EFL Learners’ Self-correction in Spoken Language

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Abstract
The article examined self-correction of Pakistani EFL learners. Participants from three different levels - undergraduate, graduate and master level participated in the study. The participants were asked to speak on the selected topic; the speech was recorded and analyzed both qualitatively and quantitatively. The results indicate higher rate of self-correction by master level students, graduate and undergraduate respectively. The tendency seems to be related with the knowledge and awareness of mistake. The higher the level the more self-correction was observed and vice versa. As far as uncorrected mistakes are concerned, the following three reasons were observed: Learners’ unawareness about their mistakes which means that they couldn’t recognize the mistakes. Some mistakes were even recognized but not corrected due to their lack of knowledge in that particular area. Most of times the errors were recognized and could be corrected, but the speaker gave less importance to them. They were of the view that the errors don’t create disturbance in speech and the message is being conveyed properly.

Keywords: EFL learners, self-correction, mistakes, errors

Introduction
The Self correction is the process of correcting the mistake or errors by one self. For example, when a person speaks a second language, mistakes occur likely during speech that can be of any type of grammatical mistakes, and then when that person during the speech rectifies the mistakes himself/herself, that is known as self-correction.
The current research explores the “self-correction in spoken” language with focus on the following three perspectives questions.

1. What sorts of mistakes are done by the undergraduate, graduate and master level students?
2. Which of the mistakes committed are rectified by them?
3. Why some mistakes are left uncorrected while other mistakes are self-corrected?

**Literature Review**

Self-correction or self-repair of self-errors has been one of the debated topic in linguistics and psychology since 19th century as mentioned in the work of Victoria Fromkin:

This linguistic interest in speech errors can be traced back to Herman Paul (1886) who, according to Merringer (1895), was the first linguist to suggest that in examination of speech errors might reveal a natural cause of certain types of linguistics change. ([Fromkin: 1973, p.13](#))

In pursuit of self-correction, date collected plays a pivotal role to make it successful “Merringer (1895) also notes that Delbruk (1887) suggested that speech error data was of value to linguistics”, this is one of the mighty reason to make Merringer ‘the “Father” of the linguistic interest in speech errors, if for no other reason than that his published collection of over eight thousand speech, reading, and writing errors has provided the data for other researchers.’ ([Fromkin: 1973, p.13](#))

“Apart from the work of Merringer, an American psychologist Bawden’s ‘small collection of about one hundred error was published” ([Fromkin: 1973, p.14](#)) in 1900.

As the years passed by, the work on speech errors grew it, it was not until in 1951 ‘Wells published his paper “Predicting Slips of the Tongue”, which is marked as pioneering effort in using speech error evidence in linguistics.’ ([Fromkin: 1973, p.14](#))

The above mentioned article has contributed significantly to understanding of language and linguistic performance.
In the process of correction, two main themes have approached forward; first one is self-correction and second other-correction. The first thoroughly deals with the person correcting his/her mistakes and the other deals with other person intervention. As this topic spins around just self-correction of speech errors, let’s take look at this.

“For most of the twentieth century error correction of second language students’ texts was assumed to be an important and beneficial practice. That assumption is probably still held today by most students and many teachers, even more so in Asian countries where English is taught as a foreign language (Ho, 2008; Lee, 2005).”

If we glance at work of some people on self-correction, we can come to many written available things. Mistakes can be of any sort, be that of fragments, simple words problems. Let’s see what Hayes and Mouradian (1981) have talked of it:

...people often leave out or repeat words or phrases, break off what they are saying and rephrase or replace it, speak in fragments, or otherwise use incorrect grammar (Hayes and Mouradian: 1981, p.231).

One of the many essentials things to be done by the researcher is to find the place of mistakes and its self-correction as (Donald Hindle 1983) mentioned, ‘Of course, finding the site of a self-correction is only half the problem’, and then analyzing it.

Self-correction (self-repair) is a phenomena which is problematic but many suggestions have been given to deal with it. One of the main way to correct mistakes and elevate self-correction is self-monitoring during an utterance. (Levelt, 1989) many models have been proposed to detect it as the local model RIM (Repair Interval Model) by Nakatani and Hirschberg 1993.

McCormick and Sisken did a project on self-correction in speech errors. They analyze the extent of self-correction between the students with different proficiency levels for
English as a second language (ESL). They also investigate the impact of self-correction on their proficiency and communication skills. They consider the learners as a primary source of corrective feedback.

First of all they describe the significance of their project by comparing it with other work done by Genesee (2006), Upshur (1968), Golonka (2006), Goodwin (1990), Lazaraton (2002) and Shehada (2001).

For their project they selected Goodwin’s method. Actually they want to investigate how much students of low intermediate and high intermediate have the ability to identify the errors and then to self-correct these errors, according to the varying proficiency level. They provide three questions for their project.

- What are the errors identified by students within their proficiency level?
- How much ability students have for self-correction for errors identified by them within their proficiency level?
- What is the effect of self-correction on their skills?

McCormick and Sisken (2007) used the tool of recording of students for their research project. First they recorded the speech of students, and then asked students to transcribe their speech in regular orthography and also asked them to identify the errors and then correct these errors by themselves.

They also presented three hypotheses for their project.

- Ability of identifying errors of students will be increases.
- Ability of self-correcting of students will be increases.
- To improve the spoken production students can use the method of self-correcting.

The important fact was that they mentioned that ability will be varying for different proficiency levels.

Regarding their finding, for all three questions they found different percentages for different levels of proficiency. As high level graduate had more ability to identify and correct errors comparing with low level graduate. In the last possible path for self-correcting used by students were given as analysis.
This project was done by 12 members. The focus of this group was to learn identifying errors and then to correct them. They divided their research in five fields, as to identify the errors in listening, reading, speaking and in writing. Fifth and last field was about investigation. Two members for each field of identifying errors and four members for investigation were assigned. The project is more focused on second language acquisition along with mother tongue. Similarly another purpose for their project which they mentioned was to identify the reasons of doing errors.

They divide the errors or mistakes found by their transcription of their project in two categories.

- Mistakes of meaning
- Mistakes of form

Then they further divide these two categories in their sub categories. We have mentioned those here to understand their concept.

Mistakes of meaning

1. Linguistically correct but not exact forms intended by speaker.
2. Linguistically correct messages, but politically incorrect.
3. Low effect mistakes -Which creates un-understandability.
4. Local effect mistakes-A part of conversation is mistaken.

Mistakes of form

1. Slips: When the teacher thinks that a student could self-correct a mistake.
2. Error: IF a student cannot self-correct a mistake in his/her own English level, but the teacher think student should do this.
3. Attempts: Teacher agreed that student does not have so much proficiency to self-correct this error.

They took the transcription from the students who meet every Wednesday to increase their spoken English.

They divide the data in categories as described above and provide a chart for each subcategory, which shows the percentage of errors found in the conversation of those students.
Methodology

In order to check whether learners correct their mistakes or not, the spoken language was recorded and analyzed both qualitatively and quantitatively.

**Tool:** We used the tool of interviewing via recordings.

**Sample:** The pattern of collecting data remained equally balanced for all level of students. As such, if five undergraduate were taken, then as well five post graduate and M.Sc level students.

**Size:** Five students were taken from each level. Then the total numbers of the recording were fifteen.

The participants were asked to speak on the selected topic “Terrorism”, every participant was given timeframe of at least 2 minutes, and they could talk more than it but not less than it. Interestingly, there were many who couldn’t even talk even for one and half minute.

As earlier mentioned, the quantity of participants was equally taken, five for per level: undergraduate, post-graduate and master level.

The data collected from each group of students was categorized and then their recorded speech was analyzed.

Data analyses

**Undergraduate**

Five undergraduate students were taken and given time to talk on the selected topic. One of the main things seen was the continuously happening ‘pauses’ in their utterances.

Here is one of their pieces of speech:

“…. Huh… I think terrorism is not…good thing. And people should **finished** it…finish it. Hmmm….huh… innocent life…lives are”

Here is another small part of recorded speech:

“Terrorism **are** very common in the world. Many money countries are **spent**…spending to fight it. But….uh…huh….”
Above mentioned information from the date clearly states that various kinds of approaches occur during self-correction, undergraduate students generally do make mistakes, many times proceeding without correcting and sometimes correcting. But the mistakes are more likely of verb and tenses because their utterances are related to it. Here are the mistakes and their percentages done by the speakers.

![Bar Chart: Percentages of Errors Done by Under-Graduate](chart.png)

Figure 1. shows percentages of errors done by undergraduate EFL learners.

As above mentioned shows the clear picture of errors done by the speakers, as one can find high errors percentage in appropriate words and Nouns, and then the mistakes of Tense and Word Order fall lower than them. The error percentage Adjective, Adverb, Article and Preposition seem circle around almost a same domain 40 to 50.

Now we have another table which shows the percentages of self correction done by the speakers.
Figure 2. shows percentages of self-corrections done by undergraduate EFL learners.

Graduate
Like undergraduate, five students were chosen for post-graduate to boot. The method was mostly same. The difference between the two has remained the difference of academic level.

Figure 3. shows percentages of errors done by graduate EFL learners.
Showed above the graph has easily explained the errors done by graduates, as rate of errors are high in nouns, appropriate words, then tense and prepositions, as it keeps going one, then adjective, adverb and at last article. The mistakes were committed on different types of nouns, tenses and so on.

Figure 4. shows percentages of self-corrections done by graduate EFL learners.

Further comes the rate of corrected errors which were done by the graduate students. Tense and word order are higher, then noun and adverb, later preposition and adjective; low rate falls in article and the lowest in appropriate words.
Masters Students

![Percentage of Errors Done by the Master Students](image)

Figure 5. shows percentages of errors done by Masters level EFL learners.

As expected, the analysis was of some positive sense. Master level students were far better than the rest, because of their longer academic career and vast reading. Clearly, one can see high rate of errors in appropriate words and nouns, following that word order and tense; later preposition and adjective. At last, the adverb and article.

![Percentage of Corrected Errors by the Master Students](image)

Figure 6. shows percentages of self-corrections done by Masters level EFL learners.
Similarly, as regarded in their higher academic career, their correction level was higher. The highest rate in correction was in tense, after that noun, word order and adverb remain as same. Further, adjective and preposition fall in correction; later appropriate words and articles do come.

**Findings**

**Errors**

Finally, the final analyses were performed into two parts; the first was the merging of all errors done by the all levels of student of undergraduate, post-graduate and master level. It was to find out the trend among the all levels and rate of errors on bases of comparison. Expectedly, the errors of undergraduate exceed the rest, after that errors rate of graduate come and the last come the master level.

![Comparison of Errors](image)

Figure 7. shows comparison of errors done by Undergraduate, graduate and master level EFL learners.
Correction of Errors

The same was performed on correction of errors, the rate of correction in undergraduate, graduate and master. Here the scenario changes, master level students have higher rate of correcting their mistakes since their level is higher. Afterwards, graduate emerges as high in rectifying the errors. At last, undergraduate seems slower in correcting because of their level.

Figure 8. shows comparison of self-corrections done by Undergraduate, graduate and master level EFL learners.

Conclusion

The results indicate higher rate of self-correction by master level students as compared to graduate and undergraduate students. The tendency seems to be related with the knowledge and awareness of mistake. The higher the proficiency level, the more self-correction was observed and vice versa. Tense seems to be the most difficult area for Pakistani EFL learners. Though master level students make fewer mistakes but they prefer the correct tense, that’s why higher level of self-correction was found in use of tenses. As far as uncorrected mistakes are concerned, the following three reasons were observed:
• Their unawareness about their mistakes which means that they couldn’t recognize the mistakes
• Some mistakes were even recognized but not corrected due to their lack of knowledge in that particular area
• Most of times the errors were recognized and could be corrected, but the speaker gave less importance to them. They were with the belief that the errors don’t create disturbance in speech.

References


