



FEATURED THEME: ERROR CORRECTION

Error correction in the second language classroom

by Shawn Loewen

The topic of error correction in the second language (L2) classroom tends to spark controversy among both language teachers and L2 acquisition researchers. Teachers may have very strong views about error correction, based on their own previous L2 learning experiences, or they may be more ambivalent, particularly if they have been following the debate among L2 researchers on the topic. Depending on which journal articles a teacher reads, he or she will find error correction described on a continuum ranging from ineffective and possibly harmful (e.g., Truscott, 1999) to beneficial (e.g., Russell & Spada, 2006) and possibly even essential for some grammatical structures (White, 1991). Furthermore, teachers may be confronted with students' opinions about error correction since students are on the receiving end and often have their own views of if and how it should happen in the classroom. Given these widely varying views, what is a teacher to do? This article will address this question by exploring some of the current thinking about error correction in the field of L2 acquisition research.

Before going further, it is important to clarify the context in which error correction will be considered. Second language instruction can be conceptualized as falling into two broad categories: meaning-focused instruction and form-focused instruction (Long, 1996; Ellis, 2001). Meaning-focused instruction is characterized by communicative language teaching and involves no direct, explicit attention to language form. The L2 is seen as a vehicle for learners to express their ideas. In contrast, form-focused instruction generally treats language as an object to be studied through discrete lessons targeting specific grammatical structures and rules. Such instruction can be called an isolated approach because attention to language form is isolated from a communicative context. Error correction in this context is often used to ensure that learners accurately use what they have just been taught; however, this is not the type of error correction currently receiving so much interest.

Instead, the context for error correction that has received considerable attention during the past decade involves an integrated approach to language instruction, incorporating attention to language structures within a meaning-focused activity or task. One method

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EDITOR'S MESSAGE

Dear Readers,

The topic of this issue's main article is error correction, a subject that has figured prominently in recent second language acquisition research. Is error correction effective? Which methods work best? Is it possible to correct students' errors without interrupting the flow of the class? Shawn Loewen's informative article covers these and other questions and also gives numerous resources for further study. Start the school year off with a new perspective on effective error correction in the language classroom!

Also in this issue are updates on several new CLEAR products, including new programs in our Rich Internet Applications (RIA) suite. We will be presenting on our RIA initiative at several upcoming conferences; we hope you will join us (see listing of conferences on p. 7) or visit our website to learn more about these free tools. There is also a retrospective on the workshops that took place this summer, including participants' thoughts on how they will apply their new knowledge. Remember that in addition to our

summer workshops, CLEAR personnel can come to you! We offer a number of low-cost onsite workshop options. To learn more, visit our website and click on *Professional Development*.

Finally, on behalf of CLEAR, I would like to thank Margo Glew for her four years of service as the coeditor of *CLEAR News*. She has proved a wealth of information and ideas, always able to come up with pertinent and timely topics of interest to today's language educators. It has been a pleasure to work with Margo, one of the country's leading experts on less commonly taught languages, and we at CLEAR wish her the best of luck in her new pursuits.

We hope to meet some of you at ACTFL in San Antonio this November. Come visit us at Booth #551 in the LRC Pavilion to say hello and to learn more about CLEAR and our new products in person!



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CLEAR News is published twice a year, and each issue reaches thousands of foreign language educators, both in hard copy and on CLEAR's website. If you have an article, a teaching idea, or a materials review that you would like to submit for possible publication, send an electronic copy of your submission to CLEAR.

SUBMISSION REQUIREMENTS:

Main Article—An article related to current research or foreign language teaching issues. (1000–1500 words)

The Idea Corner—A unique activity or teaching idea for foreign language teachers. Must be adaptable for multiple languages. (500–600 words)

Book/Materials Profile—Share your best finds with colleagues by telling us about a favorite text, website, CD-ROM, or other teaching materials. (100–200 words)

Featured Teacher—Have you benefited in some way from a CLEAR workshop or product? Contact Joy Campbell for information on becoming our featured teacher in a future issue!

The deadline for submissions for the Spring 2008 *CLEAR News* is December 14, 2007. Submissions should be sent to Joy Campbell at:

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The U.S. Department of Education awards grants through Title VI funding to a small number of institutions for the purpose of establishing, strengthening, and operating language resource and training centers to improve the teaching and learning of foreign languages. There are currently fifteen Language Resource Centers nationwide: the Center for Advanced Language Proficiency Education and Research (CALPER) at The Pennsylvania State University; the Center for Advanced Research on Language Acquisition (CARLA) at the University of Minnesota; the Center for Applied Second Language Studies (CASLS) at the University of Oregon; the Center for Languages of the Central Asian Region (CeLCAR) at Indiana University; the Center for Educational Resources in Culture, Language and Literacy (CERCLL) at the University of Arizona; the Center for Language Education and Research (CLEAR) at Michigan State University; the Language Acquisition Resource

Center (LARC) at San Diego State University; the National African Language Resource Center (NALRC) at the University of Wisconsin—Madison; the National Capital Language Resource Center (NCLRC), a consortium of Georgetown University, the Center for Applied Linguistics, and George Washington University; the National East Asian Languages National Resource Center (NEALRC) at The Ohio State University; the National Foreign Language Resource Center (NFLRC) at the University of Hawai'i at Manoa; the National K-12 Foreign Language Resource Center (NK-12LRC) at Iowa State University; the National Heritage Language Resource Center (NHLRC), a consortium of UCLA and the UC Consortium for Language Learning and Teaching; the National Middle East Language Resource Center (NMEELRC) at Brigham Young University; and the South Asia Language Resource Center (SALRC) at The University of Chicago.

for achieving an integrated approach is to provide error correction while learners are using the language to communicate. Thus, learners' attention is drawn to the connection between language form and meaning at the crucial moments when they need to use the forms to convey their intended meaning. Many second language acquisition researchers argue that such timing is optimal for learners to learn to use the language fluently and accurately (e.g., Doughty, 2001). An example of the integration of form and meaning is shown in example one, in which a student is describing some of his past experiences to his teacher.

Example 1

1. S: two years ago, I was hiking
2. (3.5 second pause)
3. T: no, I went, I went hiking
4. S: I went hiking for three months

The statement in turn one is possibly correct, if the student is using the past continuous to set the stage for some additional activity (such as, Two years ago I was hiking and I saw a bear). However, the long pause after his statement indicates that no additional information is forthcoming, so in turn three the teacher provides a more accurate linguistic form for the learner to express his intended meaning. The learner incorporates this correction into his own speech in turn four and provides additional information about his experiences.

There is growing evidence from individual research studies (e.g., Ellis, Loewen & Erlam, 2006; Loewen, 2005) that this type of error correction can be useful for L2 learners. In addition, a recent synthesis of error correction research found that, in general, it is beneficial for learning (Russell & Spada, 2006). As a result, researchers have begun to focus on different types of error correction to determine if certain types are more or less effective. In the remainder of this article, we will consider several of the more common options for providing error correction in the L2 classroom.

One method that has received considerable attention recently is recasting. A recast correctly reformulates a student's incorrect utterance while maintaining the central meaning of the utterance. An example of a recast is shown below.

Example 2: Recast

1. S: when I was soldier, I used to wear the balaclava
2. T: and why did you wear it, S, for protection from the cold or for another reason
3. S: just wind, uh protection to wind and cold
4. T: protection from
5. S: uh, from wind and cold
6. T: right, okay, not for a disguise

Here, the teacher and student are talking about the student's army experiences. While doing so, the student uses the wrong preposition in turn three. The teacher provides the correct form (a recast) in turn four, and the student repeats the correct form. After this brief attention to grammatical form, the conversation returns to the primary goal of communication.

There are several reasons why recasts are favored by some researchers. First, they are relatively implicit and unobtrusive, and thus do not generally interrupt the flow of communication. In fact, recasts often serve the dual purpose of a clarification request and a correction, and thus fit quite naturally into the conversation. However, this unobtrusiveness, which is promoted by some, is said by others to be a disadvantage. Recasts are so implicit that learners often fail either to notice them or to perceive their corrective intent.

Researchers who dislike recasts tend to favor prompts or elicitation as a type of feedback. In prompting, the teacher does not provide the correct form but rather attempts to get the student to self-correct. For instance, in example three, the teacher and student are discussing an assigned reading about a woman traveling in India.

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Example 3: Prompt

1. S: yeah, in, in India she began to feel sick and she went to doctor <said> the doctor in India, but that doctor said it, it is not so serious
2. T: it, not it is, the doctor said it
3. S: doctor said, uh, it w-, it was not serious
4. T: mhm

As the student was retelling the story, he made a verb tense error at the end of turn one. The teacher, instead of providing the correct form in a recast, draws attention to the error and then attempts to elicit the correct form. In this instance, the student is able to self-correct and provides the correct verb form in turn three.

Proponents of prompting argue that in this way more attention may be drawn to the linguistic form and, therefore, the possibility of learners noticing the correction becomes greater. In addition, some researchers argue that trying to get students to correct themselves involves them in deeper mental processing and thus may have a greater impact on learning. While such a claim may be true, it is also necessary for learners to have some latent knowledge of the structure for them to be able to self-correct. If the grammatical structure is entirely new or the vocabulary word is unknown, no amount of prompting will draw out the structure.

Another type of error correction is the provision of metalinguistic information regarding the error. In example four, the teacher and student are talking about a cigarette lighter that another student has recently bought.

Example 4: Metalinguistic Feedback

1. S: uh didn't work well, it must be ripped ripped
2. T: so you need a noun now
3. S: it must be ripped
4. T: it must be a rip off
5. S: it must be a rip off

The student makes an error in turn one; in turn two, the teacher tells the student what type of word is needed. The student repeats the error in turn three, and this time the teacher provides a recast, which is then adopted by the student.

Several recent studies have found that such explicit attention to form can be beneficial for learning. With this method it is more certain that the learners will notice the correction; however, there is also the risk that the communicative nature of the class will be disrupted.

While the previous paragraphs have considered the teacher's response to a student's error, it is also important to consider the student's response to the feedback, often called uptake. Again, perhaps not surprisingly, there is controversy regarding the importance of uptake. Some researchers argue that it is not important for students to produce the correct forms themselves once they have been corrected. In fact, in the case of recasts, they argue that such uptake may be mere parroting of the form provided by the teacher. Others, drawing on Swain's (1995) Output Hypothesis, argue that it is beneficial for students to be stretched to produce language that is somewhat beyond their current ability. Furthermore, uptake may be an indication that the teacher's correction has been noticed by the learner. Additionally, some error correction methods, such as prompting, make uptake a very necessary and essential component of the interaction. Finally, some studies (e.g., Loewen, 2005) found that successful uptake was one of the main predictors of students' subsequent accurate test scores. Thus, it seemed that students benefited from producing the correct forms.

So what does this all mean for teachers? While researchers continue to try to isolate the effects of various types of error correction, teachers may want to continue doing what they have (I hope) already been doing in the classroom—incorporating all of the available options.

First, let me say that I do believe it is possible to incorporate error correction into meaning-focused activities and still retain the primary focus on communication. Therefore, teachers need not be afraid to address linguistic items if and when they arise. As for which type of error correction works best, I think the jury is still out on that (thankfully, so I still have a job!). My advice to teachers would be to mix it up. Know what options are available and then incorporate them into your classrooms as you see fit. If you have a class of highly motivated and attentive adults, you may be able to provide implicit types of feedback, which will still be attended to by the students; however, if you have younger students or students who are less motivated, you may want to use more explicit types of feedback. Finally, I

would recommend that once you start the process of error correction, it is probably worthwhile to see it through to get the students to produce the correct form, since the actual production of uptake seems to be beneficial for learners. An example of how teachers might scaffold the provision of various types of feedback to ensure learner uptake is shown in example five.

Example 5

1. S: she told us that was the, that she was having the time of her life
2. T: she- she told, she said that what
3. S: she said, she said, you are exciting
4. T: no, no. What tense are you going to use
5. S: <unintelligible>
6. T: past perfect
7. S: she said she had the time of her life
8. T: she had had
9. S: she had had a time of her life on the Greek island

Again, the teacher and student are discussing an assigned reading, with the student retelling part of the story. The student should have used the past perfect in turn one but instead uses the past progressive. In turn two, the teacher attempts to elicit the correct form and allow the student to self-correct. The student does not do so, and the teacher then highlights that it is the verb tense that needs attention. This statement does not produce the desired response, so the teacher is more specific, stating which tense should be used. However, this information is still not enough for the student to self-correct, so in the end, the teacher provides a recast for the student in turn eight, and the student then repeats the correct form.

While error correction in meaning-focused activities seems to be beneficial for learners, there are still some caveats. None of the research to date advocates correcting every error that learners make. Such an approach is not feasible in the classroom and would be discouraging for learners. Too much error correction can also shift the primary focus from communication to linguistic forms. However, it does seem clear that the judicious use of error correction in the classroom can help provide an optimal environment for L2 learning.

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Shawn Loewen is an assistant professor in the Second Language Studies program at Michigan State University. He specializes in second language acquisition and L2 classroom interaction. His recent research has investigated the occurrence and effectiveness of incidental focus on form in meaning-focused L2 classrooms, and his work has appeared in *Language Learning*, *Studies in Second Language Acquisition*, and *Modern Language Journal*. He teaches classes on SLA and research methodologies. Before coming to MSU, he was a senior lecturer at the University of Auckland, New Zealand.

Summer Workshop Overview

For the tenth consecutive summer, CLEAR hosted workshops, drawing participants from all over the United States and several other countries. Teachers of more than ten different languages, from French, Spanish, and German to Thai, Indonesian, and Turkish, gathered in East Lansing to gain hands-on experience in a variety of topics.

Integrating Technology and Assessment for Language Teaching and Learning

The first workshop of the summer was led by Paula Winke of MSU's Department of Linguistics and Languages and CLEAR's Dennie Hoopingarner. Participants in this workshop learned how technology facilitates assessment and how assessment, in turn, facilitates learning. After being introduced to several online tools, attendees left the workshop with the skills to create online assessment activities for reading, writing, listening, and speaking.

Participants felt the information was timely and pertinent. As one remarked, "I [was] delighted to find such forethought and advanced focus on the future use and application of technology." Others were excited about the tools introduced in the workshop: "I will absolutely use the *Conversations* application in my testing. I can now replace my cassettes!" "*Conversations* is a fantastic program that will allow me to give speaking and listening tests from home for homework."

Interested? You can learn to use *Conversations* and other *Rich Internet Applications* yourself by visiting CLEAR's website!

Keeping Teacher and Student Talk in the Target Language

Charlene Polio, an MSU Department of Linguistics and Languages faculty member and frequent CLEAR presenter, led this workshop in July. The premise was that most teachers and teacher educators believe that maximal use of the target language in foreign language classrooms is best for facilitating language acquisition. Sometimes, however, various obstacles prevent teachers and students from speaking the target language.

Participants in this workshop learned strategies that teachers can use to teach in the target language, particularly in difficult contexts, such as when working with beginners and teaching grammar.

Participants were inspired by the workshop: "I am leaving with some definite techniques but, even more importantly, a 'can do' attitude about using the [target] language in the classroom." Another was pleased with the "practical ideas, immediately useful in the classroom"; a third reports that the workshop was "wonderful! I found it sparked my imagination and provided me with new (better!) variations of activities I have used." CLEAR presenters strive to give workshop participants not only the theory behind the pedagogy but practical applications as well.

“The best part of this workshop was the chance to collaborate with teachers from not only Michigan schools, but other states as well. Also, making contacts to continue to share ideas and information!”
— Summer 2007 Workshop Participant

Making the Most of Video in the Foreign Language Classroom

First-time CLEAR presenter Eve Zyzik, an assistant professor in MSU's Department of Spanish and Portuguese, led this workshop. Teachers and researchers agree that video materials can enhance the learning environment in foreign language classrooms by providing rich, contextualized input. Participants in this workshop learned several ways to use video that extend beyond typical listening comprehension activities as well as techniques for adapting authentic materials to learners of various proficiency levels.

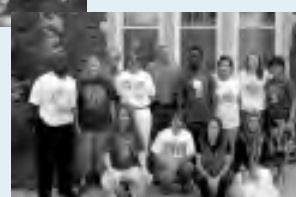
Workshop attendees learned not only techniques for using video but also the pedagogical theory behind video use. One participant commented, "Dr. Zyzik's... examples really helped clarify the points she was making. She was extremely knowledgeable about using video in the classroom, backing up her points with research. I appreciated the handouts of lesson plans as well as the websites and sources for research articles." Another attendee was also pleased with the applicability of the information: "Lots of resources were presented that I had never heard of nor thought to look for. I will definitely use the resources and ideas that I've collected. In fact, I've already e-mailed some to a few of my colleagues!"

You can use CLEAR's free online tool, *Viewpoint*, to upload video clips for use in the classroom. Learn more at: <http://clear.msu.edu/viewpoint>.

Language Teaching and Technology

The last workshop of the summer was conducted by Senta Goertler of MSU's Department of Linguistics and Languages. Technology in the classroom can ease classroom management tasks, provide a change of pace for students, provide opportunities to include the target community, and provide easy access to students' language production. Workshop participants learned how to use technology, such as course-management software, chat rooms, Instant Messaging, and websites, and also had the opportunity to develop their own materials.

Participants looked forward to using their new knowledge in the fall semester. One attendee stated, "[I'll apply this to] one lesson a month (at least), spicing up old ideas with technology, taking what I'm already doing and adapting a bit." Workshop attendees also appreciated the "many, many ideas presented for incorporating technology in the classroom" and, as another reported, "I will try to do my best to make classes more interactive and interesting using my newly learned skills and materials."



Upcoming Conferences

CLEAR will be represented at exhibit booths and will be presenting sessions at the following conferences this fall and next spring.

- [Michigan World Language Association \(MiWLA\)](#), October 18-19, 2007, Lansing, MI
- [American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages \(ACTFL\)](#), November 16-18, 2007, San Antonio, TX
- [Central States Conference on the Teaching of Foreign Languages \(CSCTFL\)](#), March 6-8, 2008, Dearborn, MI
- [World Languages Day](#), April 12, 2008, East Lansing, MI
- [Computer Assisted Language Instruction Consortium \(CALICO\)](#), March 18-22, 2008, San Francisco, CA

New Products

Visit <http://clear.msu.edu/clear/store> for these and other products from CLEAR.

La phonétique française

Similar to our popular Spanish CD-ROM, *Pronunciación y fonética*, this cross-platform multimedia program consists of interactive lessons that can be used by French teachers to learn how to teach pronunciation or by advanced students working on their own. *La phonétique française* is currently available in beta format. Anyone who orders the beta version will automatically receive a free updated version of the CD-ROM, if any changes are made upon further piloting.

Rich Internet Applications

One of our major initiatives in this new funding cycle is an ongoing project entitled *Rich Internet Applications*. Four of the new products available in this category are *Audio Dropboxes*, *Conversations*, *Viewpoint*, and *Mashups*. We will be presenting on *Rich Internet Applications* at all of the conferences listed above; we hope to see you in one of our sessions or workshops!

In the physical world, a *drop box* is where students can turn in papers, homework, or other assignments for teachers to collect later. In cyberspace, an *Audio Dropbox* is a virtual dropbox for audio recordings. Using this new tool, you can put a drop box for speaking assignments on any web page. From within that web page, students record themselves, and their audio files are automatically put into your drop box. Teachers can then access their drop box from anywhere and listen to the recordings. Put a drop box on your home page, mashup, wiki, or blog. Using the tool is as easy as copying and pasting. You do not have to upload or download anything, and it works on any computer from anywhere.

Conversations is a program that allows teachers to record prompts or questions for their students to answer. The program can be used to simulate conversations, role plays, or virtual interviews. Create a conversation to ask questions and collect responses. Join a conversation to listen to and respond to questions. Students can work in practice mode or respond to questions spontaneously. The program runs from your web browser and works without downloading or uploading.

Viewpoint is a video repository that allows you to record your videos online using your webcam or upload existing videos. These videos can then be linked from other sites or embedded inside your own web pages. Surpassing the functionality of YouTube, *Viewpoint* lets you add subtitles to your videos.

The term *mashup* refers to the combination of data from one or more web services with customized functionality or data. In the case of CLEAR's *Mashups*, the term refers to the combination of an audio or video clip with a SMILE exercise and additional text. The idea is to combine media elements to create a new resource for language teaching.

Coming Soon

We plan to launch at least two new products in fall 2007. Check our website for details on these and other new materials.

- [Introductory Business German](#). This CD-ROM is intended for use by those who have little to no knowledge of the German language but wish to learn more about the German business and economics environment.
- [Celebrating the World's Languages: A Guide to Creating a World Languages Day Event](#). CLEAR, in collaboration with the University of Wisconsin, Madison, and the University of Minnesota, has created a guidebook for those interested in running a World Languages Day event. The guide walks readers through the steps of planning and running this all-day cultural and language awareness event for high school students.

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