TEACHER FEEDBACK AND LEARNERS' UPTAKE

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Abstract: This paper presents a study of corrective feedback and learner uptake (*i.e.*, oral responses to feedback) in an EFL intermediate class given by a Brazilian teacher in Niterói-RJ. The transcript of this class is analysed using a model developed by Lyster and Ranta (1997) and comprising the various moves in an error treatment sequence. Results include the distribution of different feedback types, in addition to the distribution of different kinds of response generated by each feedback type. Moreover, a brief review of the most prominent reception and production-based theories of second language acquisition is commented and their contribution to language learning in an instructional setting highlighted.
Key words: feedback; correction; acquisition; output.

1 INTRODUCTION

This paper presents a study of corrective feedback and learner uptake (i.e., oral responses to feedback) in an EFL intermediate class given by a Brazilian teacher in Niterói-RJ (Brazil). It also presents a brief review of the most prominent reception and production-based theories of second language acquisition and commentes their contribution to language learning in an instructional setting highlighted.

2 THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

2.1 Classroom-based sla research

Although most researchers in the field of second language acquisition recognise classroom interaction as having the potential to create ample opportunities for second language acquisition, there continues to be a great deal of debate, and more critically, a lack of empirical evidence, on which form of interaction(s) actually

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contributes to second language acquisition (Ellis 1990). However, in the last decade, research on interaction in language classrooms has made great strides (see, for example, Long 1983). It has shown how non-native speakers of a language negotiate with other non-native speakers (their peers in the classroom) to clarify the meaning of each other's utterances in the performance of classroom tasks; the mechanics of turn-taking, requests for clarification or confirmation, and repair strategies and the effect of such factors as task type (Doughty and Pica, 1986) on the quantity and quality of participation in classroom interactions.

In Lightbown & Spada (1993), four central theoretical positions, which have been proposed to explain second language learning are discussed: Behaviourism, Cognitive theory, Creative Construction theory and the second language Interactionist view.

Traditional behaviourists believed that all learning, whether verbal or non-verbal, invariably takes place through the process of habit formation. This means that learners receive linguistic input from speakers in the environment, and consequently positive reinforcement for their correct repetitions and imitations. As a result, learners develop a set of good habits in the second language. This view of learning was very influential in classrooms in the 60's and 70's.

Psychologists supporting the cognitive theory tend to view second language acquisition as "the building up of knowledge systems that can eventually be called on automatically for speaking and understanding" (ibid, p. 25). Basically, learners pay attention to any aspect of the language which they are trying to understand or produce and, gradually, through experience and practice, they use parts of this knowledge quickly and automatically. This theory has not yet been widely tested empirically, since it is difficult to predict what kinds of structures will be automated.

The Creative construction theory has as its main contributor the American linguist Noam Chomsky, whose ideas on second language learning have influenced advocates of such position. Here learners are believed to "construct" internal representations of the language being learned. In other words, these mental representations function as "mental pictures" of the target language and they develop in predictable stages to the complete mastery of the second language.

These theories have, in one way or the other, greatly influenced pedagogic practices related to the development of second language proficiency. In Edmonson & House (1981, p. 20), we find that: "The type of English spoken in the classroom

is clearly a major factor determining the type of English that is learnt there [...] in the process of teaching, we teach English of a particular kind, which we call pedagogic discourse".

Pedagogic discourse surely presents some distinctive characteristics, which compared to spontaneous discourse seems more "ritualised" and therefore asymmetrical.

According to Koch (1992, p. 70), symmetrical interactions are "... daily talks in which all participants have equal right as to the use of speech and asymmetrical interactions are interviews, medical appointments, lectures, in which one of the interactants has the control of speech and the power to distribute it the way he/she wishes".

This distinction - symmetrical and asymmetrical - has received great attention on the part of some linguists who study the kind of interaction, which takes place in classrooms and how this affects the kind of language learners are exposed to.

Tsui (1995, p. 7), drawing on a study conducted by Wells (1986) reports:

> Wells (ibid, p 25), in a study that compares children's language at home and at school, found that children in school speak much less with adults than at home, get fewer speaking turns and ask fewer questions. The meanings that they express are of a much smaller range and sentences they use are syntactically much simpler. The reason is that the teachers do most of the talking in the classroom, determine the topic of talk, and initiate most of the questions and requests. As a result, students are reduced to a very passive role of answering questions and carrying out the teacher's instructions.

It was seen in the foregoing discussion that several theories of acquisition have been put forward with a view to explaining the process of language acquisition and the applications of these views to second language pedagogy. However, no theoretical position has been able to fully capture the intricacies of learning a second language and understand the implications factors such as age, motivation and degree of literacy, among others, have in the process - most importantly in our case in second language classrooms. But one thing, at least, is certain: interaction in the language classroom plays a crucial role in the development of second language proficiency. As Van Lier (1988, p. 77-78) points out:

> If the keys to learning are exposure to input and meaningful interaction with other speakers, we must find out what input and interaction the classroom can provide...We must study in detail the use of language in the classroom in order to see if and how learning comes about through the different ways of interacting in the classroom.

I will turn now to the issue of input and interaction more fully in the brief review of reception and production-based theories of language acquisition.

2.1.1 The input hypothesis

The input hypothesis is a fundamental principle of Krashen's Monitor Model and is probably the most well known reception-based theory. Its importance stems from the fact that Krashen has devoted a whole book to it (Krashen, 1985) and the attention it has attracted from language teachers. The theory holds that acquisition occurs when learners understand input that contains structures that are beyond their current level of competence. It is known as the i + 1 hypothesis, the i representing students' current level of language proficiency, and the + 1 representing linguistic forms or functions that are beyond this level. Krashen states two ways in which comprehension of input containing new linguistic material is successfully achieved: Teachers simplifying input and the utilisation of context by the learner. This theory highlights the importance of social interaction for both learning and language acquisition and due to this fact it gained an enormous popularity among language teachers and advocates of a more communicative approach to the teaching of languages.

However prominent and influential this theory may be, it has come in with a great number of critiques (cf. Faerch & Kasper, 1986; McLaughlin, 1987). Most researchers complain that his theory cannot be empirically proved, and thus only partly describes the processes involved in acquiring a second language. Ellis (1990) claims that Krashen offers no direct evidence in support of the Input Hypothesis. However, Ellis recognises its importance to language teachers saying that "it is a statement of important principle, namely that for successful classroom acquisition learners require access to message-oriented communication that they can understand... [however] there is more to teaching than comprehensible input" (ibid, p. 106-7).

2.1.2 The interaction hypothesis

This highly recognised reception-based theory, proposed by Long (1983), places great emphasis on the comprehensible input in the form of conversational adjustments. In other words, successful second language learning depends on the amount of adjustments speakers are able to make in order to understand each other and these attempts (negotiation of meaning) will create comprehensible input. Like Krashen, Long stresses the importance of comprehensible input, but emphasises the interaction that takes place in two-way communication. Similarly, this position in not without problems and it has also received many criticisms.

2.1.3 The output hypothesis

The Output Hypothesis (Swain, 1985) was proposed as an addition to the input/output hypotheses. Swain recognises the importance of comprehensible input, but he claims that it is insufficient to ensure native-like levels of grammatical accuracy, and therefore learners need the opportunity to produce the target language. Swain (ibid, p. 248-9) attributes three roles to output:

> 1. The need to produce output in the process of negotiating meaning that is precise, coherent and appropriate encourages the learner to develop the necessary grammatical resources. Swain refers to this as "pushed language use";
> 2. Output provides the learner with the opportunity to try out hypotheses to see if they work;
> 3. Production, as opposed to comprehension, may help to force the learner to move from semantic to syntactic analysis of the input it contains. Production is the trigger that forces learners to pay attention to the means of expression.
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> It should be noted, however, that the output hypothesis predicts that learners need to be pushed in their output in order for acquisition to occur. Opportunities to speak may not in themselves be entirely sufficient. Some studies have lent some credence to the output hypothesis, but a great deal still remains to be investigated before we can support the claim that pushed output promotes learning.

2.1.4 The discourse hypothesis

The Discourse Hypothesis (Givon, 1979) states that learners will acquire those structures associated with the type of language use in which they typically participate. Thus, if learners only have experience of informal/unplanned language use they will develop the capability of performing in this kind of discourse. To acquire a full range of linguistic competencies, learners should be exposed to a variety of communicative contexts. Seen in the light of the discourse hypothesis relevant teaching is teaching that gives learners access to the type of language use that they need to master. The discourse hypothesis, then, leads to pedagogic proposals radically different to those based on the input or interaction hypothesis. Ellis (1990) argues that the discourse hypothesis should be considered nothing more than an interesting idea until further evidence is forthcoming.

2.1.5 The role of negative evidence in second language classrooms

Several studies have documented the importance of providing negative evidence for second language learners in order to make them notice erroneous forms in their output (c.f. Doughty & Varela, 1996; Lyster, 1996, 1998; White & Spada, 1991). All these studies claim that providing feedback in the form of recasts, clarification requests, repetition and others plays an important facilitative role in development. Groups whose attention has been drawn to targeted construction through form-focused activities or error correction are consistently reported to outperform those groups who receive the same amount of natural classroom exposure (c.f. Lightbown & Spada, 1990). However, the success in producing correct forms may be due in part to the frequency of the forms concerned in classroom input or, on the other hand, the rarity of some forms in instructional environment may account for the failure to survive intervals of non-instructional focus before delayed post-tests are conducted. Some researchers (Beck & Eubank, 1991) have provided some criteria, which acknowledge the relevance of negative evidence when (1) it exists, (2) it exists in usable form, (3) it is used, and (4) it is necessary. Long (1996, p. 45) reporting on the conditions, which generate negative evidence says: "Demonstrating the existence of negative evidence involves showing that something in the learner's linguistic, conversational, or physical environment reliably provides the information necessary to alert the learner to the existence of error".

The scope of a great deal of studies on the role of negative evidence in classrooms has been firmly based on the short-term, normally immediate effects of oral correction in the students' output and these findings are difficult to prove beneficial for acquisition. Long (ibid, p. 48) argues that the focus of such studies has been fairly limited "perhaps because L2 acquisition among instructed adult subjects progresses rapidly in the early stages and because of the difficulty of controlling for outside exposure in longitudinal studies, even in foreign language environments".

Other studies have sought to demonstrate which types of feedback are more effective in generating correct responses on the part of learners (cf. Lyster & Ranta, 1997). These studies usually investigate the role that different kinds of feedback play on the efficacy of learners' immediate responses to them and to what extent this process of noticing the error and correcting it will lead to acquisition.

Although research on negative evidence has shed some light on the importance of providing feedback with a view to making learners notice non-target forms in their oral production (although the body of literature is much more extensive in L1 studies), much more detailed investigation is clearly required in order to more securely determine, and consequently trace the best way of providing feedback to learners.

3 METHODOLOGY

The model used in this study to analyse the types of feedback used by the teacher is entirely based on a previous one proposed by Lyster & Ranta 1997 (see figure 1), although we do not use all the elements of it due to the more restricted objective of our analysis. We also use an adaptation of the Communicative Orientation of Language Teaching Observation Scheme[2] (Spada & Frohlich, 1995) especially designed for analysing data in computers. This model was originally created for the observation of foreign and second language classes and it is divided in two parts: (1) Part A describes classroom events at the level of episode and activity whereas (2) Part B analyses the communicative features of verbal exchanges between teachers-students and/or students-students as they occur within each episode

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[2] Due to its length, it was impossible to reproduce the scheme in this paper, but it is available in the bibliography.
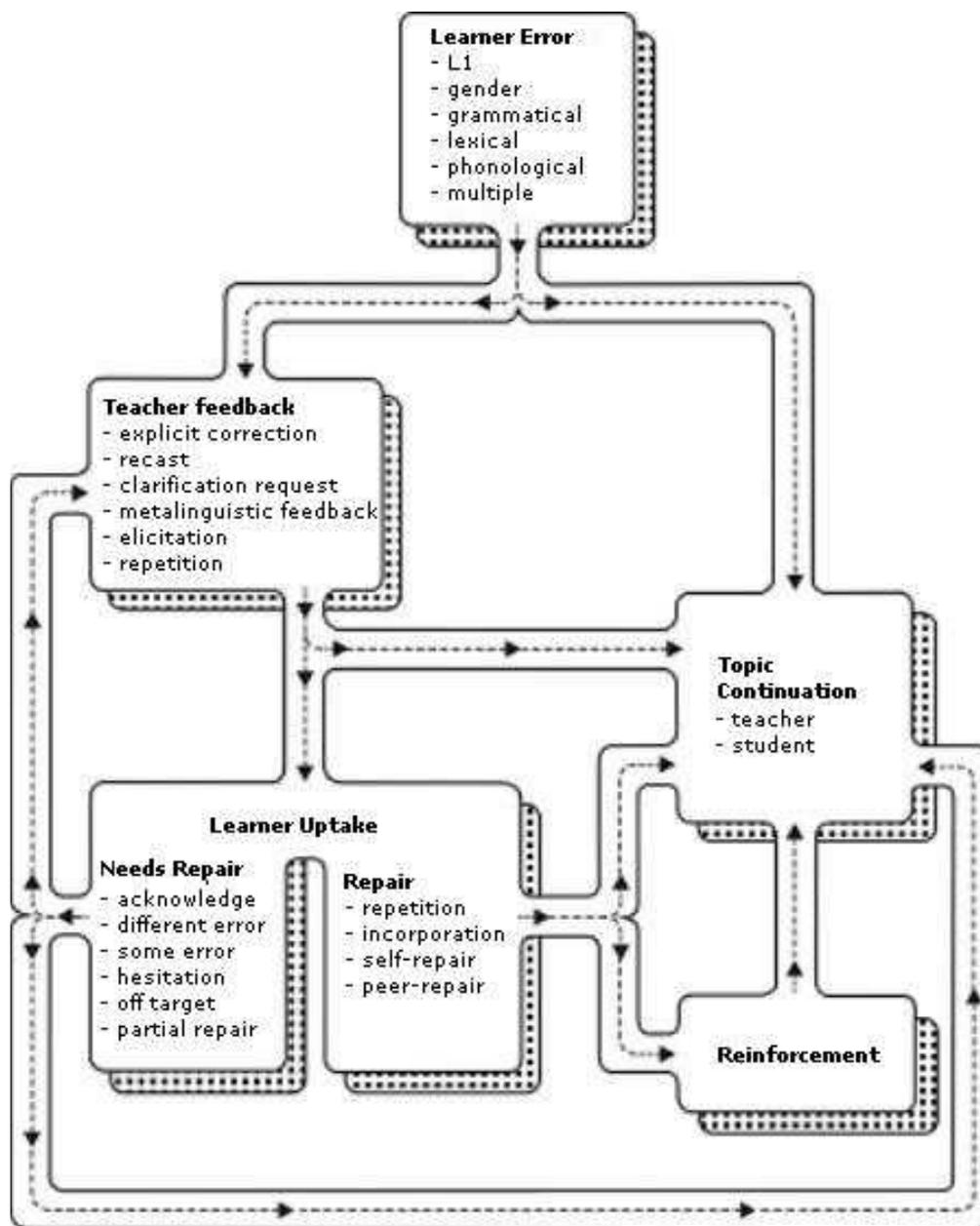
**FIGURE 1 - ERROR TREATMENT SEQUENCE
(LYSTER & RANTA, 1997, P. 44).**

or activity. Due to the flexibility of this scheme, an adaptation to better suit the analysis proposed by this study was possible and allowed us to concentrate on the relevant features we utilised for coding the data. We disregarded Part A of such scheme because it does not include elements concerning correction on the part of either learner or teacher. Thus, Part B (to be more precise, incorporation of student/ teacher utterances) seemed more appropriately suited for the analysis of the turns.

3.1 Error

For the purpose of this study we comprised different sorts of errors (phonological, lexical, or grammatical) into the more general label: error. Also, there were not any instances of the L1 unsolicited. Errors generally included ill-formed sentences or non-native-like uses of English.

3.2 Feedback

We distinguished five different types of feedback used by the teacher in this study:

*1.***Form**-**related comment** *refers to positive or negative response (not correction) to previous utterance(s).*

St: Would you do if you failed...

T: Uh-hum.

St: your exams

T: good.

2.**Elicitation** *refers to techniques that teachers use to directly elicit the correct form from the student.*

St: How would you feel, would you feel, if you...

T: Good. How would you feel (rising intonation).

*3.***Expansion** *refers to the extension of the content of the preceding utterance(s) or the addition of information that is related to it.*

T: if you aren't?

St: seats.

T: "if there", OK. "If", so. Let's change this. If there aren't seats.

*4.***Correction** *refers to any linguistic correction of a previous utterance or indication of incorrectness*

St: to travel?

T: No. Hang on. You didn't...

5.**Metalinguistic feedback** *contains either comments, information, or questions related to the well-formedness of the student's utterance, without explicitly providing the correct form. Metalinguistic comments generally indicate that there is an error somewhere or provides some grammatical metalanguage that refers to the nature of the error.*

T: when will you go

St: go

T: but I wa-, I need a conditional question.

3.3 Uptake

In this study the term uptake is used to refer "to a learner'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 aspect of the student's initial utterance" (Lyster & Ranta, 1997, p. 49). Uptake, then, reveals the learner's attempt to work on the feedback received. If there is no uptake, then there is topic continuation, which is initiated by either the student or by the teacher.

4 RESULTS

With regard to students' errors, it is noteworthy that we are not reporting the absolute number of errors produced by students. Because the aim of the present paper is to show different kinds of feedback and their effect on learners' output, we will not be reporting on the different types of errors.

As shown in Table 1, the single largest category is the form-related comment, which accounted for 34% of all feedback types. Therefore, elicitation ranks high among the others: 26%, followed by an almost equal proportion of expansion (23%). The other two categories that appeared, although rather scarcely in comparison to the others, were metalinguistic feedback, which represented 11% of the total feedback types and correction (6%).

We counted a total of 35 turns containing feedback from the teacher and the distribution of the categories in terms of absolute numbers is: A) form-related comment = 12; B) elicitation = 9; C) expansion = 8; D) metalinguistic = 4; E) correction = 2.

TYPE	NUMBER	%
Form-related comment	12	34%
Elicitation	9	26%
Expansion	8	23%
Correction	2	6%
Metalinguistic	4	11%

Table 1 - **Distribution of feedback types:**

The number and percentage of feedback moves that lead to uptake are provided in Table 2.

	Uptake		Topic Continuation	
	Number	%	Number	%
Form-related comment (n= 12)	7	58%	5	42%
Elicitation (n= 9)	6	66.6%	3	33.3%
Expansion (n= 8)	3	37,50%	5	62.50%
Correction (n= 2)	1	50%	1	50%
Metalinguistic (n= 4)	1	25%	3	75%

Table 2- **Uptake following teacher feedback:**

It is evident that the form-related comment, the most common feedback technique in this study, is effective in promoting uptake: 58% of the form-related comment moves lead to successful student-generated repair whereas 42% of such moves do not lead to any uptake at all. Elicitation leads to uptake 66.6% of the time, and only half of elicitation moves lead to topic continuation. Expansion is slightly more effective in promoting topic continuation (62.5% of all moves) than in eliciting uptake from students (37.5%). It seems that in one of the occurrences of correction moves there is immediate uptake whereas the other results in topic continuation. Metalinguistic feedback seems to be three times as likely to promote topic continuation than elicit uptake (75% and 25%, respectively). The most successful technique for eliciting uptake is elicitation followed by form-related comment.

5 DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study is to apply an analytic model comprising various moves in an error treatment sequence to a database of interaction in an intermediate foreign language classroom with a view to documenting the frequency and distribution of corrective feedback in relation to learner uptake.

In the present analysis, we have not addressed the issue of what types of errors the teacher chose to correct, nor how she went about making these decisions. We do know, however, that the teacher uses a relatively varied range of feedback types when correcting students rather than relying so extensively on one form of correction. In so doing, the teacher seems to ensure more opportunities for uptake following feedback.

It is important to acknowledge, however, that teachers must take into account their students' level of L2 proficiency when making decisions about feedback. Due to the small amount of data we cannot draw any conclusions to support a claim that such feedback types were utilised having in mind the learners' degree of proficiency.

Our results indicate that elicitation and form-related comment account for the largest number of uptake in comparison to the other feedback types, which, in general, result in a high percentage of topic continuation or lead to no uptake at all.

Since the purpose of this study is to capture student uptake immediately following corrective feedback, it could be argued if such uptake successfully leads to language acquisition. Lyster and Ranta (1997) believe that student-generated

repair may be important in L2 learning for at least two reasons. First, They allow opportunities for the retrieval of target language knowledge that already exists in some form. Second, when students self-repair themselves they "draw on their own their own resources and thus actively confront errors in ways that may lead to revisions of their hypotheses about the target language" (ibid, p 57).

It is important to point out that the data analysis reveals that none of the feedback types stop the flow of classroom interaction and that uptake does not break the communicative flow either. The discourse of this classroom is structured in a way that allows the teacher to intervene regularly without causing frustration, maybe because students were expecting such interventions. Thus, it seems reasonable to assert that corrective feedback and learner uptake constitute an adjacency pair that is a common feature of classroom discourse and it seems to function as an insertion sequence without stopping the flow of communication[3].

Our data indicate that the feedback-uptake sequence is significantly more effective when signals are provided to the learner, which assist in the reformulation of the erroneous utterance, as it is the case of elicitation.

6 CONCLUSION

The present study aims at providing evidence for the importance of directing students in their output by providing them with cues to draw on their own linguistic resources. Although the purpose of the activity in which the feedback types are embedded is to negotiate the correct form of conditional sentences, the expression of meaning is not undermined by such negotiation of form, which nonetheless gives learners ample opportunities to make important form-function links in the target language.

It seems obvious from the preceding discussion that negotiation of form plays an extremely important role in classroom interaction because the effective choice of feedback procedures may as well greatly contribute to second language acquisition in the short or long-term. The extent of which the negotiation of form may indeed enhance L2 learning in classroom settings needs to be the object of further investigation.

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[3] See Kock (1992, p. 42) for an explanation of insertion.

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Título: O feedback da professora e o desempenho subseqüente dos alunos
Autor: Marcelo Marconsin Bargiela
Resumo: Esse trabalho é fruto de um estudo sobre tipos de feedback usados por uma professora de língua inglesa e a conseqüente produção oral posterior ao momento de correção de um grupo de alunos intermediários aprendendo inglês como língua estrangeira, em um curso de idiomas, em Niterói-RJ. A transcrição dessa aula é analisada tendo como base um modelo proposto por Lyster e Ranta (1997) e que se compõe de vários movimentos em uma seqüência de tratamento de erros. Os resultados incluem a distribuição dos diferentes tipos de *feedback* e também a distribuição dos diferentes tipos de respostas gerados por cada estilo de *feedback*. Além disso, é feita uma breve explanação das principais teorias de recepção e produção em aquisição de uma segunda língua e a contribuição das mesmas para um contexto-educacional.
Palavras-chave: *feedback*; correção; aquisição; produção.

Titre: Le feedback du professeur et le dégagement postérieur des élèves
Auteur: Marcelo Marconsin Bargiela
Résumé: Ce travail est le fruit d'une étude sur plusieurs types de *feedback* employés par un professeur de langue anglaise et sa suíte, c'est-à-dire la production orale postérieure au moment de la correction d'un groupe d'élèves de niveau intermédiaire, apprenant l'anglais comme langue étrangère, dans un cours de langue étrangère, à Niterói –RJ. La transcription de ce cours est analysé ayant comme base un modèle proposé par Lyster et Ranta (1997) et qui est composé de plusieurs mouvements en une séquence de traitement de fautes. Les résultats tiennent à inclure

la distribution des différents types de *feedback* et aussi la distribution des différents types de réponses produites par chaque style de *feedback.* En outre, on fait une courte explication des théories principales de réception et production dans l'acquisition d'une deuxième langue et la contribution des mêmes en vue d'un contexte–éducationnel.

Mots-clés: *feedbac;* correction; acquisition; production.

Título: El feedback de la profesora y la respuesta posterior de los alumnos

Autor: Marcelo Marconsin Bargiela

Resumen: Esa memoria es el fruto de un estudio sobre tipos de feedback usados por una profesora de lengua inglesa y la consecuente producción oral posterior al momento de corrección de un grupo de alumnos de nivel intermedio aprendiendo inglés como lengua extranjera en un curso de idiomas, en Niterói-RJ. La transcripción de esa clase es analizada teniendo como base un modelo propuesto por Lyster y Ranta (1997) y que se compone de varios movimientos en una secuencia de tratamiento de errores. Los resultados incluyen la distribución de los diferentes tipos de feedback, y también la distribución de los diferentes tipos de repuestas generados por cada estilo de feedback. Además de eso, es hecha una breve explanación de las principales teorías de recepción y producción en adquisición de una segunda lengua y la contribución de las mismas para un contexto educacional.

Palabras-clave: feedback; corrección; adquisición; producción.