

## ***Introducing Error-Treatment as a Motivator of Learners Towards Achievement in the Language Classroom.***

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### **Summary:**

The following article deals with error treatment in the language classroom and its role in motivating learners. It starts by asking some questions related to the link between error treatment, motivation and achievement in learning English. Then, the definition of some key constructs such as: feedback, correction, treatment, and repair is introduced. The article proceeds through the statement of the different views of errors, the ways errors should be corrected, the appropriate time of correction, and the corrector preferred by learners. In the second part of the article, motivation and achievement are introduced.

We are backed by a study undertaken in some secondary schools where some 120 pupils and 30 teachers were involved. This study aimed at gaining information on the way errors are dealt with, and the possible effects observed on the learners' motivation and achievement in learning English.

### **المخلص:**

يهدف هذا المقال إلى دراسة كيفية معالجة الأخطاء في أقسام تعليم اللغة الأجنبية و دورها في ترغيب الطلبة. يبدأ المقال بطرح جملة من التساؤلات عن طبيعة العلاقة بين معالجة الأخطاء؛ الرغبة والتحصيل في تعلم اللغة الإنجليزية. يلي ذلك اقتراح لمفاهيم بعض المصطلحات المتداولة في هذا المجال كالتعقيب التصحيح والمعالجة. ثم يتطرق المقال إلى مختلف وجهات النظر التي تناولت مفهوم الخطأ و طرق تصحيحه و كذا الوقت المناسب للتصحيح والمصحح الذي يفضله التلاميذ. في الجزء الثاني من المقال تعرضنا بالتفصيل إلى الرغبة و التحصيل في تعلم اللغة.

اعتمدنا في هذا المقال على دراسة قمنا بها في بعض الثانويات أين تمت مساندة 120 تلميذا و 30 أستاذا. كانت هذه الدراسة تهدف إلى جمع معلومات عن الطريقة التي يعالج بها موضوع الأخطاء و أثارها على مستوى الترغيب و التحصيل لدى التلاميذ في تعلم اللغة الإنجليزية.

**Introduction:**

The field of foreign language teaching has witnessed an outstanding shift of focus from the structure of the language i.e. the product to the complex mental abilities and the way they function i.e. the process. The origin of this shift could be traced back to the changes in linguistics and psychology in particular, and science methodology in general. However, this change has not been accompanied with a serious re-evaluation in the 'licence' programmes in the departments of English throughout Algeria; a problem that stands, to a far extent, behind failure in learning English in Algerian universities as well as secondary schools.

In this respect, the present article is an attempt to show the importance of reinforcing some courses related to psycho-pedagogy aiming at fostering a better understanding of the teacher of his learners' problems by trying to depict what the sources of the problems are, and how to deal with them. We are backed by a study undertaken in some secondary schools to show the drawbacks of the actual teaching practice in order to find out what the reasons for failure to learn English in Algeria are and how to maximize learners' chances to succeed.

This study is aimed at establishing the link between the learner's motivation and achievement on one hand, and error treatment on another, in order to answer few questions among which are :

- 1- Are teachers interested in communication or formal accuracy?
- 2- Does error treatment put the learner on the defensive?
- 3- How does error treatment affect motivation?
- 4- What link is there between motivation and achievement?

**I- Definition of terms:**

**1- Feedback:** It is a frequent term in the literature related to errors. It comprises reactions that a learner receives from his teacher or classmates. The information included in feedback is meant to help the learners test their hypotheses about the language in order to confirm, reject or modify them (Chaudron 1988).the initial goal of feedback is not that of a judgment or criticism of a learner's product, rather it is the provision of information that a learner actively uses in modifying his behaviour (Chaudron 1988).

**2- Correction:** Different researchers have suggested different definitions of this term. (Chaudron 1977) believes that correction occurs when a teacher is able to elicit a correct response from the committer of the error or from one or more of his classmates. Correctness was also considered as a negative feedback that needs to be discretely conveyed to the learner.

**3- Treatment:** This term is often used to refer to a cautiously carried out correction in an attempt to show the location of the error of his learners and guiding them towards avoiding these errors in their future performance.

**4- Repair:** this term was defined as the treatment of trouble occurring in interactive language use (Van Lier 1983). It is, although not a sufficient condition, an important variable in language learning because it is one of the mechanisms of feedback on the interim system that is creatively constructed by the language learner. It can be 'overt' going straight forward to the trouble spot to repair it, as it can be 'covert'; that is urging the learner to do his self-monitoring and adjustment of his talk.

## **II- Research Methodology and Design:**

We opted for the descriptive design because it seems to be the best way to uncover the complex mental processes by describing the apparent behaviour and then, trying to introspect about what is cognitively oriented.

We have also chosen a sample of 120 pupils and 30 teachers to whom we have administered our questionnaires. We insisted to know about the experience of the teachers and ensured to them that our study has nothing to do with a judgment of their performance, and it constitutes an attempt to gain information about the teaching practice in general and the obstacles teachers and pupils encounter in this operation.

## **III- Different Views of Errors**

For the behaviourists, error has a negative connotation. It was considered like sin the effect of which must be overcome (Brooks 1964). The occurrence of error was directly linked to the inadequacy of the teaching techniques (Corder 1967).

Later on, errors were seen through a more positive view and regarded as inevitable since they are indicators of the learner's progress through the Interlanguage by formulating and testing hypotheses about the nature of the new language system.

Corder (1974) distinguished between 'overt' and 'overt' errors. While 'overt' errors are ungrammatical utterances at the level of sentence, 'covert' errors refer to the ungrammatically well-formed, but interpretable within the context of communication. More recently, Lennon (1991) used two dimensions for identifying errors: 'domain' and 'extent'. The 'domain' of a n error refers to "the rank of linguistic unit which must be taken as context in order for the error to become apparent". 'The extent' refers to "how far up the hierarchy of linguistic unit in which the text is organised the error has permeated, it also delineates the rank of the unit which has to be deleted, replaced, added or re-ordered".

For Example when a learner says 'he goed' the domain of the error is the word and the extent is the morpheme 'ed'.

### **III-1- Contrastive Analysis**

Fries(1945) believes the problems of language learners to be caused by the different structures of the native and target language. For that reason, he maintained that Contrastive Analysis would predict areas of difficulty in order to design appropriate language teaching materials. Lado (1957) who based his studies on the structuralists' findings said: We assume that the student who comes in contact with a foreign language will find some features of it quite easy and others extremely difficult. Those elements that are similar to his native language will be simple and those elements that are different will be difficult.(Lado 1957:59)

Contrastive analysts, on the whole, agreed that the source of error in language learning was the negative transfer or the language interference. later on, it was discovered that it was an oversimplification to say that differences cause errors while similarities do not. Many problems predicted by Contrastive Analysis did not occur and many unpredicted problems occurred. Thus, Contrastive Analysis in its strong version claiming to solve language teaching problems by predicting the errors through the establishment of similarities and differences between languages was abandoned in favour of Error Analysis.

### **III-2- Error Analysis**

Error Analysts said that we have to deal with errors after they occur. They claimed that a study of the product can only make a guess without any evidence that our guesses could be faithful. What needs to be studied is the process of learning. Richards distinguished between: 'Intralingual' and 'Developmental' errors

Intralingual errors reflect the general characteristics of rule learning, such as faulty generalization incomplete application of rules, and failure to learn conditions under which rules apply. Developmental errors show how a learner starts from his limited knowledge and experience in the language to build hypotheses about it.

### **III-3- Errors and Interlanguage**

Errors show how a system works and how a learner progresses through the Interlanguage this latter refers to the language variety standing between the learner's mother tongue and the target language. (Corder 1974) claims that a learner's sentences may be deviant, ill-formed, incorrect or erroneous only in the sense that they are not fully describable in terms of the grammar of his mother tongue or the target language. They are, however, presumably well formed in terms of the grammar of his own transitional idiolect at that point in time.

This is to say that a learner's language during a certain period of the development is neither his mother tongue nor the target language but a variety standing between the two. This variety is likely to contain many errors that delineate the learner's hypothetical stage about the language (Selinker 1972).

Different kinds of errors occur during the Interlanguage stages that are:

**A- Random Errors stage** from the learner's limited language of the target language, he'd produce errors of the order of::

He cans sings

He can sings

After being taught that verbs in the simple present take an "S" with the third person singular.

**B- Emergent Stage:** here a certain consistency in the learner's production appears. The learner, here may internalize some rules

although incorrect, but thought to be correct because the learner is unable to correct them.

**C- The Systematic Stage:** where the rules although not well formed, because more closely approximating the language system and the learner becomes able to correct his errors if pointed out to him to him by someone else

**D- The Stabilisation Stage:** here the errors become fewer and he is able to self correct, but some errors undetected and get fossilised.

**IV- What to Correct?**

The task of finding out what errors to correct is not an easy one. The requirements of acceptability and appropriateness should be judged by the teacher with reference to clearly specified criteria, while acceptability is much related to competence because it is dependent on the structure's well formedness, appropriateness is related to performance because it shows whether the utterance was produced in its right context or not ( Corder 1981).

Because appropriateness is usually judged subjectively, two dimensions were identified; the referential appropriateness related to the material truth value of the utterance, and the social appropriateness having to do with the proper style or register to use in different situations as shown in the following diagram from (Corder1981:41):

Acceptable	Appropriate	Free from error
Acceptable	inappropriate	erroneous
Unacceptable	appropriate	erroneous
Unacceptable	inappropriate	erroneous

But in practice, not all errors should be corrected. Correction should be limited to 'global' errors that affect the communicativeness of the utterance, while 'local' errors should be tolerated in order to encourage the learner to communicate freely in the foreign language (Burt and Kiparsky 1974).

**V- When to Correct?**

**V-1- Immediate Correction:**

It is usually preferable to provide correct feedback just after the detection of the error in the learner's utterance. Its value is likely to decrease if the time between performance and error correction is greater (Mackworth 1950). There is, however, the problem of the bad

effect correction could have on the learner. It can represent a real inhibition for him because he feels he is interrupted and deprived from communicating what he believed was true.

### **V-2- Delayed and Postponed Correction.**

Delaying correction may enable the learner to produce longer utterances, to show the product of his thinking process, and involve other learners in the discussion. For that reason a 'wait-time' of a few seconds before providing feedback is likely to be of a positive effect on learners' progress.

## **VI- Who Should Correct the Errors?**

### **VI-1- Self Correction**

A learner needs to be urged to rely on his own to correct the errors he made. The teacher's role would be limited to mentioning that an error occurred. He may supply the learner with some cues about the location and identity of the error, and leave him with sufficient time to self correct.

### **VI-2- Peer Correction.**

This technique has the advantage of allowing the teacher to get the whole classroom involved in the correction of errors. Nonetheless, it is usually less accepted by pupils because they believe that the classmate does not have the authority of correcting them, and the teacher, for them is the only one who has the status of evaluator.

### **VI-3- Teacher Correction.**

Teacher correction of oral errors may be helpful if the teacher knows how to proceed in the correction. He can, according to Bartram and Walton (1991), use a gesture, pretend to misunderstand the learner's response, or repeat in context the learner's utterance containing error. He can equally reformulate what a learner says in a correct form, or repeat the answer in context adding stress on the trouble spot.

## **VII- Motivation**

Motivation is often related to solving problems and satisfying needs. In learning a foreign language, it may be assimilated with solving the problem of understanding other people and satisfying the need to communicate with them without difficulty.

It may be, in the case of classroom language learning, explained through the learner's willingness to understand his teacher's and classmates' utterances, and at the same time, putting his views to discussion in order to check their validity. Having always in mind the deep desire to achieve the best results during exams, the motivated learner tends to formulate hypotheses about the language, then passes to check them with his teacher and classmates. Once an error is detected by his teacher or classmates, he knows that a certain hypothesis is wrong and that it should be revised.

The teacher can know about a learner's hindered psychological mechanisms only by observing his overt behaviour. His motives after performing a certain task or engaging in a given activity are worth studying because they will enable the teacher from inciting him to be productive. In this respect, to be motivated is to have a deep desire to reach a well-defined objective. Motivation could be said to have to do with the intrinsic force that is possessed by every human being and urges him to act. Gardner and Lambert (1959) distinguishes two kinds of motivation; integrative motivation and instrumental motivation. An integratively motivated learner is the one who tends to learn the foreign language and the foreign culture it carries to be accepted as a member of the target community. Whereas, an instrumentally motivated learner is interested in the language for utilitarian reasons such as getting a job, or having good marks during the exams (case of language learners).

Maslow (1968) explained human behaviour in terms of meeting basic needs, where people experience certain drives to meet these needs and are pushed to act in particular ways to reduce these drives. There exists according to Maslow (ibid.) a hierarchy of needs that is divided in two categories. Deficiency needs and being needs. While the deficiency needs are related to a person's psychological and physiological balance, the being needs are more related to the fulfilment of individual potential having to do with cognitive and aesthetic development. These needs were detailed explained as follows:

- 1- Physiological needs: air, water, food, sleep, elimination, sex, activity.
- 2- Safety needs: How to avoid fear and pain, physical security, order, and physical safety.
- 3- Belonging and love needs: to love and be loved, have friends, and to be part of a family.



4- Self-esteem needs: to feel competent, independent, successful, respected, and worthwhile.

5- Self-actualization needs: being one's true self, achieving one's highest potential, wanting knowledge and wisdom, being able to understand and accept oneself and others, being creative and appreciative of beauty in the world. A self-actualized person is happy, realistic, accepting, problem-oriented, creative, democratic, independent, and fulfilling a mission or purpose in life.

Whenever the deficiency needs are not met or are disrupted in a way or another, then, it would be difficult for a person to move up in the hierarchy. However, this claim was criticised on the ground that experience has provided evidence that despite of severe physical pain and deprivation, many people were able to meet being needs and were able to overcome their bad conditions.

Nonetheless, what could be retained from Maslow's ideas is that children's difficulty in learning may be due to the fact that their basic needs are not met at home or in the classroom where needs to be established the proper and secure environment. Learners need also to be encouraged to think and teachers have to avoid penalising them for being different and creative.

Motivation can be Intrinsic related to intrinsic satisfaction i.e. when we perform an activity we for pleasure and self-content. The activities related to intrinsic motivation usually do not require any kind of reward. In the foreign language classroom, learning is unfortunately not very appealing for many students and is related for few of them to what Gardner (1985) called the 'integrative motivation'; that is the desire to identify with the culture of the community of the foreign language. Extrinsic motivation, however, is related to the reward or external incentive one gets after performing a given task. The reward functions as a positive reinforcer for a wanted behaviour, or as a negative reinforcer to avoid an unwanted behaviour. In the classroom, the teacher usually resorts to this type of motivation by rewarding good students with good marks and 'punishing' weak students with bad marks.

Deci and Ryan (1985) claim that the three innate needs that are; competence, relatedness, and autonomy are transformed by the individual, via social interaction and cultural patterns into goals.

### **VIII- Motivation and Achievement**

Atkinson (1957) states that the need for achievement results from two tendencies: motivation towards success and motivation towards

avoidance of failure. The two tendencies are composed of three factors:

- The person's expectations of success (or failure).
- The values of the tasks as an incentive.
- The orientation towards success or toward avoidance of failure.

For Mc Combs and Marzano (1990) the achievement outcome is related to skill and will, where the will is the motivation to achieve. Motivation influences, to very far extents, the learner's achievement. It can be beneficial when moderate, or inhibiting when it is too high or too low. A very high motivation usually changes into anxiety and the learner is highly concerned with success than the effort he has to devote or the abilities he has to foster. A moderate motivation allows the learner to use the necessary efforts to achieve success. Ziv and Diem (1975) report, that motivation effects anxiety and therefore the learner's achievement.

Gardner and McIntyre (1993) define the motivated person as the one who: "Wants to achieve a particular goal, devotes considerable efforts to achieve his goal, and experiences satisfaction in the activities associated with achieving this goal".

Competitive situation where a learner's performance is compared with that of his classmates should be avoided because they are equally inhibiting. For that reason Erikson (1968) said that the teacher's emphasis should be upon individualism or co-operative learning aiming at fostering the spirit of co-operation rather than competition.

Rogers (1969) went further when he claimed that self-initiated learning is very important because it involves feeling and cognition and it is likely to be lasting. In case there would be a threat to the learner's self-image, resistance to learning occurs.

### **IX- The Results of the Study.**

When asked if they had received any formal training about error treatment, the majority of teachers answered negatively, and they asserted that they faced the problem of error treatment only as they became teachers.

Most of them agreed that oral errors should be corrected, but few of them had a precise idea about correction. As for the appropriate time of correction 66% of the teachers were of the view that correction should be done immediately after error occurrence.

On the whole, most teachers claimed that error-treatment is likely to provide better results in the learning process, but few could match learners' interests in the classroom since things are not clear in their minds and due to learners' differences, they can not opt for a standard method that could work with all their pupils.

### **Conclusion**

We may conclude by saying that language teaching is a very delicate entreprise. Unfortunately, the licence students, who are teachers to be, have not received the appropriate training that would enable them to carry on their task in the right conditions. The complexity of the task of dealing with pupils who are different in terms of motivation, readiness and aptitude to learn the foreign language obliges us to think of a serious re-evaluation of the programmes of licence.

We can, consequently safely say that the introduction of a module of assessment and feedback is a necessity to end up with the queries of the actual teaching practice. The modules of phonetics and grammar should be reinforced since many learners' errors are teacher-induced.

Teachers should also be trained to create a pleasant atmosphere in the language classroom where learners are motivated to learn English and the barriers to learning are easy to transcend.

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