It also could be related to the students' level of language proficiency (intermediate level) since they are more motivated to be informed of their lexical errors. Analyzing the frequency and percentage of eight types of feedback showed that explicit feedback was the most frequent type of feedback (32%), and metalinguistic feedback as the least frequent feedback type (3%). The findings of the study were not in parallel with findings of Lyster and Ranta' (1997) study in such a way that recast was recognized as the most frequent type of feedback (55%) and the least was repetition(5%). However, repetition was recognized to be the third most frequent type of feedback.

While analyzing the second research question and data obtained from Table 1, it was revealed that although the frequency of elicitation feedback was less than other feedback types, it led to the greatest amount of uptake. Almost 88% of this feedback type led to *repair* and 12 % to *needs repair*. No percentage of this type of feedback was left without uptake. After this feedback type, clarification request, metalinguistic, and translation led to the greatest amount of uptake (78, 70, and 62% respectively). In the current study and Lyster and Ranta's study, elicitation, metalinguistic feedback, clarification request led to the greatest amount of uptake by providing the students the opportunity to self correct. Recast, despite its high frequency, led to the lowest amount of uptake (16%). Probably this could be attributed to the ambiguity of recast (Lyster, 1998b). In other words, recast might be confusing to the learners and they might be confused whether the instructor was correcting the error or repeating the correct form or rephrasing their utterance. Another reason could be their proficiency level since some researchers emphasized that the effectiveness of the recast would be increased at advance levels (Doughty & Varela, 1998). In some cases, it was observed that the students understood the intended aim of the teacher's provision of recast but not utter anything. It is worth mentioning that in some cases, instructors took the opportunity from students for reaction to recast.

Considering the third research question, the results showed that phonological and grammatical errors tended to invite mostly explicit feedback and recast. It seems that some teachers tried to provide recast for their students' phonological and grammatical error types to make a natural conversation, whereas some other teachers tended to explicitly inform their students of their errors. The least feedback types provided for phonological was metalinguistic (3%) despite its high percentage of uptake. Lexical errors received mostly explicit feedback (39%) and the least type of feedbacks provided for lexical errors were metalinguistic and multiple feedback (2.5 and 0% respectively). Multiple and L1 errors received mostly recast (48 and 40% respectively); whereas in Lyster and Ranta's study grammatical and phonological errors invited recast but not explicit feedback. Lexical errors favored negotiation of form including clarification of request, elicitation and metalinguistic feedback. The classroom observation revealed that some teachers were reluctant to use clarification, elicitation, and metalinguistic feedback since they thought these feedback types were time consuming and needed more patience.

VI. PEDAGOGICAL IMPLICATIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

Since in this study the frequency of repair (*self* and *peer repair*) was low in spite of their high effectiveness in learning a language, some teachers took this valuable opportunity from their students to correct their errors by themselves or their classmates, so it is highly recommended to instructors before correcting students' errors, give a chance to correct themselves or their classmates. Even after the individual student and class have failed to provide self-correction, it is still not recommended to give student the correct form. The instructor can repeat the incorrect utterance

and, by pausing immediately before or after the error, highlight it in the hope that there will be sufficient help to encourage a student to produce the correct answer.

Although recast is considered as the second most frequent type of feedback in this research, the effectiveness of this feedback type in leading to uptake is low, so instructors are recommended to use this type of feedback less than others or to combine it with other feedbacks; for example with elicitation:

S: I am agree with Sarah about this problem of society. (Error-grammar)

T: Really, do you agree with Sara about cultural problems of family? Sarah I am agree or I agree? (Feedback-Recast and Elicitation)

S: Sorry sir. I agree. (Uptake-repair-self)

In the above example, the instructor mixed two implicit and explicit feedback types to raise the effectiveness of feedback and inform the student of her error.

In this study, the classifications of errors was based on Lyster & Ranta's category. The other studies could be done with other categories of errors e.g. errors related to stress, intonation, register, omissions and appropriacy. Classroom observation indicated that some instructors used other way(s) of correcting such as facial expression, delay error correction, ..., so the future studies could consider more types of feedback. Since this study was carried out among male and female instructor, it seems that female students were more comfortable, motivated, and confident to negotiate with female instructors; they had more tendency to receive feedback especially explicit feedback from the instructors with the same gender. The next studies could be done to examine the effect of gender on receiving feedback in EFL context as a moderator variable.

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