

Introduction

On the face of it, it might seem that everything that there is to know about error correction, be it provided in the oral or written mode, should have already been uncovered and there should be a solid basis for feasible guidelines for teachers that would clearly tell them whether or not to react to a learner's ill-formed utterance or sentence in a particular context, when and how such feedback should be supplied, and who should be responsible for the correction. An assumption of this kind would be fully warranted in view of the fact that error treatment is of immediate concern and relevance to both teachers, theorists and researchers. Therefore, it constitutes an area where the interests of these groups of professionals could be reconciled and the existing gap between the practical world of the classroom, with all its exigencies and unpredictability, and the scientific world of the academia, with all its rigorous requirements, could successfully be bridged. When it comes to practitioners, the need to effectively respond to learners' errors can be regarded as part and parcel of their jobs, since inaccurate spoken and written output is bound to appear in huge quantities in most instructional settings and the ability to handle it in the most beneficial way is without doubt an important teaching skill. On the other hand, the investigation of the role of corrective feedback and the efficacy of specific corrective techniques is an extremely promising line of empirical inquiry, mainly because it is a fertile testing ground for verifying the theoretical claims regarding the overall contribution of form-focused instruction, the value of explicit and implicit techniques, the utility of input-based and output-oriented options, the need for ensuring learner engagement, or the challenge of creating optimal relevance during language lessons.

In reality, however, the belief that the area of corrective feedback no longer holds any secrets since all its aspects have been thoroughly researched and teachers are well prepared to dispense it, could not be further from the truth, as is evidenced by even a cursory overview of the relevant literature. In the first place, the issue of error correction is not usually accorded much space in popular methodology coursebooks for prospective

and practicing teachers, and when relevant chapters or sections do appear, it is typically touched upon from a very general perspective without recognition that it is an integral part of the process of teaching language forms. Secondly, although the amount of research into the contribution of corrective feedback, particularly such drawing upon Long's (1996) idea of focus on form, is indeed overwhelming, which is visible in the numerous papers devoted to this topic appearing in refereed journals and edited collections, there are few, if any, book-length publications that would attempt to offer a comprehensive account of this fascinating domain, especially such that would cover both oral and written correction and treat the insights stemming from theoretical positions and research findings as a basis for making concrete, sound, practicable and context-sensitive recommendations for everyday classroom practice. This comment applies in equal measure to the Polish context, where the pertinent monographs are those by Arabski (1979) and Zybert (1999), as well as the international arena, where the publications by Edge (1989), Bartram and Walton (1991), James (1998) and Sheen (2010b) can be found. The problem is, however, that while these volumes have considerably contributed to extending our knowledge base, some of them are somewhat dated and cannot possibly give justice to the latest developments in the field of research on corrective feedback, others focus more on the nature of error and its role in the process of interlanguage development than the treatment of incorrect forms, and others yet are purely pedagogically oriented, sometimes to the point of oversimplification. In addition, they are often limited to the discussion of oral corrective feedback or dismally fail to adequately explore the possible teaching implications as well as to point to directions for future empirical investigations. This unfortunate paucity of relevant publications is highly disconcerting as it leads to insufficient dissemination of the latest research findings in a manner that would be approachable to teachers, which, in turn, results in misconceptions concerning the need for corrective feedback and the ways in which it should most profitably be provided.

The main aim of the present work is to fill the existing gap and dispel some of the myths surrounding the place of oral and written error correction in language education by providing an exhaustive and up-to-date account of issues involved in this area, taking the stance that the provision of corrective feedback constitutes an integral part of form-focused instruction. This account places an equal emphasis on the relevant theoretical claims, the most recent research findings and everyday pedagogical concerns, particularly as they apply to the teaching of additional languages in the foreign language setting, where the amount of in- and out-of-class exposure is still

restricted. To this end, the book consists of four chapters, each dealing with a different aspect of oral and written error correction, but also related to the remaining ones, thereby testifying to the acute need to forge links between theory, research and pedagogy with respect to this crucial domain. Chapter One, which is meant as an overview of the key issues related to corrective feedback, focuses on the definitions of error and error correction adopted for the purpose of this work, the importance of error correction in the language classroom, the evolution that the perceptions of its contributions to language learning have undergone over time, the vital distinctions between explicit and implicit learning, knowledge, and instruction, and the place of error correction in classifications of techniques and procedures that can be employed in teaching language forms. Chapter Two, in turn, is intended to make a strong case for the facilitative role of the treatment of learner errors in language pedagogy by considering the requirements for successful language acquisition, presenting the arguments that have been advanced against reactive negative evidence, and then offering a convincing rationale for the provision of corrective feedback on both theoretical, empirical and pedagogical grounds. The focus of attention in Chapter Three is on the pedagogical choices that teachers have at their disposal when conducting oral and written error correction. It opens with the discussion of the potential contributions of pedagogical intervention of this kind to the development of explicit and implicit second language knowledge, which is followed by a comparison of the nature of corrective feedback in speaking and writing, the consideration of the role that error correction can play in the curriculum and lesson planning, and, finally, a thorough presentation of the decision-making process that practitioners are confronted with when responding to learners' errors, or the target, timing, manner and source of correction. A separate section is devoted to the discussion of the ways in which computers can be harnessed for the purpose of providing corrective feedback in recognition of the fact that the role of new technologies in this area is likely to grow significantly in the foreseeable future. In Chapter Four, the emphasis is shifted to empirical investigations of oral and written error correction by first outlining a framework for conducting and synthesizing such research, and subsequently discussing its methodology and main findings with respect to the effectiveness of specific feedback options, the influence of mediating variables, as well as the nature of learner engagement. Finally, the conclusion offers a summary of the most important points touched upon throughout the book, provides a set of pedagogical proposals and considers the possible goals of future research endeavors and the ways in which these can most effectively be pursued.

Several important clarifications are also in order with respect to the title of the present volume, the terminology it employs, and the audiences for which it is intended. Although this issue is considered at greater length in Chapter One, it should be explained at this point that the term *error* is used here in a very general sense to refer to any infelicitous language use and is thus regarded as a synonym of the term *mistake*, while the term *error correction* is applied in the same sense as *corrective feedback* as well as a number of other expressions that can be drawn upon to describe teachers' response to learners' inaccurate spoken and written output. Another qualification is that while the book is primarily aimed to enhance the effectiveness of teachers' corrective practices in the foreign language context, the terms *foreign* and *second* are used interchangeably unless explicitly stated otherwise, and the studies invoked in the four chapters have been conducted in very different instructional settings. By the same token, no theoretical undertones are intended through the use of the terms *acquisition* and *learning*, with the exception of cases in which they are discussed within the framework of Krashen's (1981, 1982, 1985) Monitor Model. It should also be emphasized that the phrase *foreign language classroom*, as it is used in the title, should not be understood literally as the physical space in which lessons are conducted, but, rather, interpreted more metaphorically, as describing the whole process of language education. In effect, the concept of error correction is not meant to be confined only to situations in which teachers respond to learners' inaccurate language use in speech or writing in the course of classroom interaction, but also includes situations in which such feedback is delivered at a later time, as is typically the case with the marking of written assignments, or it is mediated through the use of technology, as when teachers and learners communicate with the help of computer software. Finally, as regards the potential recipients of this book, it is envisaged that it will be of relevance and significance not only to specialists in the field of second language acquisition, but also to graduate and doctoral students carrying out research in the area of form-focused instruction and error correction. Many parts of this volume, particularly the discussion of pedagogical options included in Chapter Three, will also be of considerable interest and utility to teachers of foreign languages at different educational levels, wishing to augment the quality and efficacy of the oral and written corrective feedback they provide on their learners' inaccurate language use.