

Effective and Less Effective Teacher Questioning and Corrective Feedback Behavior in an EFL Context

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Abstract

Inspired by the new trend in language teaching pedagogy in which more emphasis is placed on the role of teachers (Kumaravadivelu, 1994; Brown 2001), the present study was conducted to find out if there is any significant difference between effective and less effective teachers in terms of their questioning and feedback behavior in class. The conversation classes of two effective and two less effective teachers, selected as such by the students, the Educational Office staff members and the manager of the English language teaching institute where the study was carried out, were observed. Each teacher's class was observed two times. The question types chosen included "display" and "referential" ones and the feedback categories under investigation encompassed "explicit correction", "recasts", "clarification feedback", "metalinguistic feedback", "elicitation", and "repetition". The analysis of the data obtained through the observation forms designed to let the researchers investigate the hypotheses of the study revealed that effective teachers not only ask significantly more questions than their less effective counterparts but also supply significantly more corrective feedback than less effective teachers do.

Key Words: Effective teachers, Less Effective Teachers, Display Questions, Referential Questions, Corrective Feedback Categories.

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Introduction

English language teaching has undergone many fluctuations over the years. According to Thanasoulas (2003) unlike other disciplines such as maths or physics, this tradition has been practiced in various ways, in all of the classrooms around the world. Although the teaching of other subjects has, to some extent, remained the same, in the field of English or language teaching in general it is not the case. As a matter of fact, over the years, the profession of language teaching has undergone many changes. As put by Brown (2001) from the mid-1880s to the mid-1980s, the language teaching profession was involved in what is called a search. The search was for an ideal method, which was supposed to be able to play the role of a panacea for all foreign language teaching problems. In fact, historical accounts of the profession tend to include a series of methods, each of which has gone out of favor to some extent by the appearance of new ones (Brown, 2001). Although the primary concern of language pedagogy until the mid-1980s was to find more effective "methods" of language teaching, this trend has now been replaced by a new movement, which focuses much more on language pedagogy that involves various aspects of teaching and learning processes and the contributions of the individual teachers to the profession. Consequently, the obsession with methods is no longer as vehement in language teaching circles as it was in the past (Widdowson, 1990).

To account for the demise of the "methods" syndrome, Brown (1997, as cited in Richards & Renandya, 2002) alludes to a number of reasons as follows: 1. Since methods are top-down impositions of experts' views of teaching, they assume too much about a context before the context has even been identified. However, needs, wants, and situations in language teaching/learning are in abundance; therefore, no single method which prescriptively looks for an idealized context can foresee all the different variables involved in everyday challenges of language learning and teaching. Thus, they are more prescriptive, while what we need is more bottom-up approaches.

2. Generally, it was claimed that methods were quite distinctive from each other. In fact, they are such at the beginning of a language course but become rather

indistinguishable from each other at the later stages of the course.

3. Methods are laden with the quasi-political or mercenary agendas of their proponents; therefore, methods, which are often the creations of the powerful centers, become “vehicles of a linguistic imperialism” (Phillipson, 1992 as cited in Richards & Renandya, 2002, p.10).

As was indicated above, in the “method era” there was an attempt in the selection and implementation of the optimal methods and teachers trained in every one of those methods were required to implement the ideals of the methods and create the necessary conditions to actualize their objectives. But bringing into question the specific roles imposed on teachers, Kumaravadivelu (1994) states that finding general methods that are suitable for all teachers and teaching situations reflects an essentially negative view on teachers. Also Richards (1990) believes that this kind of view implies that teachers cannot be trusted to teach well, and if they are left to their own devices, they definitely will make a mess of things.

In fact, Kumaravadivelu (1994) argues that the relationship between theorizers and teachers should be refigured by empowering teachers. He believes empowered teachers will be able to devise for themselves a systematic, coherent, and relevant alternative to method, an alternative which Kumaravadivelu (1994) has referred to as “post-method condition”, which is characterized by a number of basic principles or macrostrategies.

To shed more light on the new concept, Brown (2001) suggests that in the post-method condition the method is best replaced by pedagogy. He defines the former as a static set of procedures and the latter as a kind of dynamic interaction between teachers, learners, and instructional materials during the process of teaching and learning. According to Swaffar et al. (1982) such an interaction reveals itself as a quite different approach to teaching. They believe that in such an approach teachers are involved in observing and reflecting upon their teaching as well as the learning behavior of their students.

Looking upon the teaching profession as it is viewed by the advocates of the post-method era, Brown (2001, p.66) suggests twelve principles of second language

teaching that form "the core of an approach to language teaching pedagogy". One of these principles is the "Interlanguage Principle" based on which, as posited by Brown (2001, p.67), "second language learners go through a systematic developmental process as they progress to the full competence in the target language". While undergoing these developmental phases, they need to receive feedback from others especially their teachers to gauge their progress. Hence, this principle in a sense highlights the importance of feedback that teachers supply learners with in the classroom.

Given the new trends in pedagogy as outlined above, it is not surprising that nowadays considerable attention is given to the teacher-student interaction. In the 1970s and 1980s, major studies on teacher-student interaction focused on the practitioners' point of view, providing implications directly relevant to the classroom teacher (Nystrom, 1983 & Chaudron, 1986, as cited in Kamijo, 2005). "In recent years, a much greater role has been attributed to interactive features of classroom behaviors, such as turn-taking, questioning and answering, negotiation of meaning and feedback" (Chaudron, 1988, p.10). The background of this lies in the fact that "second language learning is a highly interactive process" (Richard and Lockhart, 1994, p.138) and the quality of this interaction is thought to have a considerable influence on learning (Ellis, 1994). In fact, interaction and involvement of learners are said to play an important role in language learning by providing learners with authentic input and feedback viewed very influential in building interlanguage and producing comprehensible input. This teacher-student interaction definitely gains more prominence in foreign language settings in that EFL learners have considerably fewer opportunities to use their foreign language communicatively both outside and within the classroom among peers. This means that the teacher is the only source learners expect to communicate with, and one effective way through which teachers can actualize this is to ask questions and provide feedback (Farooq, 1998).

Chaudron and Nunan (as cited in Moritoshi, 2002) acknowledge the importance of the interactive nature of language teaching and learning and argue that questions

and feedback have a significant part to play in second language acquisition. The ability to identify and discuss components of these behaviors may, therefore, lead to a more informed practice. That is why teachers' questioning has been the target of investigation for researchers working in the field of classroom second language learning (Banbrook and Skehan, 1990; Brock, 1986; Oberli, 2003).

According to Banbrook and Skehan (1990) teacher questions are of extreme significance. In fact, they can be used to let learners keep taking part in the discourse and even modify it so that the language will be more comprehensible. In a similar vein, admitting the significant role of teachers' questioning in creating an interactive language classroom, Brown (2001) suggests that teachers are inclined to enhance their role as an initiator of interaction to develop a repertoire of questioning strategies. He notes, "in second language classrooms, where learners often do not have a great number of tools... your questions provide necessary stepping stones to communications" (Brown, 2001, p.169). Differentiating between display and referential questions, Long and Sato (1983) concluded that although referential questions elicit longer and more authentic responses than display questions do, display questions unfortunately dominate classroom interaction.

Another crucial factor in creating an interactive classroom is teachers' feedback, which has attracted many researchers' attention. For example, Nunan (1991) considers giving feedback as the most important responsibility of teachers. Ellis and Barkhuizen (2005) also argue that research studies by Mackay (1999), Oliver (1998), and Van den Branden (1997) all seem to demonstrate the importance of providing corrective feedback in that it contributes to L2 acquisition.

Moritoshi (2002) states that some writers equate feedback specifically with error correction, that is to say, corrective feedback, while others include reinforcing and motivating behaviors. Oberli (2003) claims that feedback on form and error correction in particular lie at the core of feedback debate and consequently, present the greatest challenge in deciding on an appropriate strategy.

Regarding the importance of corrective feedback, there are different attitudes. While nativists such as Chomsky (1975) and Krashen (1982) contend that corrective

feedback is of almost no significance, Swain (1985) in his *Output Hypothesis*, Schmidt (1990) in his *Noticing Hypothesis*, and Long (1996), in his *Interaction Hypothesis* advocate it. Crookes and Chaudron (2001) argue that learners, even in the most learner-centered instruction, need corrective feedback to differentiate between acceptable and unacceptable target

language use. Also Nunan (1989) believes that the existence of corrective feedback distinguishes classroom interaction from the interaction that takes place out of classroom where errors are not corrected in the discourse of communication. In fact, when an error is made during the interaction in the language class, the teacher has two choices: to address it or ignore it.

Given the salutary effect of classroom questions and feedback on creating an interactive atmosphere to language classes and given the positive role these two classroom activities play in helping students' proficiency forward (Banbrook and Skehan 1989; Brown, 2001; Gripps, 1994; Holland and Shortall 1997; Nunan, 1991), ignoring error correction does not seem to be a judicial option in that the literature in ESL/EFL does not appear to be willing to sidestep students' errors. That is why this study was designed to tackle the topics of teacher questioning and feedback behavior. More specifically, the present project was undertaken to pinpoint the most efficient question types (display and referential) and corrective feedback behavior based on what effective teachers do with regard to both. In so doing, such classroom behaviors, as demonstrated by effective and

less effective teachers, were carefully studied. And, the categorization of questions and feedback, as used in this study, were as follows.

Questions

According to Ellis (1994), while there are many different types of questions that make it difficult to decide on discreet and observable categories, widespread studies have identified two main types of questions that are classified as *display* and *referential* questions. Therefore, in this study the same two main types were carefully studied.

Display questions are those to which the answers are already known and which are designed to elicit particular structures, while *referential questions* are ones to which teachers, in naturalistic and classroom discourse, do not know the answers already (Richard & Lockhart, 1994).

Feedback

According to Ellis (1985, as cited in Oberli, 2003), feedback refers to the response given by the teacher to efforts by the learner to communicate and it "can involve such functions as correction, acknowledgement, requests for clarification and back channel cues such as 'Mmm'. It has been suggested that feedback plays a major role in helping learners to test hypotheses they have formed about the rule system of the target language" (p. 295).

However, in this study we put emphasis on the corrective function of feedback, i.e. corrective feedback. To investigate different types of feedback, we made use of Lyster and Ranta's (1997, as cited in Suzuki, 2003) corrective feedback patterns:

Explicit Correction: Clearly indicating that the student's utterance was incorrect, the teacher provides the correct form.

Recasts: Without directly indicating that the student's utterance was incorrect, the teacher implicitly reformulates the student's error, or provides the correction.

Clarification requests: By using phrases like "Excuse me?" the teacher indicates that the message has not been understood and a repetition or a reformulation is required.

Metalinguistic feedback: Without providing the correct form, the teacher poses questions or provides comments or information related to the formation of the student's utterance. *Elicitation:* The teacher directly elicits the correct form from the student by asking questions (e.g., "How do we say that in French?"), or by pausing to allow the student to complete the teacher's utterance (e.g. "It is a ..."). Elicitation questions differ from questions that are defined as Metalinguistic clues in that they require more than a yes/no response.

•*Repetition:* The teacher repeats the student's error and adjusts intonation to draw the student's attention to it.

Hypotheses

Based on the categorization of questions and feedback, as outlined above, this study sought to investigate the following hypotheses. However, before the hypotheses are stated, it is to be noted that out of the six corrective feedback types mentioned above, the teachers observed did not use the "Metalinguistic", "Clarification Request", and "Elicitation" techniques. That is why the researchers have investigated the "Explicit", "Recast", and "Repetition" corrective feedback only.

It is also to be kept in mind that the researchers focused on display and referential questions and the four corrective feedback types referred to in the previous paragraph without considering the language skill or component (i.e. grammar, pronunciation, etc.) in which the questions were asked or the corrections were made.

1. There is no significant difference in the proportion of referential questions asked by effective and less effective teachers.
2. There is no significant difference in proportion of display questions asked by effective and less effective teachers.
3. There is no significant difference in the proportion of display and referential questions asked by effective teachers.
4. There is no significant difference in the proportion of referential questions asked by less effective teachers.
5. There is no significant difference between effective and less effective teachers in terms of the proportion of the total number of questions asked by effective and less effective teachers to the total number of the questions asked by both teacher types.
6. There is no significant difference in proportion between the amount of explicit corrective feedback provided by effective and less effective teachers.
7. There is no significant difference in proportion between the amount of recast corrective feedback provided by effective and less effective teachers.
8. There is no significant difference in proportion between the amount of repetition corrective feedback provided effective and less effective teachers.

9. There is no significant difference in proportion between the amount of corrective feedback provided by effective and less effective teachers.

I. Method

Participants

The actual subjects of the study included four teachers, two effective and two less effective ones, who taught *The New Interchange Series* at the institute where the study was implemented. The *New Interchange Series* includes four books that help ESL/EFL students to move from the beginning to the high-intermediate level. To select the teachers to be used in this study 185 adult male and female students of the institute, the staff members of the Educational Office and the manager of the above-mentioned institute were asked to rate the conversation teachers teaching there. Each rank in the questionnaire was given a point (5 for **Excellent** and 1 for **Below Average**) and those obtaining the first two highest ratings and those obtaining the two lowest ratings were selected as “effective” and “less effective”, respectively.

It is to be noted that all the four teachers used in this study were M.A. holders in English Literature and taught English at other language institutes as well as the one in which the present project was implemented.

Instrumentation

One of the instruments used to find answers to the questions was an observation tool because according to Nunan (1989), there is no substitute for direct observation as a way of finding out about language classroom. However, there are several observation techniques such as FIAC (Flanders’ Interaction Analysis) by Flanders (1970), COLT (Communicative Orientation of Language Teaching) by Ullman and Geva (1984), and FLINT system (Foreign Language Interaction, an adoption of FIAC) by Moskowitz (1971). Out of these, as Yamazaki (1999) observes, the FLINT by Moskowitz has been given specific attention. In Moskowitz’s FLINT, the observer has an empty matrix specifying the categories for analysis. Entries are

made in the matrix during class at regular intervals so that by the end of a lesson a graphic record of events is available (Johnson & Johnson, 1998). While the FLINT system includes a number of categories dealing with question and feedback types used by teachers, the researchers did not employ it in this study in that it did not provide all the required data for this study such as the types of questions and corrective feedback. To this end, the researchers devised a simple classroom observation checklist, including the variables which were the focus of this study.

Procedures

To collect the data necessary to investigate the hypotheses of this study the following steps were taken:

1. To locate effective and less effective teachers, the researchers administered a questionnaire to the manager of the institute and the staff in the Educational Office of the same institute where the study was conducted. Then, the researchers administered the same questionnaire to all the students in the conversation classes of the institute. Based on the answers provided by the manager, the educational staff, and the students, the sixteen teachers of the institute were rank-ordered. The questionnaire had been devised such that each respondent had to rate each teacher from 1 to 5. Next, the mean of each individual teacher was computed by dividing the sum of each teacher's total score by the number of people who had appraised him/her. Finally, the two teachers who had gained the highest scores and those two who had gained the lowest scores were selected as "effective" and "less effective", respectively.

2. Having selected the effective and less effective teachers, these teachers' classrooms were observed. Each teacher's class was observed twice. Using the observation checklist devised to satisfy the needs of the study, the researchers used a check mark whenever a question (display or referential) was asked or an instance of feedback was provided.

II. Results and Discussion

A. Investigating the hypotheses quantitatively

As there were actually only four teachers serving as the main subjects in this study, the chi-square procedure was not deemed as an appropriate statistical procedure to be used. Hence, to test the hypotheses, the Z formula, which measures the difference in proportion between populations (Beaver, 1991; Moore 2003), was utilized:

$$Z = \frac{p_1 - p_2}{\sqrt{pq \left(\frac{N_1 + N_2}{N_1 N_2} \right)}}$$

Table 1 below shows the results obtained in regard to the first five hypotheses which are related to the question-type aspect of this study.

Table 1. The Z formula results for teachers' questions

Ho	Z-observed	Z-critical
Ho1	0.85	1.96
Ho2	1	1.96
Ho3	1.08	1.96
Ho4	0.36	1.96
Ho5	5**	1.96

α :5% c:95% ** There is a significant difference

As Table 1 above demonstrates all but the fifth hypotheses are confirmed. That is, it can be safely stated that:

1. there is no significant difference in the proportion of referential questions asked by effective and less effective teachers,
2. there is no significant difference in the proportion of display questions asked by effective and less effective teachers,
3. there is no significant difference in the proportion of display and referential

questions asked by effective teachers,

4. there is no significant difference in the proportion of referential questions asked by less effective teachers,

5. but there is a significant difference between effective and less effective teachers in terms of the proportion of the total number of questions asked to the total number of the questions asked by each teacher type. More specifically, effective teachers ask significantly far more questions than less effective teachers do.

On the other hand, this study was concerned with the feedback behavior provided by teachers as well. In fact, hypotheses 6, 7, 8 and 9 were concerned with teachers' feedback behavior. Table 2 below shows the results obtained in regard to the last four hypotheses related to the feedback aspect of this study.

Table 2. The Z formula results for teachers' corrective feedback

Ho	Z-observed	Z-critical
Ho6	0.08	1.96
Ho7	0.43	1.96
Ho8	0.1	1.96
Ho9	3.3**	1.96

α :5% c :95% ** There is a significant difference

As Table 2 above demonstrates, all but the ninth hypotheses are confirmed. That is, it can be safely stated that:

6. there is no significant difference in proportion between the amount of explicit corrective feedback provided by effective and less effective teachers,

7. there is no significant difference in proportion between the amount of recast corrective feedback provided by effective and less effective teachers,

8. there is no significant difference in proportion between the amount of repetition corrective feedback provided effective and less effective teachers,

9. but there is a significant difference in terms of the proportion of the total amount of corrective feedback provided by effective and less effective teachers to

the total amount of the corrective feedback provided by each teacher type. More specifically, effective teachers supply significantly far more corrective feedback than less effective teachers do.

B. Investigating the hypotheses qualitatively

B. 1. Question-based Hypotheses

Table 3 below is provided to let qualitatively investigate the results of this study in terms of the type and the number of questions asked by the effective and less effective teachers in this study.

Table 3. Teachers' Questions

Q Types	Eff. Teachers	Leff. Teachers	Total
Referential	78	33	111
Display	64	36	100
Total	142	69	211

Although most of the hypotheses in this study were confirmed, that is, the difference in questioning behavior between the effective and less effective teachers did not turn out to be significant in many aspects, such results should be viewed with a grain of salt in that the statistical procedure used focused on proportions; hence, the magnitude of the differences was somehow underestimated, an underestimation which one can atone for only if the raw data are carefully examined.

In fact, a glance at the findings as reported in Table 3 seems to tell another story. The effective teachers asked more referential questions (78) than the less effective teachers (33) did. In other words, the effective teachers asked 2.36 times as many referential questions as the less effective teachers. That is, out of 111 referential questions, 78 (about 71%) were asked by the effective teachers and only 33 (about 29%) referential questions were asked by the less effective teachers.

As for the second hypothesis, statistics showed that there is no significant difference between effective and less effective teachers in terms of display questions, while the descriptive data, displayed in Table 3 demonstrate that the difference is great. That is, the effective teachers asked more display questions than the less effective ones did. More specifically, the effective teachers asked 1.8 times as many display questions as the less effective teachers. Out of 100 display questions, 64 were asked by the effective teachers and only 36 by the less effective teachers.

Although from a statistical point of view there is also no significant difference between the referential and display questions asked by effective teachers, it can be understood from Table 3 that this is not exactly the case. In fact, our effective teachers used referential questions 1.2 times more than display questions. In other words, out of a total of 147 questions that the effective teachers asked, 78 were referential questions and 64 were display ones.

Like the previous hypotheses, although the fourth hypothesis was statistically confirmed, i.e. there is no significant difference in regard to display and referential questions asked by less effective teachers, the raw data presented in Table 3 reveal that the less effective teachers in this study asked more display questions (36) than referential questions (33), though the difference looks slight.

In regard to the fifth null hypothesis, statistics and qualitative analysis are in accord. That is, both analysis types demonstrate that the difference between the effective and less effective teachers regarding the total number of questions is great. Table 3 illustrates that out of a total of 211 questions, 142 questions (about 68%) were asked by the effective teachers and only 69 questions (about 32%) were asked by the less effective teachers. That is, the effective teachers asked 2.05 times as many questions as the less effective teachers did.

Concerning the feedback provided by the effective and less effective teachers, a close look at the raw data can also reveal illuminating facts that go unnoticed when the facts and figures are only analyzed quantitatively. Table 4 below lends support to the claim made.

Table 4. Teachers' Corrective Feedback

CF types	Eff. Teachers	Leff. Teachers	N
Explicit	33	14	47
Recast	16	8	24
Repetition	5	1	6
N	54	23	77

Although the results mentioned in the quantitative phase indicate that the sixth hypothesis related to corrective feedback is statistically substantiated (i.e. there is no significant difference between effective and less effective teachers regarding their explicit corrective feedback behavior), Table 4 simply displays that it is to be modified. In fact, the effective teachers provided the students with more corrective feedback than the less effective teachers did. More specifically, the effective teachers provided 2.06 times as much explicit corrective feedback as the less effective ones did. Obviously, the raw data demonstrate that the amount of explicit corrective feedback (33) provided by the effective teachers is far more considerable than the amount of explicit corrective feedback (14) provided by the less effective ones. Considering hypotheses 7 and 8, quantitative results, as already stated, suggest that there is no significant difference between effective and less effective teachers concerning the amount of recast and repetition corrective feedback types. However, a look at Table 4 suggests something else. The information in the table reveals that there was a great difference between the effective and less effective teachers regarding recast and repetition corrective feedback. In other words, the amount of recast (16) and repetition (5) corrective feedback given by the effective teachers was greater than the amount of recast (5) and repetition (1) provided by the less effective teachers. In sum, we can assert that the effective teachers used 2 times as much recast and 5 times as much repetition as the less effective teachers did.

In regard to the ninth hypothesis, statistics dovetail with descriptive data. That

is, not only do statistics reject this hypothesis and reveal that there is a significant difference between effective and less effective teachers regarding the total amount of corrective feedback, but also descriptive data reveal that the total amount of corrective feedback (54) provided by the effective teachers was far more substantial than the total amount of corrective feedback (23) provided by the less effective teachers. More specifically, the total amount of corrective feedback given by the effective teachers was 2.25 times greater than the total amount of corrective feedback given by the less effective teachers. In other words, the effective teachers made use of different kinds of corrective feedback much more often than the less effective teachers did.

III. Conclusion

Based on the results obtained in this study, it can be concluded that the quantitative data do not tell the whole story and a comparison of effective and less effective teachers' questioning and feedback behavior through descriptive data should also be used to shed light on the questions raised in this project. The study firmly supports the conclusion that effective teachers ask significantly more questions than less effective ones and provide significantly more corrective feedback than their less effective counterparts.

The present study also reveals that effective teachers ask referential questions far more often than they ask display questions (78 versus 64) whereas this does not hold true concerning less effective teachers, i.e. the number of referential and display questions they ask is almost the same(33 versus 36).

As is the case with questions, this study strongly favors the statement to the effect that effective teachers provide far more corrective feedback than less effective ones do.

However, an examination of the types of feedback provided by effective teachers also unveils the fact that they use explicit corrective feedback more often than the other kinds of corrective feedback. As a matter of fact, the ratio of explicit, recast, and repetition corrective feedback for these teachers is 61%, 29%, 9%,

respectively. It is interesting to note that less effective teachers also use explicit corrective feedback more often than the other feedback types.

As a final conclusion it is to be noted that this study seems to suggest that asking questions and providing feedback are two very important qualities of good teachers and effective teaching. What remains to be investigated is whether explicit corrective feedback is more effective than the other types of feedback and what students' preferences for different types of feedback are.

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