The American University in Cairo
The English Language Institute
The MA TEFL Program

Form-Focused Feedback in Communicative Language Teaching

Written by: Hamdy Ali

Presented to: **Dr. Fred Perry**

Paper 1: The Research Questions & Hypotheses

Outline

I. Rationale & Problem

      a. Introduction & historical background.
      b. The problem
      c. The importance of the topic for today

II. Research Questions & Hypotheses

   The argument:

  a. Part One   (with research question 1 & hypothesis 1)
  b. Part Two (with research question 2 & hypothesis 2)

III. Delimitation of the problem

IV. Definitions of constructs & specialized terms

V. Table of references

a. Introduction & historical background:

Whether meaning-focused instruction is sufficient for acquiring a second/foreign language has

been a matter of controversy. Krashen (1981) advocates the notion that the provision of comprehensible input supported by a low affective filter is sufficient for acquiring a second language, and he further claims that meaning-based instruction can provide such conditions. Supporting the same idea, Prabhu (1987) argues that drawing the learners' attention to grammatical forms in meaning-based instruction is not necessary and totally unhelpful. On the other side, other researchers and educators believe that in the second/foreign language classroom, form and meaning are inseparable. For example, Long (1991) supports the idea that for meaning-based instruction to be effective, it needs to be complemented with some degree of attention to form, and that without this integrity between form and meaning, meaning-based instruction can never be sufficient for L2 development.

Empirical work in the field of second language acquisition suggests that there are serious deficiencies with communicative language teaching situations in which communication or meaning receives the greatest attention. For example, data from the French immersion program studies conducted in Canada over the last 20 years showed that there was little feedback on errors in content-based classes, and that many linguistic errors were not corrected in these classes simply because the teachers responded more to the content or the meaning of the utterances rather than to grammatical errors (Allen, Swain, Harley, & Cummins, 1990). In these studies, the researchers mention that only 19% of the total errors registered were corrected. The findings of these studies showed that students enrolled in these immersion programs had serious problems in dealing with specific linguistic forms even after their exposure to high-quality meaningful input

over a reasonably extended period of time. In the light of these findings, the researchers recommend that including form-focused activities within communicative classroom settings may bring about better language learning outcomes.

As a result of the French immersion programs, researchers began to be more interested in investigating focus on form within communicative learning contexts. A number of research studies (e.g., Doughty, 1991; Doughty & Williams, 1998; Harley, 1998) revealed that the provision of only meaning-based learning activities is not sufficient for instructed SAL, and that focus on form within communicative language contexts can successfully enhance L2 development. More recently, Pica (2002) noted that the type of input and feedback learners receive in content-based classes that excessively focus on the learning of the subject matter content does not seem to assist L2 learners in developing their language use in the ESL classroom.

The support for focus-on-form in communicative language teaching relies on three major assumptions in SLA. First, learners acquire new linguistic structures while attending to such linguistic forms in contexts where the main goal is the message, not the code (Hatch, 1978). Secondly, L2 learners may have difficulty in producing or attending to certain linguistic forms in communication as their capacity of information processing is limited, and thirdly, as a result, L2 learners take advantage of the opportunities that occur during communicative learning situations to give specific attention to form (Long, Inagaki, & Ortega, 1998; Mackey & Philp, 1998).

How to draw the learners' attention to *form* in communicative classroom settings has become the real challenge. Over the last decade, there has been an attempt to achieve this through feedback on linguistic errors made by the students in their attempts to use the target language in communicative classroom settings. As a matter of fact, some researchers have identified

corrective (negative) feedback as a focus-on-form procedure (Long & Robinson, 1998). Long (1991) gives a definition for 'focus-on-form' as the overt drawing of the students' attention to linguistic errors as they occur incidentally in lessons in which the overriding focus is on meaning or communication. However, it should be noted here that in spite of the fact that research has shown that negative feedback (information to the students that their utterances are erroneous and need to be corrected) is essential for second language acquisition (Long & Robinson, 1998), and that form-focused feedback is successful in drawing the learner's attention to certain linguistic forms within the context of performing communicative activities (Shah, 2003), most of the research interest in the last 8 years has been directed to the experimental investigation of the effect of negative feedback (particularly implicit negative feedback in the form of a recast) on drawing the learners' attention to form in communicative learning contexts (Doughty & Varela, 1998; Long, Inagaki & Ortega , 1998; Ayoun, 2001; Oliver & Mackey, 2003; Sanz & Morgan-Short, 2004). None of the above studies investigated how far the students have actual access to negative feedback that focuses on erroneous linguistic forms in real communicative classroom contexts. Over the last 6 years I found **only one** study conducted in a real classroom setting investigating the provision of form-focused negative feedback in CLT. In this study, Shah (2003) investigated feedback in content-based Malaysian classrooms, and he found that students received little feedback focusing on their linguistic errors compared to the feedback they received on their errors in meaning or the subject matter content. I have not found any research studies investigating the provision of negative feedback in real ESP communicative classroom settings.

b.   The problem

Many errors related to linguistic forms go uncorrected in communicative or content language teaching situations because the focus in such situations is entirely on meaning or communication.

So, little attention (if any) is given to linguistic forms in spite of the fact that, as shown by research referred to in the above section, attention to form within the context of communicative learning activities has the potential to yield useful language learning outcomes in terms of enhancing the students' processing of language input and increasing the accuracy of their language production.

c.   The importance of the topic for today

The topic of this paper (feedback focused on form in communicative classroom settings) has important theoretical and practical implications. Theoretically, it can reveal more on the role of cognition and attention to form in instructed SLA. Pedagogically or practically, it can help us have better understanding of the nature of feedback learners receive in communicative classroom settings such as teacher-student classroom interactions, pair work, group work, open class discussions, etc. Furthermore, it can reveal to us how far feedback provided in such learning contexts is useful in modifying the students' incorrect language production. On the other side, if research shows that negative feedback focused on form does not lead to any improvement in students' language production following the provision of this feedback type, why shall we then worry about correcting our students' linguistic errors in communicative learning activities and create stressful learning environments for our students that may make them unwilling to participate in such important interactional learning activities? If this research shows that implicit less face-threatening negative feedback technique (e.g., recasting) is useful in interactive ESP classroom settings, then teachers and educators may be more encouraged to adopt it in their communicative classroom settings.

The following section of this paper presents the argument that is used to generate the research questions and hypotheses.

The Argument

My argument consists of two parts:

   a.   **Part One   (with research question 1 & hypothesis 1)**

   Since the process of language learning has been seen as a process of testing hypotheses in the sense that language learners are constantly involved in an ongoing process of formulating hypotheses, testing them and finally confirming or rejecting them based on the language data they receive during the language learning process, students' errors in the ESL classroom are considered significant as they keep teachers informed of the various hypotheses learners make during the language learning process (Gass & Selinker, 2001). As a result, feedback on error is also significant because it represents some form of input according to which learners modify some of the hypotheses they have previously made about the language they are learning. Hence, feedback on error is crucial to the notion of hypothesis testing, and thus quite relevant to the process of SLA (Schachter, 1991).

   When feedback is provided to students in response to their errors, it is termed 'negative or corrective feedback'. Negative feedback can be explicit or implicit. Explicit negative feedback is that type of feedback in which teachers provide explicit explanations for their students that their utterances are erroneous and need to be corrected; whereas implicit negative feedback is that type of feedback in which the students' attention is drawn to erroneous linguistic forms but in an indirect manner. Implicit negative feedback usually occurs as various interactional moves such as recasts, clarification requests and other forms of negotiation of meaning (Mackey, Gass & McDonough, 2000).

The following premises are used to generate the first research question:

1. Research has shown that despite the fact that L2 learners develop high levels of fluency and communicative abilities in the target language through communicative language teaching, they still have problems with linguistic accuracy and complexity (Lightbown & Spada, 1990).

2. French immersion studies have revealed that so many errors in content and communicative teaching situations go uncorrected because teachers tend to respond to the content or meaning of the learners' utterances rather than to their grammatical errors. (Allen et al., 1990).

3. Focus on form has a significant role to play in acquiring an L2 (Gass, Svetics, & Lemelin, 2003)

4. The acquisition of certain linguistic forms within communicative learning activities is greatly facilitated by drawing the students' attention to these forms (Murphy, 2005).

5. Feedback focused on form is considered essential for Second Language Acquisition (SLA) (Long & Robinson, 1998).

6. It has been found that feedback focused on form can draw the learner's attention to linguistic forms within the context of performing communicative activities; thus it can facilitate or improve their L2 development (Shah, 2003).

The above 6 premises give rise to the first research question in the study:

To what extent is negative feedback that focuses on the learner's erroneous linguistic forms available to students in communicative classroom settings?

Sub-questions of the above research question include:

1- What type of feedback do teachers provide for their students in communicative classroom settings? (Is it meaning-focused or form-focused or is it both?)

2- What are types of errors that receive form-focused feedback in communicative classroom settings? (Lexical errors, syntactic errors, phonological errors, etc).

In an answer to the first research question, the following hypothesis can be made:

Communicative classroom settings will provide less access to negative feedback that focuses on erroneous linguistic forms produced by the students.

This hypothesis is motivated by the fact that in communicative classroom settings, the focus is entirely on meaning and communication; so form receives little (if any) attention. The hypothesis is also based on data from the French immersion studies which showed that in communicative classroom settings, teachers tend to respond to the content or meaning of the learners' utterances rather than to their grammatical errors (Allen et al., 1990).

b. Part Two (with research question 2 & hypothesis 2):

Despite the extreme importance of negative feedback for the process of SLA, some teachers and educators argue that the provision of explicit negative feedback in communicative teaching situations may interrupt the flow of interaction, and thus seriously affects the achievement of the predetermined learning targets. Further, some researchers suggest that the use of explicit negative feedback in communicative or content teaching situations can lead to passive affective reactions on the part of the students; students may perceive feedback provided in interactional or communicative classroom settings as impolite and abrupt (Shah, 2003). In other words, the provision of negative feedback within the context of communicative learning activities may increase the students' anxiety level when they are fully indulged in practsing the language in such contexts, which greatly affects their language performance. However, research has shown that attention to linguistic forms within the context of interactional communicative learning situations can benefit learners in two ways. First, it improves their performance in processing language input. Second, it increases the accuracy of their language production. (Long, 1991; Long & Robinson, 1998).

The refusal of some teachers and educators to use explicit negative feedback in content-based instruction or interactional teaching situations motivated researchers to look into alternative methods of incorporating negative feedback within the context of communicative or content language teaching, which gave rise to research on the use of implicit negative feedback in communicative teaching situations. The recast has been the most prominent implicit negative feedback technique investigated by recent research to see how far it can help learners in interactional and communicative contexts to focus on erroneous linguistic forms they produce within such learning contexts. Farrar (as cited in Ayoun, 2001) defines the recast as the corrective reformulation of an erroneous utterance. It occurs more within the context of natural communication when the focus is on meaning, and it is functioned to draw the attention of a certain language user to an erroneous linguistic form that has just been made in the course of interaction.

Some of the latest research conducted on implicit negative feedback found support for a facilitative role of recasts in instructed SLA. Carrol and Swain (1993) found that the recast is able to cause some form of change in the learner's interlanguage at least on a short-term basis. In another study conducted on the role of implicit negative feedback, Long, Inagaki & Ortega (1998) found support for the notion that reactive implicit negative feedback (recasts) can be more effective than preemptive positive input (models) in achieving improvements on previously unknown L2 structures. Doughty and Varela (1998) found that student utterances occurring immediately after a recast had changes that led to a correction of the original incorrect student utterance. Further, they found that learners who had a more advanced level of question formation benefited more from **interaction with recasts** than **interaction without recasts**. As a result, the researchers suggested that recasts in L2 communicative classrooms are effective only if they are

accompanied by some additional cues (such as repetition of the incorrect utterance placing emphasis on the student's error), indicating to the learner that it is the *form* and not only the *meaning* of the utterance that is in focus. Leeman (as cited in Sanz & Morgan-Short, 2004) found that the effect of the recast is not due to the fact that it corrects the student's error, but to the fact that it represents correct target language (TL) input to the learner. In other words, it is important to expose the learners to correct TL structures. This finding has an important teaching implication as it places a big question mark on all those learning activities that expose L2 learners to incorrect TL structures and ask them for error correction. Oliver & Mackey (2003) indicate that the context in which a certain negative feedback technique is used is highly valuable. In their study, they found that in language-focused exchanges, most feedback supplied to learners was in the form of recasts, and that learner often modified their output following these recasts. None of the above studies investigated the effectiveness of recasting as an implicit negative feedback technique in ESP communicative classroom contexts.

Based on the above explanation, the following premises can be made

6. Explicit negative feedback is possibly avoided in interactional or communicative classroom settings because it may be perceived by the students as impolite and abrupt (Shah, 2003).

7. Implicit negative feedback in the form of a recast makes certain linguistic forms salient to ESL learners; thus positively affects instructed SLA (Sanz & Morgan-Short, 2004).

8. The recast is able to cause some form of change in the learner's interlanguage at least on a short-term basis (Carrol & Swain, 1993)

9. Student utterances occurring immediately after a recast had changes that led to a correction of the original incorrect student utterances (Doughty & Varela, 1998).

10. Research has shown that students in interactional learning activities often modified their language output after receiving feedback on their errors in the form of a recast (Oliver & Mackey, 2003)

11. Students with an advanced language level benefit more from interaction with recasts than interaction without recasts (Doughty & Varela, 1998).

The above 6 premises show that recasting as an implicit negative feedback technique is useful in correcting the students' erroneous utterances, and that explicit negative feedback is not preferred by students in communicative classroom settings, which gives rise to the second research question in this study:

Is recasting as an implicit negative feedback technique able to make the students modify their linguistic errors in ESP communicative or interactional classroom settings?

Based on the above question, the following sub-questions could be asked:

1-What are the students' perceptions of recasts as implicit feedback techniques in ESP communicative classroom settings? (e.g., do they perceive them as feedback on form or feedback on meaning?).

2- What kind of recast is more successful in correcting students' linguistic errors in interactional ESP classroom situations? The usual recast or the emphatic recast?

Based on the second research question, the following hypothesis can be made:

Recasts will be effective in modifying the incorrect utterances of the students provided that they are accompanied by additional cues (e.g., stress on the student error) that help learners perceive recasts as feedback on *form* rather than confirmation of *meaning*.

The above hypothesis is based on previous research referred to in the first section of this paper, and it is also motivated by the study of Doughty & Varela (1998) in which they showed that recasts are effective in interactional classroom settings only when they are accompanied by additional cues indicating to the learners that it is the *form*, not the meaning, that is in focus.

III.   **Delimitation of the problem**

The focus of my study is on negative feedback on student linguistic errors in ESP communicative classroom settings. Thus, a number of delimitations in my study need to be clarified. Firstly, the purpose of the study is to investigate the availability extent of negative feedback focused on form in ESP communicative classroom settings, and thus negative feedback on form is investigated **only** in communicative classroom activities such as role-plays, pair-and group-work, teacher-student class interactions, debates or open classroom discussions in which the focus is usually on meaning and communication rather than on the linguistic form. Negative feedback on error **will not** be investigated in any other classroom activities in which focus on form is extensively existent such as grammar classroom exercises, vocabulary exercises or pronunciation drills simply because it is highly expected that feedback in such learning activities is form-focused. Secondly, the study focus **will be** on any form of negative feedback (whether explicit or implicit) that draws the students' attention to (or asks the students to) correct erroneous linguistic forms they produce (such as explicit corrections of student errors, recasting, clarification requests, etc.).

In the second stage of the study, it should be noted that only the role of recasting as a feedback technique in communicative classroom settings will be investigated. No other implicit negative feedback technique will be investigated. The rationale behind my choice of an implicit rather than

an explicit negative feedback technique to investigate in the second part of my study is in accord with previous research (e.g., Shah, 2003) which shows that explicit negative feedback is probably avoided in communicative learning contexts because it could be perceived by learners as abrupt and impolite. In other words, if, on one side, some teachers and educators indicate that they are inclined to avoid explicit negative feedback in communicative classroom learning activities, and previous research, on the other side, shows that negative feedback that focuses on form is significant in helping the students focus on form within the context of performing communicative activities, then why do not we try to see if the provision of implicit negative feedback (that is safer to use in terms of being less face-threatening and less anxiety-provoking in communicative classroom activities) is useful in such particular learning situations in which the focus is entirely on meaning or communication. The other reason that made me particularly choose recasting as a feedback technique in the second part of the study is the fact that it received increased interest from researchers in the last decade due to its potential role in interactional situations in teacher-student interactions or NS-NNS interactions.

Finally it should be clarified that my investigation of the role of recasting in ESP communicative classroom activities will be confined to adult learners of a reasonable language proficiency level that allows them to perceive the recast as feedback on error rather than confirmation of meaning. Two reasons motivated me to consider only adult learners in my study. First, my teaching experience has always been with adult learners and I am interested in providing them with practical teaching suggestions and useful pedagogical practices that help them attend to and correct their linguistic errors in communicative classroom contexts. Second, previous research (e.g., Mackey & Philp, 1998) showed that learners were able to understand the

corrective nature of recasts **only when** they had a certain language proficiency level or as the researchers called it "developmental readiness".

IV. Defining constructs and specialized terminology:

A. Definitions of constructs:

Form-focused feedback

Theoretical definition:

The type of feedback that focuses on errors related to linguistic forms produced by the students within the context of a certain communicative learning situation.

Operational definition:

The teacher's correct responses to the erroneous linguistic forms produced by students

The recast

Theoretical definition:

A reformulation of an incorrect utterance. (Farrar, 1990).

Operational definition:

The teacher's reformulated correct response of an incorrect utterance produced by the student.

Communicative language teaching:

Theoretical definition:

A language teaching approach that puts a lot of emphasis on interaction and communication as the goal and means of learning a second or foreign language.

Operational definition:

Those specific learning classroom activities such as role plays, debates, pair-and group-work in which the goal is to get the students use the target language for communication rather than to teach the students about grammatical structures of the target language.

B. Definitions of specialized terms:

Content-based instruction:

It is an aspect of communicative language teaching in which focus is on teaching the content rather than the language used to express that content.

Focus on form (as used in communicative language teaching):

The overt drawing of students' attention to erroneous linguistic elements as they occur incidentally in learning activities in which the overriding focus is on meaning or communication (Long, 1991).

Explicit negative feedback:

That type of feedback in which teachers provide explicit explanations for their students that their utterances are erroneous and need to be corrected.

Implicit negative feedback:

A type of feedback that is more often in interactional or communicative language situations in which the students' attention is indirectly drawn to the erroneous linguistic forms they produce.

Interlanguage:

By interlanguage in this paper I mean the learner's language. In other words, it is the specific language system created by the learner when he/she is learning a second or foreign language. It has some features from the native language and other features from the target language, but it also has features that are not found whether in the learner's L1 or L2 (Gass & Selinker, 2001).

Clarification requests:

It is a type of request in which a speaker asks another in an interactional situation (usually implicitly) to clarify something that he/she does not understand as in the following example:

Speaker 1: I am so much interested in trade.

Speaker 2: Trade? I do not know what it means. (Clarification request)

The usual recast:

A mere reformulation of the student incorrect utterance through which the correct linguistic form is provided without any additional cues to draw the learner's attention to that erroneous linguistic form he/she produced.

The emphatic recast:

A reformulation of the student utterance in which the correct linguistic form is provided accompanied by any additional cues (e.g., stress on the error) to draw the learner's attention to that erroneous linguistic form he/she produced

References

Allen, P., Swain, M., Harley, B. & Cummins, J. (1990). Aspects of classroom treatment: toward a more comprehensive view of second language education. In Harley, B., Allen, P., Cummins, J. and Swain, M. (Eds.). *The Development of Second Language Proficiency*, (pp. 57-81). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Ayoun, D. (2001). The role of the negative and positive feedback in the second language Acquisition of the passé compose and imparfait. *Modern Language Journal*, *85*, 226-243.

Carrol, S., & Swain, M. (1993). Explicit and implicit negative feedback; an empirical study of the learning of linguistic generalizations. *Studies in Second Language Acquisition*, *15*, 357-386.

Doughty, C. (1991). Second language instruction does make a difference: Evidence from an empirical study of SL relativisation. *Studies in Second Language Acquisition*, *13*, 431-469.

Doughty, C., & Varela, E. (1998). Communicative focus on form. In C. Doughty & J. William (Eds.) *Focus on form in classroom second language acquisition* (pp. 114-138). New York:

Cambridge University Press.

Doughty, C., & Williams, J. (1998). Pedagogical choices in focus on form. In C. Doughty & J.

Williams (Eds.). *Focus on form in classroom second language acquisition* (pp. 197-261).

Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Gass, S. & Selinker, L. (2001). *Second language acquisition: An introductory course*. Second

Edition. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.

Gass, S., Svetics, I., & Lemelin, S. (2003). Differential effects of attention. *Language Learning*,

53, 497-545.

Harley, B. (1998). The role of focus-on-form tasks in promoting child L2 acquisition. In C.

Doughty & J. Williams (Eds.). *Focus on form in classroom second language acquisition* (pp.

156-174). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Hatch, E. (1978). Discourse and second language acquisition. In E. Hatch (Ed.), *Second language

acquisition*: *A booking of readings* (pp. 401- 435). Rowley, MA: Newbury House.

Krashen, S. (1981). *Second language acquisition and second language learning*. Oxford:

Pergamon Press.

Lightbown, P. & Spada, N. (1990). Focus-on-form and corrective feedback in communicative

Language teaching: Effects on second language learning. *Studies in Second Language

Acquisition*, *12*, 529-448.

Long, M. H. (1991). Focus on form: a design feature in language teaching methodology. In

de Bot K., D. Coste, R. Ginsberg, and C. Kramsch (Eds.). *Foreign Language Research in

Cross- cultural Perspectives*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.

Long, M., Inagaki, S., & Ortega, L. (1998). The role of implicit negative feedback in SLA:

Models and recasts in Japanese and Spanish. *Modern Language Journal, 82*, 357-371.

Long, M., & Robinson, P. (1998). Focus on form: Theory, research, and practice. In C.Doughty

and J. Williams (Eds.), *Focus on form in classroom SLA*, (pp. 15- 41). New York: Cambridge

   University Press.

Mackey, A., Gass, S., & McDonough, K. (2000). How do learners perceive implicit negative

   feedback? *Studies in Second Language Acquisition*, *22*, 471- 497.

Mackey, A., & Philp, J. (1998). Conversational interaction and second language development:

   Recasts, responses and red herrings? *Modern Language Journal*, *82*, 338-356.

Murphy, L. (2005). Attending to form and meaning: The experience of distance adult learners of

   French, German, and Spanish. *Language Teaching Research*, *9*, 295-317.

Oliver, R., & Mackey, A. (2003). Interactional context and feedback in child ESL classrooms.

   Modern Language journal, *87*, 519-533.

Pica, T. (2002). Subject matter content: how does it assist the interactional and linguistic needs of

   classroom language learners. *The Modern Language Journal*, *86*, 1-19.

Prabhu, N. (1987). *Second language pedagogy*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Sanz, C., & Morgan-Short, K. (2004). Positive evidence versus explicit rule presentation and

   explicit negative feedback: A computer-assisted study. *Language Learning*, *54*, 35-78.

Schachter, J. (1991). Corrective feedback in historical perspective. *Second Language Research*,

   7, 89-102.

Shah, M. A. (2003). Language learning content-based English as a second language (ESL)

   Malaysian classrooms. *Journal of Language and Learning*, *1*, 73-97. Retrieved on Monday

   Feb.26, 2007 from http://www.shakespeare.uk.net/journal/jllearn/1_2/shah.html

Form-Focused Feedback in Communicative Language Teaching

Written by: Hamdy Ali

Presented to: **Dr. Fred Perry**

Paper 2

The Research methodology Paper

I. My study investigates the existence of negative feedback in communicative language teaching situations such as role-plays and group work in which the focus is on meaning or communication rather than on linguistic forms. It attempts to see how far negative feedback that focuses on form is available to the students while performing a certain communicative language learning activity in an ESP classroom.

II. *The study research question and hypothesis*

My study contains one main research question, two sub-questions related to it, and a hypothesis that attempts to answer it.

Research Question

a. To what extent is negative feedback that focuses on the learner's erroneous linguistic forms available to students in communicative classroom settings?

Sub-questions of the above research question are:

1- What type of feedback do teachers provide for their students in communicative classroom settings? (Is it meaning-focused or form-focused?)

2- What are types of errors that receive form-focused feedback in communicative classroom settings? Are they lexical errors, syntactic errors, or phonological errors?

As an answer to the research question (and in the light of previous research), the following *hypothesis* is made:

Communicative classroom settings will provide less access to negative feedback that focuses on erroneous linguistic forms produced by the students.

III. *A Plan for answering the research questions and testing the research hypotheses:*

A.   Sample

The source of data in my study is two ESP teachers and their classes. Each class consists of 25 students of an intermediate language proficiency level. The students are 3rd year students who study English as a first foreign language (FFL) at the Faculty of Tourism and Hotels, Alexandria University. I have particularly chosen students from third year due to the nature of the English language course taught for students at the faculty. To illustrate; the goal of the ***English for Tourism*** course taught at the faculty of tourism and hotels is to help the students to use English appropriately, fluently and communicatively in tourism-oriented contexts. However, because most of the students admitted to the faculty are of intermediate or lower-intermediate language proficiency level, and consequently are unable to participate in communicative learning activities requiring free use of the language for communicative purposes, the course is divided into two parts. The first part is enabling (or preparatory) in nature and is taught during the first two years (first and second years) focusing more on the grammar, vocabulary and writing aspects of the English language with the aim of increasing the students' language proficiency levels in English. The second part of the course is taught during the third and fourth years, and is marked by a shift in focus to oral communicational skills in which meaning and communication receives the greatest attention. In this part of the course there is extensive use of communicative language learning activities such as role-plays, teacher-led classroom discussions, and group work. So these two classes in my sample are particularly chosen as they are exemplary of communicative ESP classroom contexts in which the focus is on meaning and communication rather than on the linguistic form. The other reason that made me particularly choose these two classes is the fact

that they are more manageable in terms of student numbers (25 students in each class). Other classes in the same year or even in the fourth year have larger numbers of students (about 50 or even 60), which will not allow me to observe and record the progression of communicative learning activities especially if these are in the form of pair-or group-work.

The two teachers in the sample are particularly chosen for a number of reasons. First, they are well known for their punctuality and devotion to the teaching profession. Second, they are highly professional in the sense that they both hold the degree of MA in Applied linguistics from the Institute of Applied Linguistics, Faculty of Arts, Alexandria University. They are so keen on professional development as they regularly attend conferences and workshops related to foreign language teaching and learning. As a result, it is highly expected that they are both aware of current pedagogical practices and they are fully aware of what they are doing in their classes in terms of error correction, developing fluency or increasing accuracy of their students. These issues are considered major to my research.

In brief, the sampling method in my study is a sort of purposeful sampling, and the rationale behind this is the fact that this sample is exemplary of the situation in which I can investigate my first research question (to what extent is negative feedback that focuses on the learner's erroneous linguistic forms available to students in communicative classroom settings?).

B. *Design*

For the first research question, my study design is **more applied than basic**. To illustrate, my study design is **applied** because the study itself is investigating a practical classroom situation, which is the correction of erroneous linguistic forms produced by the students within the performance of communicative language learning activities in the classroom. Thus, the study is practical in nature and very useful for ESL/EFL teachers as it can provide them with useful

practical application and pedagogical implications concerning feedback on linguistic errors in communicative classroom settings.

My research design is also **more qualitative than quantitative** for a number of reasons. First, the study is conducted in a real situation: two real ESP teachers and their classes in a real communicative learning situation (teacher-led discussions or group-work). Second, the study depends, to a great extent, on thick verbal description of the participants and data, which is a main characteristic of qualitative research. Third, because the study provides thick verbal description of data and the whole research situation, I am not interested in generalizing the study findings to a larger population (which is usually the case in quantitative research), but rather in transferring those findings to similar ESP teaching/learning situations. Finally, my study is a longitudinal one where I am personally engaged in observing and recording feedback in different communicative classroom settings conducted in these two ESP classes for a whole semester (nearly 12 weeks).

Finally, I think my study design should be placed in the middle on the *exploratory-confirmatory* research design continuum. The reason behind this is that from on side, there is a research question that is being investigated (explored) in the study (To what extent is negative feedback that focuses on the learner's erroneous linguistic forms available to students in communicative classroom settings?), so the research design is exploratory in nature. On the other side, the study also has a research hypothesis that it is trying to support (confirm) (Communicative classroom settings will provide less access to negative feedback that focuses on erroneous linguistic forms produced by the students), so the study is also confirmatory in nature.

C. *Data collection procedures*

1. Because I will be looking at the provision of negative feedback by two ESP teachers to the students in their classes during interactional or communicative language learning activities, I will use observational methods for collecting my data. Since I will be looking at an outward verbal behavior (teachers' correct responses to the students' incorrect utterances), the observational method I will be using to collect my data is non-participant observation because there is no need for me to be a full-participant or even a partial-participant in the learning activities being observed. To prevent any effect of my presence on the students' behavior during these learning activities, I will keep observing different learning activities (whether communicative or non-communicative) in these two classes for a reasonable amount of time before I actually start to conduct my research study. As a matter of fact, I intend to spend most of the observation part in the 511 teaching practicum course in these two classes. Thus, the students will be accustomed to my observation of their class, and my presence during interactive classroom activities will be routinized. What can make this situation familiar to the students is actually two things. First, I have previously taught most of these students whether in the first or second years. Second, I am going to illustrate to the students, right from the beginning, that these collaborative observations (me observing other teachers and other teachers observing me) only aim at improving the quality of the English language education they receive at the college.

2. My plan for collecting data from the sample is to audiotape these learning sessions in the two ESP classes in my study. However, the important thing that should be mentioned here is that there will be no overlap between the two classes; that is, they are taught in different times, which would then give me the opportunity to be the one doing all the observations and the recordings in the learning sessions in both classes.

D. Data *analysis procedure*

1. The type of data I will get from my sample will be in the form of the teachers' correct verbal responses to their students' incorrect utterances during the communicative learning activity that is being observed. I think this type of data will answer my research question because my question aims to discover the amount of verbal negative feedback the teachers provide their students with when a certain interactive or communicative learning activity is in progress. It is important to note here that some procedures will be taken in order to ensure the quality of data obtained from the sample. Firstly, as indicated earlier, I will spend a reasonable amount of time with the students in their classes before I conduct my study so as to eliminate any undesirable possible effects of my presence on the student or teacher performance during the communicative activity being observed. One of these possible effects is that the students might be intimidated by my presence in their class, and thus the degree of their oral participation in the activity is seriously influenced, which will ,in turn, affect the amount of feedback they receive during that particular learning activity. Secondly, to make sure that the type of feedback obtained from the data is exemplary of feedback provided in communicative teaching in an ESP situation, the study will investigate feedback types provided in as many communicative learning activities as possible. That is to say, I will observe and record the teachers' feedback in role-plays, open classroom discussions, teacher-led discussions, language games, pair-work, group-work, etc. If I get data only from one type of the previously mentioned learning activities, then the type of feedback obtained can be pertinent to that particular learning activity and not to communicative language teaching in an ESP situation in general. Finally, it should be clarified that no evaluative judgments will be made during the observations; I will only be there to record or audiotape the learning sessions. So, subjectivity will be controlled, to a great extent, during the data gathering procedure. The audiotaped learning sessions will then be transcribed and investigated for

25

instances of feedback teachers provided to their students while the communicative learning activity was in progress.

2.   My plan for analyzing the data will be as follows:

a. The tape-recorded learning activities will be transcribed.

b. All the responses provided by the two teachers as corrections of errors made by the students in the various learning sessions will be isolated from the rest of the data.

c. The teachers' responses will then be divided into two main categories: category A and category B. Category A includes responses that attempt to correct students' errors in linguistic forms (such as mispronunciation of a certain word, tense use, word usage, the use of a certain preposition after a particular adjective, etc.), while category (B) includes responses that attempt to correct or clarify the meaning or the content the student is trying to convey. A specific definition will be provided for each category with some explanatory examples.

d. The researcher will then hire some professional raters and provide them with some training to make sure they understand what the categories really mean.

e. The raters will then start coding the data into A or B.

f. To check on the coding procedure, a random sample of the coded data will be chosen and checked for correction.

g. The inter-rater reliability coefficient will be computed.

h. The amount of the negative feedback focused on erroneous linguistic forms will be computed by dividing the number of occurrences of category A feedback by the total number of feedback provided.

i. The amount of negative feedback focused on meaning or content will be computed by dividing the number of occurrences of category B feedback by the total number of feedback provided.

As a result, it will be possible to see to what extent students have access to negative feedback that focuses on erroneous linguistic forms they produce in ESP communicative learning contexts, which will then answer the research question and confirm or refute the research hypothesis.

IV.   *Value of the possible research findings*

A.   **Outline of the possible research findings:**

There are a number of possible findings I might find in this research study:

1- The first possible finding is that the form-focused feedback the students get in ESP communicative classroom settings is quite limited compared to the feedback that focuses on meaning, content or communication in those particular pedagogical settings. This finding will support the research hypothesis that students are not provided with sufficient negative feedback focusing on erroneous linguistic forms produced in communicative language learning situations.

2- The other possible finding is that form-focused feedback in ESP communicative classroom settings is sufficient in comparison with the content-or meaning-focused feedback the students get in such learning contexts, which will then refute the research hypothesis stated earlier.

3- The final possible finding is that form-focused feedback in communicative learning contexts is largely existent in comparison with meaning-focused feedback, which will also refute the research hypothesis.

B**. Symmetricality of the possible findings**

Each of the possible research findings stated above is important to the research question and has useful practical implications, and this could be illustrated as follows:

1- Although the first finding is in line with most of the previous research which shows there is a lack of form-focused feedback provision in communicative classroom settings, it is still important in the sense that it shows that even in particular ESP contexts (English for Tourism in

this case) where oral communication is highly valuable for the students whose future careers, such as tour guides or hotel receptionists, are largely dependent on being orally proficient in the target language, oral linguistic errors still go uncorrected, which can further explain the existence of plenty of linguistic errors in the speech of so many second or foreign language learners. The assumption here is that most of these speech errors may be due to the fact that those learners received no (or insufficient) feedback on their linguistic errors on their attempts to use the target language in the second/foreign language classroom. This first possible finding can be particularly useful for teachers and educators who are interested in improving the degree of oral proficiency, and may tempt them to adopt form-focused feedback more in their communicative learning contexts and see how far it can be of use.

2. The second possible finding that form-focused negative feedback is sufficient in particular ESP communicative contexts is also important; that is, it contradicts the usual view about feedback techniques used in communicative language teaching which stresses the assumption that meaning, not form, is what is in focus in those learning contexts. Further, this finding raises important practical questions for EFL/ESL or ESP classroom teachers. Among these questions are the following:

- If form-focused negative feedback is sufficiently existent in those classes, is it useful?

- What is the effect of this type of feedback on the affective factors (e.g., motivation and anxiety) in the classroom?

- If the existence of this type of feedback really affects some affective factors, how strong is this effect? (i.e., does it prevent the students from participating in the learning activity?)

- Do errors in linguistic forms in communicative contexts persist even though they receive sufficient feedback that specifically targets them?

3. The third finding that there is extensive use of negative form-focused feedback in ESP communicative classroom settings has its share of importance as well. It places a big question mark on what we can call 'communicative' in our teaching. It makes us wonder if the students in particular communicative situations really receive sufficient 'communication' in the target language with all this extensive feedback they receive on their erroneous linguistic forms. Other important practical questions can be raised in the light of this final finding such as the following:

- Why does negative form-focused feedback extensively exist in those communicative activities in which meaning or communication should be in focus?

- Does it help the students, for example, to learn new linguistic forms within these communicative learning contexts?

- How far does the extensive existence of this form of feedback affect the students' opportunity of communicating in the target language in these learning activities?

Answers to the above questions may provide a lot of practical implications and may also create an enlightened pedagogical practice concerning feedback provision in the second/foreign language classroom.

C. **Scope of the possible findings**

The first possible finding that there is no sufficient negative feedback (NF) focusing on erroneous linguistic forms in communicative classroom settings is in line with most of the previous research, and consequently it is not that novel. However, the second finding that there is sufficient provision of form-focused negative feedback in communicative classroom settings has a high degree of novelty as it is in contradiction with previous research that has shown that form-focused negative feedback (FFNF) in communicative language teaching (CLT) is not at all sufficient. The third finding that there is an extensive use of form-focused negative feedback in

communicative language learning contexts has even a higher degree of novelty in the sense that it shows the opposite of what has been demonstrated by previous research concerning FFNF in CLT. It clearly indicates that FFNF is not only sufficient in CLT, but it also takes the matter further by showing that there is an extensive use of FFNF in CLL contexts. The novelty of the second and third findings add a new dimension to the investigation of NF in CLT, and can actually be a rich source that is full of practically important questions, like the ones listed earlier, that can be investigated by future research.

V. *Feasibility of study*

A. **Availability and accessibility of past research:**

There are a good number of recent research studies dealing with the idea of focus-on-form in communicative language teaching. These studies came as a call for integrating form into meaning- based teaching so as to make up for the lack of attention to form in this type of teaching. Most of these studies are available through the published as well as the online journals and periodicals existent in the AUC library or through the AUC library website.

B. **Availability of materials and instruments I plan to use**

Since I will be investigating a practical teaching situation in the classroom to see how far the students in a communicative ESP learning situation are provided with negative feedback that draws their attention to erroneous linguistic forms that occur while performing a certain communicative activity, I will use an observational method of collecting data. As a result, I will only need some recording devices (a cassette recorder, for example) to record the whole learning communicative session, and these devices are quite easy to get. I will also be in need of some raters who will assist me in transcribing and coding the verbal data. As for the availability of

these raters, a couple of my friends at the Arab Academy who got their MA in TEFL recommended some names of trained raters, and I think it will not be a problem to get them to do this job for me.

C. **Permission to use subjects/facilities**

Because my sample is from the same place I work in, this will get things a lot more easier for me. The two teachers in my sample are my colleagues for more than 10 years now, and they have already agreed to let me observe their communicative classroom activities. Since, I will not be interrupting the teaching process or use the class time in any manner, the English language supervisor has already permitted me to do these class observations. As for the students in the two classes, I do not think they will object to my existence in their classes as they have been my students in the past two years. Besides, I will not be interfering in the teaching/learning situation in any manner.

D. **Technical knowledge/skills needed to do the study**

The technical knowledge or skills I will need to do the study are related to collecting and analyzing data. As for data collection, I do not think that tape recording will be a problem as I am so familiar with it and it does not actually require much knowledge. For data analysis, I will brush up my knowledge of how verbal data is analyzed through some revision of the data analysis section in the 520 textbook studied in the spring semester 2006.

E. **Risk of things going wrong and alternative plans if they do**

While doing the recording, there may be a problem with the cassette recorder or the electricity may go out. So, I will always accompany a spare tape recorder with an empty cassette

tape inside, and cassette recorder batteries as well. The other thing that I may have problems with is related to my raters; that is, I will be having a longer list of raters' names than the one I actually need. So, if some raters apologize for participating in the data analysis part of my study for some reason or another, I will be able to substitute them with other raters on the list.

F. **Time frame for the research project**

task no.	task type	from	to	task duration
1	ongoing review of the literature	15 Feb.	25 May	16 weeks
2	deciding on research questions	15 Feb.	20 Feb.	2 weeks
3	refining research questions	15 Feb.	20 Feb.	2 weeks
4	considering methodology	20 Feb	25 Feb.	1 week
5	writing a methodology paper	20 Feb.	5 Mar.	2 weeks
6	considering data collection	5 Mar.	10 Mar.	1 week
7	writing a data collection paper	5 Mar.	15 Mar.	2 weeks
8	writing a data analysis paper	15 Mar.	25 Mar.	2 weeks
9	Piloting the study	25 Mar.	15 Apr.	3 weeks
10	Writing a pilot study report	15 Apr.	25 Apr.	2 weeks
11	writing a feasibility paper	25 Apr.	25 May	4 weeks

To show the relation between different tasks and dates, please refer to the following chart:

task #	15 Feb.	20 Feb.	25 Feb	5 Mar.	10 Mar.	15 Mar.	25 Mar.	5 Apr.	10 Apr.	15 Apr.	25 Apr.	5 May	10 May	15 May	25 May

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16
1	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
2	■	■														
3	■	■														
4		■														
5		■	■													
6				■												
7				■	■											
8						■										
9							■	■	■							
10										■						
11											■	■	■	■	■	■

The highlighted boxes in the above chart indicate the time span of each task in the research

project.

Form-Focused Feedback in Communicative Language Teaching

Written by: Hamdy Ali

Presented to: **Dr. Fred Perry**

Paper # 3

The Observational Procedures Paper

Outline

1. The purpose of the study

2. The research questions/hypotheses

3. The type of data needed to answer the research question

4. Observational procedures

    i. Description of my observational procedures in precise detail

        a. Non-participant observation
        b. The raters

    ii. A rationale for using these particular procedures

    iii. Method for determining quality of data

        a. Representativeness
        b. Prolonged engagement and persistent observation
        c. Clarifying researcher bias
        d. Researcher effects
        e. Weighting the evidence

    iv. The resulting data

1. The purpose of the study

The purpose of my study is to investigate the existence of negative feedback in communicative language teaching situations such as role-plays and group work in which the focus is on meaning or communication rather than on linguistic forms. It attempts to see how far negative feedback that focuses on form is available to the students while performing a certain communicative language learning activity in an ESP classroom.

2. Research Questions/Hypotheses

My study contains one main research question, two sub-questions related to it, and a hypothesis that attempts to answer it.

Research Question

To what extent is negative feedback that focuses on the learner's erroneous linguistic forms available to students in communicative classroom settings?

Sub-questions of the above research question are:

1- What type of feedback do teachers provide for their students in communicative classroom settings? (Is it meaning-focused or form-focused?)

2- What are types of errors that receive form-focused feedback in communicative classroom settings? Are they lexical errors, syntactic errors, or phonological errors?

As an answer to the research question (and in the light of previous research), the following *hypothesis* is made:

Communicative classroom settings will provide less access to negative feedback that focuses on erroneous linguistic forms produced by the students.

3. The kind of data needed to answer the research question

The type of data I will get from my sample will be in the form of the two ESP teachers' correct verbal responses to their students' incorrect utterances during the communicative learning activity that is being observed. Since my question aims to discover the amount of verbal negative feedback the teachers provide their students with when a certain interactive or communicative learning activity is in progress, the type of data I will get from the sample will answer my research question. By analyzing the verbal data (teachers' verbal correct responses to the students' incorrect utterances), I will be able to isolate the teachers' feedback that targets the students' errors in linguistic forms, which will then enable me to see how far the students have access to negative feedback focused on form, as opposed to negative feedback focused on meaning, in ESP communicative classroom contexts. Apparently, this type of date will answer my research question.

4.   Observational Procedures

i.   Description of my observational procedures in precise detail

There are two observational procedures used in my study:

a. Non-participant observation

I will observe all the communicative learning activities taught by the two teachers in my sample for a period of 4 weeks. Examples of these activities are role plays, group work, teacher lead-discussions, and open class discussions. These activities are of a particular nature in the sense that the focus in them is usually on communication or meaning rather than on linguistic forms or structures. The observational procedure I will use will be the non-participant observation; that is, I will not interact, in any manner, with the teachers or the students while the learning session is in progress. I will only be in the classes to audiotape the learning session so as

to study the teachers' feedback on the errors produced by the students during the communicative learning activity.

b. The raters

I will use trained raters to transcribe and code the data collected through the observational procedure mentioned above. The raters will be provided with a couple of training sessions in which they learn more about the specific system they will have to follow in coding the data. The raters will be provided with a specific rubric on which they will base their coding of the data. This rubric will include specific definitions of the two different types of feedback: form focused feedback and meaning-focused feedback. Form-focused feedback will be given the code **A,** and will be defined as any verbal response that corrects, asks the students to correct, or even draws the student's attention to an erroneous linguistic form in the student's utterance (e.g., incorrect pronunciation of a word, wrong use of a preposition after a certain verb or adjective, wrong tense use, wrong word choice, wrong word order, etc). Meaning-focused feedback will be given the code **B**, and will be defined as any verbal response that corrects, ask the students to correct, negotiates, or even asks the students to clarify the meaning or the message they are trying to convey. During the data transcription process, the raters will be asked to isolate the teachers' verbal responses to the students' incorrect utterances (feedback) from the rest of the recorded data. Then, the raters, based on the definitions in the rubric, will start coding the data into A or B. Thus, it will be possible to see the extent of availability of form-focused feedback in the two ESP communicative classes under investigation, which will answer my research question. The two sub-questions of the study can be answered by further analyzing the study data. For example, the first sub-question (what types of feedback do teachers provide for their students in communicative classroom settings? (Is it meaning-focused or form-focused?) can be answered by comparing the occurrences of form-focused feedback (type A data to the occurrences of meaning-

focused feedback (type B data). For instance, if the teachers provided 100 correct verbal responses to errors produced by the students within the observed learning activities , and 80 responses out of the 100 targeted errors in meaning while only 20 targeted errors in form; this enables us to know the percentage of the provision of meaning-focused feedback in this particular ESP context to that of form-focused feedback, which provides an answer to the first sub-question in the study. Similarly, the second sub-question (what are types of errors that receive form-focused feedback in communicative classroom settings? Are they lexical errors, syntactic errors, or phonological errors?) can be answered by further coding type A data (form-focused feedback) into **A1** (form-focused feedback that targets lexical errors), **A2** (form-focused feedback that targets pronunciation errors), and **A3** (form-focused feedback that targets grammatical errors), etc. This will definitely determine types of errors that receive form-focused feedback in an ESP communicative classroom context, which will answer the second sub-question in the study.

ii. *Rationale for using these particular observational procedures with some precautions*

First, I have chosen the non-participant observation because I will be looking at an outward behavior (teachers' verbal correct responses to the students' errors), so there is no need for me to interact (whether partially or fully) with the teachers or the students to obtain the data. This observational procedure is marked by a higher degree of objectivity than partial-participant observation or full-participant observation (Perry, 2005). However, adopting this observational procedure can have a disruptive effect on the participants causing them to behave in a way they do not normally do. Thus, I will desensitize the participants to my existence in their class by attending the class sessions long enough before I begin to conduct my research study.

Second, I have chosen to use raters as an observational procedure due to the type of data needed to answer my research question. That is to say, to answer the research question, the data collected through the first observational procedure needs to be transcribed and coded. Since the amount of data I will obtain is likely to be of a huge amount (feedback in two ESP classes through different communicative activities over a period of 4 weeks), some experts are needed to assist in the transcription and further analysis of the raw data I will get from the classrooms till this data becomes in a form that allows me as a researcher to answer my research question. I will not participate in transcribing and coding data to control for the researcher's bias and subjectivity. It should be noted here that a number of precautions will be taken to ensure the proper use of this observational procedure. First, to control for subjectivity usually associated with using raters, I will use multiple raters (to make sure that they apply the same criteria). Second, I will provide my raters with some training before they start handling the study data to help them perceive what each type or category of data really means. Finally, I will provide them with a very specific rubric in which both types of feedback (form-focused vs. meaning-focused) will be defined clearly and accurately. To control for the potential weakness of fatigue associated with using raters, I will use three raters and I will make sure that the work load they have is reasonable. In fact, the two processes of collecting and analyzing data will be conducted simultaneously; that is, when I finish observing (and audiotaping) a learning session; the tape will be given to the raters to start the process of data analysis, which means I will not be having a large amount of data to be analyzed in a short period of time. Thus, the potential weakness of *fatigue* will be controlled for. The other potential weakness of *halo effect* will be controlled due to the nature of data itself; that is, the raters are either using a certain rating scale in analyzing the data or making evaluative judgments, rather they are only coding the data into two separate categories (form-focused or

meaning-focused), so it is not at all expected that coding a number of responses as A will affect the coding of other responses due the specifically definite nature of each type of data.

iii. Method for determining quality of data

a. Representativeness

To make sure that the type of feedback obtained from the data is exemplary or **representative** of feedback provided in communicative teaching in an ESP situation, the study will investigate feedback types provided in as many communicative learning activities as possible. That is to say, I will observe and record the teachers' feedback in role-plays, open classroom discussions, teacher-led discussions, language games, pair-work, group-work, etc. If I get data only from one type of the previously mentioned learning activities, then the type of feedback obtained can be pertinent to that particular learning activity and not to communicative language teaching in an ESP situation in general. Thus, it is highly expected that the type of feedback I will obtain from observing these communicative learning activities represent the typical provision of feedback existent in these contexts, and does not depend on what Perry calls the '*luck of the draw*'.

b. Prolonged engagement and persistent observation

The kind of observation I will be doing is highly persistent; that is I will observe the outward behavior (teachers' provision of feedback) in two classes over a long period of time (about 5 weeks). Further, I will be observing the behavior in different communicative learning activities (role plays, language games, teacher-led discussions, group-work, etc). My engagement in the research situation is not represented in a form of interaction with the participants, but rather in my prolonged presence in the research site and my persistent observation of the behavior under investigation.

c. Clarifying researcher bias

Based on my review of past research and my teaching experience, I am somehow inclined to support the idea that in CLT contexts, there is no enough provision of negative feedback that specifically targets the erroneous linguistic forms produced by the students within such contexts. To control for this bias or inclination, a number of precautions will be taken:

a. I will not be a full-participant or even a partial-participant in the study, but rather I will be a non-participant observer who is not interfering in the data collection procedure in any manner. To illustrate, I will only be in the research site to audiotape the learning sessions without any interpretations of data and without making any evaluative judgments of the collected data.

b. I will not participate in the data analysis stage, but rather I will use three trained raters **who will be kept blind to the purpose of the study (and to my bias as well).**

c. The rubric I will provide the raters with will be **first reviewed by 'experts'**. By so doing, I control for any bias in the rubric because any personal bias included in the rubric will be screened out. This is a very important procedure since the rubric represents the basis on which the raters will code and analyze the data.

d. Researcher effects

a. the effect of researcher on events/participants

There are two aspects of the researcher's effect on the research event and/or participants. The first aspect relates to the researcher's involvement in the study; that is, the researcher's interaction with the participants (whether partially or fully) may affect the way the participants normally behave. This potential threat is controlled for in my study because I will not interact with the participants or the research event in any manner. The second aspect of the researcher's effect on the research event and/or participants is related to the researcher's presence in the research situation, that is, the students might be intimidated by my presence in their classes, and

thus the degree of their oral participation in the activity under investigation is seriously influenced, which will, in turn, affect the amount of feedback they receive during that particular learning activity. To control for this potential threat, I will desensitize the participants to my presence in their classes. This will be done by spending a reasonable amount of time with the students in their classes before I conduct my study so as to eliminate any undesirable possible effects of my presence on the student or teacher performance during the communicative activity being observed.

b. The effect of events/participants on the researcher

As illustrated earlier, I will be a non-participant observer in the study, so there is no interaction of any sort between the researcher and the study participants. Thus, this potential weakness is controlled for through the study design itself. Further, anything that goes on in the research situation will not have an impact on me because I will not make any evaluative judgments concerning the behavior being observed; that is, my presence in the research situation will be confined to audiotaping the learning activity.

e. Weighting the evidence

The following procedures are taken to guarantee the strength of data being collected:

a. the data consists of an actual behavior (the teachers' feedback to students' errors in a CLT context) that is going on in a naturalistic setting (a real classroom communicative learning activity).

b. The behavior under investigation is observed firsthand; that is, there are no informants whose closeness to the data can be doubted. In other words, the recording device used in the study records data as it actually occurs in the learning activity.

c. As explained in 3 above, various efforts will be exerted to control for the researcher's bias in the study.

d. Reliability and validity of the observational procedures used in the study will be investigated. Concerning reliability, the inter-rater reliability coefficient will be computed. As for validity, the rubric, which is the basis for data coding and analysis, will be reviewed and modified by exerts in the field in order to make sure that proper unbiased definitions of form-focused and meaning-focused feedback are provided.

iv. The resulting data

As indicated earlier, the study data will be coded into either A (form-focused feedback) or B (meaning-focused feedback). The resulting data will be in the form of frequencies or occurrences of each type of the coded data (e.g., how many times the code A occurred and how many times the code B occurred). Thus, the amount of the negative feedback focused on erroneous linguistic forms will be computed by dividing the number of occurrences of the code A by the total number of feedback provided; whereas the amount of negative feedback focused on meaning or content will be computed by dividing the number of occurrences of the code B by the total number of feedback provided.

As a result, it will be possible to see to what extent students have access to negative feedback that focuses on erroneous linguistic forms they produce in ESP communicative learning contexts, which will then answer the research question and confirm or refute the research hypothesis.

References

Perry, F. L. (2005). *Research in applied linguistics: becoming a discerning consumer*. New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates Publishers.

Form-Focused Feedback in Communicative Language Teaching

Written by: Hamdy Ali

Presented to: **Dr. Fred Perry**

Paper # 4

The Pilot Study Paper

I. Introduction

   The purpose of my study is to investigate the existence of negative feedback in communicative language teaching situations such as role-plays and group work in which the focus is on meaning or communication rather than on linguistic forms. It attempts to see how far negative feedback that focuses on form is available to the students while performing a certain communicative language learning activity in an ESP classroom. The study has one research question, two sub-questions related to it, and a hypothesis that attempts to answer it.

The research question is:

To what extent is negative feedback that focuses on the learner's erroneous linguistic forms available to students in communicative classroom settings?

The two sub-questions are:

1. What type of feedback do teachers provide for their students in communicative classroom settings? (Is it meaning-focused or form-focused?)

2- What are types of errors that receive form-focused feedback in communicative classroom settings? Are they lexical errors, syntactic errors, or phonological errors?

 The hypothesis is:

Communicative classroom settings will provide less access to negative feedback that focuses on erroneous linguistic forms produced by the students.

II. Sample:

   The sample I used for my pilot study consisted of one ESP teacher and his class. The class consisted of 25 students of an intermediate language proficiency level. The age range of the students in the class was from 17-21. The students were 3rd year students who study English as a first foreign language (FFL) at the Faculty of Tourism and Hotels, Alexandria University. They

have studied English for a period not less than 10 years. I have particularly chosen students from third year due to the nature of the English language course taught for students at the faculty. To illustrate; the goal of the ***English for Tourism*** course taught at the faculty of tourism and hotels is to help the students to use English appropriately, fluently and communicatively in tourism-oriented contexts. However, because most of the students admitted to the faculty are of intermediate or lower-intermediate language proficiency levels, and consequently are unable to participate in communicative learning activities requiring free use of the language for communicative purposes, the course is divided into two parts. The first part is enabling (or preparatory) in nature and is taught during the first two years (first and second years) focusing more on the grammar, vocabulary and writing aspects of the English language with the aim of increasing the students' language proficiency levels in English. The second part of the course is taught during the third and fourth years, and is marked by a shift in focus to oral communicational skills in which meaning and communication receive the greatest attention. In this part of the course there is extensive use of communicative language learning activities such as role-plays, teacher-led classroom discussions, and group work. So the class in my sample was particularly chosen as it is exemplary of communicative ESP classroom contexts in which the focus is on meaning and communication rather than on the linguistic form. The other reason that made me particularly choose this class is the fact that it was more manageable in terms of student numbers (25 students in the class). Other classes in the same year or even in the fourth year have larger numbers of students (about 50 or even 60), which will not allow me to properly observe and record the progression of communicative learning activities especially if these are in the form of pair-or group-work.

The teacher in the sample was particularly chosen for a number of reasons. First, he is well known for his punctuality and devotion to the teaching profession. Second, he is highly

professional in the sense that he holds the degree of MA in Applied linguistics from the Institute of Applied Linguistics, Faculty of Arts, Alexandria University. He is also keen on professional development as he regularly attends conferences and workshops related to foreign language teaching and learning. As a result, it is highly expected that he is aware of current pedagogical practices and what he is doing in his class in terms of error correction, developing fluency or increasing accuracy of his students. These issues are considered major to my research.

III. **Description of observational techniques**

There were two observational procedures used in my pilot study:

1. Non-participant observation:

I used the non-participant observational method by audiotaping a communicative classroom session I have attended without any sort of interaction with the study participants. The learning session was a form of individual oral presentations on topics predetermined by the teacher. The topics were tourism-oriented covering issues such as the relationship between tourism and economy, factors of tourist attractions in Egypt, tourism development in Sinai, etc. During the class session, individual students orally presented their topics, and the teacher interacted with what the students were saying providing feedback and asking questions when necessary.

2. The raters:

The audiotaped data was then transcribed and coded by using a rater. Due to time constraints and limited amount of data obtained from the pilot study, I was the one to carry out this task. However, in the original study it is planned that at least two professional, well-trained raters will be doing this job. It should be clarified here that to ensure objectivity in the process of data transcription and coding, the data was peer-reviewed by a colleague who was kept totally blind to the purpose of my pilot study. During the process of data coding, students errors (whether in form

or meaning) were calculated, and based on the rubric (reviewed and modified by three experts in the field), the data was coded A when the teacher's feedback targeted students' errors in form, or B when it targeted students' errors in meaning.

IV. Procedures

As illustrated above, to collect data for my pilot study, I attended one communicative classroom learning session. The whole learning session was audiotaped using a cassette recorder. During the class session, the teacher spent the first 10 minutes, and the last 8 minutes checking things with the students in the textbook and giving them some directions on some future assignment, so these parts of the session were excluded from the data as they were off-target. Time spent on the learning activity itself was about 23 minutes with a couple of interruptions in between (e.g., an employee came in and gave the teacher a form to sign). In the learning activity being audiotaped, the students orally presented topics related to the field of tourism, and the teacher commented on what the students said giving instant feedback, asking questions or redirecting the whole discussion by asking the student to elaborate on some particular idea. So we can say the learning activity was a form of teacher-lead discussion. Five students gave oral presentations during the learning activity (3 boys and two girls). There was no time limit for the student's oral presentation; that is, it was the student who ended the presentation when he/she felt that they covered all the ideas related to the topic being presented. As a result, the amount of time spent in each presentation varied; some students spoke for 5 minutes while others only spoke for about 2 or 3 minutes. This is expected due to the fact that the class demonstrated some sort of variety in the students' proficiency levels. When some students were stuck at some point in the presentation, the teacher was there to provide support by asking a question or by making a comment that helped the students to go on with his/her oral presentation.

The audiotaped data was then transcribed. Information in the data pool that is not related to student errors or the teacher's feedback on those errors was excluded. After transcribing the data, the total number of errors produced by the students while performing in the teacher-led discussion activity was calculated. The teacher's feedback to the students' errors was coded based on the target of this feedback; code A meant feedback targeting errors in linguistic forms; whereas code B meant feedback targeting errors in meaning. Because I am a non-native speaker of English (and I myself make errors), deciding on what is erroneous and what is not was not always an easy job. To illustrate, some types of student errors were clear violations of the rules of English (e.g., *Hurghada has **a** great landscape**s** and mountain**s***). However, for some other errors (like the use of the definite article *the*, for example), I had to consult some grammar reference books.

V. Results of Data Analysis

The observed behavior in my study was the teacher's verbal feedback to the students' errors as they incidentally arose within the context of a teacher-lead discussion communicative classroom learning activity. As previously illustrated in the observational procedures paper, so many procedures will be taken to ensure the quality of data being obtained when the original study is implemented. However, in this pilot study, the number of those procedures was minimized due to time and practicality constraints. In the pilot study, the precautions taken to ensure the quality of the obtained data were as follows:

1. ***Clarifying researcher bias***

Based on my review of previous research and my teaching experience, I am somehow inclined to support the idea that in CLT contexts, there is no enough provision of negative feedback that

specifically targets the erroneous linguistic forms produced by the students within such contexts. To control for this bias or inclination, the following procedures were taken:

 a. I was not a full-participant or even a partial-participant in the pilot study, but rather I was a non-participant observer who is not interfering in the data collection procedure in any manner. To illustrate, my existence in the research site was only for audiotaping the learning session without any interpretations of data and without making any evaluative judgments on the collected data.

b. My participation in the data analysis stage was controlled by having a professional colleague **(who was kept blind to the purpose of the study 'and thus to my bias as well')** to review my coding of the collected data.

c. The rubric that represented the basis for the whole process of data coding and analysis **was first reviewed by three experts in the field**. By so doing, I controlled for any bias in the rubric because any personal bias included in the rubric was screened out.

b. Researcher effects

* The effect of researcher on events/participants

 There are two aspects of the researcher's effect on the research event and/or participants. The first aspect relates to the researcher's involvement in the study; that is, the researcher's interaction with the participants (whether partially or fully) may affect the way the participants normally behave. This potential threat was controlled for in my pilot study due to the fact that I did not interact with the participants or the research event in any manner. The second aspect of the researcher's effect on the research event and/or participants is related to the researcher's presence in the research situation, that is, the students might be intimidated by my presence in their class, and thus the degree of their oral participation in the activity under investigation is seriously influenced, which will, in turn, affect the amount of feedback they receive during that

particular learning activity. To control for this potential threat, I did desensitize the participants to my presence in their classes by spending a reasonable amount of time with the students in their class before I conducted my pilot study so as to eliminate any undesirable possible effects of my presence on the student or teacher performance during the communicative activity being observed.

* The effect of events/participants on the researcher

As illustrated earlier, I was a non-participant observer in the pilot study, so there was no interaction of any sort between the researcher and the study participants. Thus, this potential weakness was controlled for through the study design itself. Further, anything that went on in the research situation did not have an impact on me because I did not make any evaluative judgments concerning the behavior being observed.

c. Weighting the evidence

The following procedures were taken to guarantee the strength of data being collected:

1. The data consisted of an actual behavior (the teachers' feedback to students' errors in a CLT context) that was going on in a naturalistic setting (a real classroom communicative learning activity).

2. The behavior under investigation was observed firsthand; that is, there were no informants whose closeness to the data can be doubted. In other words, the recording device used in the study recorded data as it actually occurred in the learning activity.

3. As explained earlier, various efforts were exerted to control for the researcher's bias in the pilot study.

4. Validity of the rubric on which data analysis is based was ensured by having it reviewed and modified by exerts in the field in order to make sure that proper unbiased definitions of form-focused and meaning-focused feedback were provided.

After the data coding procedure, I started to analyze the data. The first thing I had to do was to identify the errors (whether in form or meaning) produced by the students while performing in the learning activity. Then, there were two types of patterns I started to look for in the data. The first type was the teacher's feedback on form (FF), and the second type was the teacher's feedback on meaning (FM). The following table shows the total number of the students' errors (NE), the teacher's feedback on students' errors in form (FF), and the teacher's feedback on students' errors in meaning (FM).

NE	FF	FM
28	3	10

Table1. Total number of errors (NE), feedback on form (FF), and feedback on meaning (FM).

In the following section, I will provide excerpts from my data that support each of the two patterns identified.

Excerpt One: (errors are written in **bold and italic,** *and teacher feedback in italic only*)

S1: the **mean** idea in my topic is **Egyptian weather** (without the)
T: *mean or main; mean has a bad meaning. So, you want to say main?*
S1: yes, yes, main idea.

In the above excerpt, the student made two errors. The first error was a pronunciation error in which the student pronounced *main* as *mean*. The second error was a grammatical error where the student did not use *the* before a specific type of weather 'Egyptian weather'. The teacher only provided feedback on the first error 'the pronunciation error'; whereas the second error 'the deletion of the definite article' was totally ignored. In the above excerpt, the teacher understood the general message the student wanted to convey. However, the teacher targeted a single erroneous linguistic form within the conveyed message. So, this type of feedback is identified as

53

form-focused feedback rather than meaning-focused feedback. The rationale for the identification of the above-mentioned error as form-focused rather than meaning-focused feedback is based on the simple fact that when meaning is not comprehended; it becomes hard for the interlocutor to attribute the incomprehensibility of the message to a specific linguistic form, and in this case he/she asks the speaker for clarification of the whole intended message (e.g., *what do you mean?, I cannot understand you, I do not get your point, etc.*) rather than for single linguistic elements in this message. On the other hand, the interlocutor can never decide that there is something problematic with a certain linguistic form unless the whole intended message has been already comprehended. For example, in the error under investigation, how can the teacher know that the student wanted to say *main* rather than *mean* if he did not comprehend the student's intended message?

The excerpt below provides more illustration on the form-focused feedback pattern:

Excerpt Two: (errors are written in ***bold and italic,*** *and teacher feedback in italic only*)

S2: we ***should be more welcome*** for the ***tourists*** (pronounced wrongly) in our country.
T: you think why?
S2: to encourage the tourist ***visiting*** our country.
T: Yes.
S2: and we ***should be provide*** different ***services*** (pronounced wrongly) for ***tourists*** (pronounced wrongly).
T: *services not as you said it*. Ok. *Services* (correctly pronounced)
S2: OK. Services, yes!

   Out of all the errors in the above excerpt, the teacher provided feedback on the wrong pronunciation of the word *services*, and got the student to correct it. The same argument sated in excerpt one above holds here: how does the teacher know that the student meant to say the word *services* (though it is wrongly pronounced) unless he already understood his intended message? (However, it can be argued here that the teacher's ability to locate the linguistic error was attributed to his familiarity with student errors rather than to his comprehensibility of the

intended meaning, but only replacing the teacher with a native speaker who is not familiar with

student errors will decide that). So, as clear in the above excerpt, the teacher was targeting a

specific linguistic form rather than the whole intended meaning of the utterance. Thus, this type

of feedback is regarded as form-focused feedback rather than meaning-focused feedback.

The following two excerpts are related to the second identified pattern in the data (MF):

Excerpt Three: (errors are written in ***bold and italic,*** *and teacher feedback in italic only*)

S1: the ***important*** is Egypt is working for two seasons.
T: *What two seasons?*
S1: the winter and the summer.
T: *what do you want to say? I don't understand you?*
S1: I want to say that tourists come to Egypt in the winter and summer because weather is good,
 so it's working for two season.
T: yeah, *you want to say that the good Egyptian weather attracts tourists in both seasons*?
S: yes!
T: Ok.

In the above excerpt, the teacher did not understand the intended meaning of the student

utterance, and that is why he asked for clarification of a part of its content 'what two seasons?'

hoping to comprehend the message. When this failed, the teacher inquired about the whole

message '*what do you want to say*, *I don't understand you*'. This type of feedback is identified as

meaning-focused rather than form-focused as it, in contrast to the first pattern, targeted the whole

indented message rather than a single linguistic element in it.

The following excerpt provides more illustration on the meaning-focused feedback pattern:

Excerpt Four: (errors are written in ***bold and italic,*** *and teacher feedback in italic only*)

S1: the ***another*** idea is the Egyptian ***friendly*** and hospitality.
T: All right, go ahead.
S1: ***tourist*** will know Egypt hospitality from the first man to the last man.
T: *What do you mean from the first man to the last man?*
S1: I mean the tourist will know the hospitality from the first man till the last man.
T: *I really don't get your point*, (to the rest of the class): Do you understand, Amr?
Class: No!
S1: I want to say the tourist will know hospitality from the first step in the country.

T: Uh, *You want to say that the tourist will feel hospitality right from the beginning of his visit in Egypt?*
S1: yes, from **beginning the visit** in Egypt.

In the above excerpt, the teacher did not comprehend the intended meaning of the student utterance *tourist will know Egypt hospitality from the first man to the last man*, as a result he targeted a part of the message content *first man to the last man* and asked for clarification of it hoping that this will lead to comprehension of the meaning of the student utterance: *What do you mean from the first man to the last man?*. However, when the student reply added nothing to the previously-stated message, the teacher targeted the whole meaning of the student utterance: *I really don't get your point.* When the student's subsequent utterance was a bit clearer, the teacher provided feedback on meaning through **a comprehension check**: *You want to say that the tourist will feel hospitality right from the beginning of his visit in Egypt?* So, it is clear that it is the whole meaning of the utterance, rather than a single linguistic item, that is in focus in this pattern of feedback, and thus it is identified as meaning-focused feedback rather than form-focused feedback. Due to time and practicality constraints, only one tactic was used by the researcher to promote the credibility of the two patterns identified in the data:

Peer review

As previously illustrated, my coding of the data was peer-reviewed by a graduate TEFL colleague who was asked to check if the coded data represent the correct categories in the rubric. The one instance about which I and my colleague had disputed 'whether it is form or meaning' was excluded from the data.

Before starting to talk about data analysis and results, I would like to point out an important observation. This observation is directly related to feedback provision in CLT contexts. To illustrate, although the study question and hypothesis propose that there is provision of feedback

in CLT situations, but this feedback is more meaning-focused than form-focused, in the pilot study there were two instances where the students received no feedback at all due to their high proficiency levels and very high levels of fluency and accuracy. Thus no feedback patterns of whatsoever were provided. This urged me to think that it is not only the CLT situation that determines the provision of feedback, but it is also the proficiency level of the students. So, if feedback is related to error, and error is related to proficiency, thus if my study is applied to a communicative class with a higher proficiency level, it is highly expected that none of the feedback patterns identified here will be existent.

To validate my conclusions about the two identified patterns mentioned above (FF & FM), a number of tactics were used to ensure credibility of my explanations and conclusions of the patterns in the pilot study data. Those tactics included:

1. Rival explanations

As mentioned in Perry (2005), a good way to added plausibility to the conclusions a researcher makes about patterns found in his verbal data is to find another plausible 'rival' explanation for the identified patterns and then demonstrate how his own explanation is good in itself as an explanation, and at the same time more credible than the rival one. A plausible rival explanation for the patterns found in my pilot study data is that there are not two types of feedback provided by the teacher in the communicative learning situation under investigation. What really is there is **only one** type of feedback: meaning-focused feedback. The plausibility of this explanation is based on the claim that among all the other errors made by the students within the learning activity, the teacher only targeted 3 specific linguistic errors to provide feedback on (*weather* instead of *atmosphere*, *services* (correctly pronounced) rather than *services* (wrongly pronounced), and *main* vs. *mean*). This explanation argues that the teacher targeted these three

specific errors because they interfered with the intended meaning of the utterance; so it was the *meaning* rather than the *form* of the word that the teacher was targeting when he provided feedback on these errors. As a result, only one type of feedback exists in the data: meaning-focused feedback. To argue against this rival explanation, I will ask a very simple question: why did the teacher comment on some students' utterances saying: *what do you mean, I don't understand you, and I don't get your point*; whereas he responded to others by providing feedback on particular erroneous linguistic forms? The answer to this question is: because the teacher did not comprehend the intended meaning of the student's utterance in the first case, but he did in the second. So, if the meaning has already been acquired, then it is not in focus anymore, and what is targeted is the erroneous linguistic form itself. The fact that the teacher targeted specific erroneous linguistic forms rather than the others can be explained by the notion that correcting these particular linguistic forms may add a higher degree of *clarity* to the intended meaning; whereas this degree will not be obtained by correcting other linguistic errors, so the teacher went: *why bother.*

2. Informant feedback

To check the plausibility of the patterns perceived by the researcher, the teacher in my pilot study was given a report of the final results, and I had a little informal discussion with the teacher. The teacher indicated that when he provided feedback on these three particular errors, he did understand the meaning the student wanted to convey, and that he corrected these linguistic errors because they, as he thinks, may cause the students problems when they are communicating with the tourists 'out there'. This adds credibility to my earlier explanation that it was the form, rather than the meaning, that is targeted by correcting these particular errors. When asked about his rationale for not correcting other errors, the teacher literally said: *Hamdy, you know the students! We strive to make them use the language. So if you keep correcting every error they*

58

make, they will be intimidated, and they will never have any participation in what you are trying to do. So, what can you do? You let it go as long as you understand what they are trying to say. When I asked my fellow teacher about why he did not apply the same principle to the three errors he corrected in spite of the fact that he understood the meaning the student wanted to convey, he replied saying: *No, they are major errors; they will cause problems for the students.* This '**let it go as long as you understand**' behavior from the teacher towards the students' errors support what I have read in the literature that in communicative, meaning-based instruction, teachers do not worry about linguistic errors as long as there is comprehension.

3. Rich, thick description

Another tactic for adding weight to the conclusions and explanations obtained from verbal data analysis is to provide a rich, thick description of every thing that is related to the research situation so as to help the reader decide if those conclusions obtained from this particular situation with those specific characteristics are transferable to other similar situations. Not providing thick description of the research situation in the world of qualitative research that is based on verbal data usually renders the results of a certain qualitative study useless as they become of no use to the readers, teachers, or educators due to the inability of those interested people to decide if the results are applicable to their situations or not. In my pilot study, I provided thick description of the students (their age, proficiency level, etc), the teacher (academic record, professional development history, and even personal qualities related to the teaching profession), the language course (level of the course, language aspects covered in the course, focus of the course for the 3rd year students, rationale for this focus), the research situation (how the data was collected, interruptions occurring during the data collection process, etc.), and the data analysis procedure (the rubric used for coding the data, how this rubric was validated, what statistical procedure was used to analyze the data, how the results were obtained, and what

supports their reliability). By providing such very detailed information, I added weight to my findings because I gave others enough information to decide if my study is applicable to their situations or not.

Results of data analysis:

Using the test of the two proportions to analyze the coded data revealed that the difference between form-focused feedback and meaning-focused feedback is statistically significant; that is, z (df (degree of freedom) =1, n (total number of errors) =28) = -2.216 with probability (p) = 0.0134 (less than 0.05). Thus, we can say that the students in this communicative ESP learning activity received feedback on their errors in meaning more than feedback on their errors in linguistic forms, which answers the research question, supports the research question, and rejects the null hypothesis that feedback on form equals feedback on meaning in this particular situation.

V. Discussion

a. Interpreting the results of the pilot study

I find myself quite restricted when interpreting my pilot study results due to the fact that they are based on **only one** investigation of the research situation (form-focused feedback in ESP communicative settings), and thus the data obtained may be totally pertinent to the **one** learning activity being investigated; consequently not representative of what really happens in ESP communicative settings with regard to feedback provision. But **roughly speaking**, the pilot study findings mean that the students in this particular teacher-lead discussion communicative activity received feedback on their errors in meaning more than the feedback they received on their errors in linguistic forms. This answers the research question of my study: *To what extent is negative feedback that focuses on the learner's erroneous linguistic forms available to students in*

communicative classroom settings? The fact that (as shown by the statistical analysis of data) the difference between feedback on meaning (FM) and feedback on form (FF) is statistically significant means that FM is more than FF; which answers the first sub-question of the study: *What type of feedback do teachers provide for their students in communicative classroom settings? Is it meaning-focused or form-focused*? Moreover 'and again roughly', it can be said that the pilot study results also mean that two types of errors were targeted in the teacher's feedback: pronunciation errors (2 instances) and lexical or vocabulary errors (one instance); which answers the second sub-question of the study: *What are types of errors that receive form-focused feedback in communicative classroom settings? Are they lexical errors, syntactic errors, or phonological errors?*

b. Comparing the pilot study results to previous research

The pilot study findings stated above lend support to what was found in previous research studies investigating feedback on linguistic errors within meaning-based instruction or communicative, content-based language teaching situations where the focus is on meaning or communication rather than on the linguistic form. Specifically (and again roughly), it can be said that the pilot study findings lend support to the French immersion program studies conducted by Allen, Swain, Harley, & Cummins (1990) in which they found that many linguistic errors were not corrected in communicative classrooms simply because the teachers responded more to the content or the meaning of the student utterances rather than to linguistic or grammatical errors. In spite of the fact that the percentage of errors corrected in my pilot study were much higher than the percentage mentioned in the study of Allen et.al (13/28 = 46%) in my study, but only 19% in the study by Allen et. al), but this difference in percentages is meaningless due to the limitations in my pilot study.

The pilot study results also lend support to the study be Shah (2003) in which he found that

students in content-based Malaysian classes, where the focus is on meaning and content, received feedback on meaning more than the feedback they received on their errors in linguistic forms. However (and again roughly due to my pilot study limitations), all the errors in meaning in my pilot study were corrected (10/10) '100%'; whereas only 3 errors in form out of 18 (16%) were corrected. This contradicts the percentages of error correction mentioned in the study by Shah (2003) in which the researcher found that 86% of errors in meaning were corrected (30/35 = 86%); whereas only 18% of errors in linguistic forms were corrected (14/80 = 18%). This difference in percentages could be **roughly** explained by the fact that in my class, the activity was a communicative one between two interlocutors: the teacher and the student, and in communication, tolerance of meaning errors is not possible as it leads to communication breakdown or failure; whereas this was not exactly the case in the Malaysian classrooms where the students were responding to the teacher's questions about some content, and were not totally engaged in a communication event.

c. Relation of the findings to applied linguistics and the TEFL situation:

The pilot study findings are in accordance with CLT teaching principles and practices which give a lot of weight to meaning and communication at the expense of the linguistic form. These teaching practices adopt the viewpoint that every error is allowable as long as it does not hinder communication or interfere with the meaning being conveyed. This **'let it go'** behavior was evident in my study; that is; the teacher provided feedback on linguistic errors that he thought were major and will affect the students' ability to communicate with the tourists. However, my study raises important questions and suggests important classroom applications with regard to feedback on error in communicative classroom contexts. The first thing I would like to point out here is that in spite of all the attention given to grammar over the students' EFL learning life (10-15) years, and the huge amount of focus on grammar provided in the first two years of the

students' undergraduate studies at the faculty of tourism, grammatical errors were still the most frequent ones. This places a big question mark on the effectiveness of the explicit grammar explanations in helping the ESL learner produce language that is target-like or error-free, and as a result may trigger change in the way grammar is presented in our EFL/ESL classrooms. The second important observation I would like to make here is that although the grammatical errors in my pilot study were the most frequent (15 errors), there was no single attempt from the teacher to provide feedback on a grammatical error. This could be explained by the fact that syntactic or grammatical errors are less disruptive in communication and do not usually hinder the meaning being conveyed. On the other hand, all the errors in pronunciation or vocabulary received correction due to their interference with the meaning and their disruptive nature in communication. This observation rings a bell with regard to the weight of vocabulary and pronunciation in language courses in comparison to that of grammar; that is, if grammatical errors are the most recurrent (in spite of all the explicit grammatical explanations learners receive in the ESL classroom), and at the same time, the least effective in communication, does not this make us reconsider the amount of time and effort we spend on grammar teaching? One the other hand, does not this make us give more attention to vocabulary and pronunciation at the expense of grammar?

VI. Problems encountered in the pilot study which may be encountered in the thesis

I have encountered two problems in the pilot study which may be encountered in the thesis. The first problem was related to my inability to access one of my classes on which I planned to pilot the study. The cause for this problem was the teacher's illness; that is, the teacher had a terrible cold, and so she cancelled all her classes in the week I was planning to pilot the study. This problem had a serious effect on my pilot study; I was planning to observe two different communicative class activities, and thus observer the two teachers' provision of feedback on the

students' errors in these two different activities. Including the two classes in the pilot study was vitally important as data from the two classes can be somehow representative of feedback provision is CLT teaching situations, and thus I will have more freedom when interpreting results. To illustrate, I will be dealing a bigger amount of data, which will render my conclusions of the identified patterns more credible. Left with only one class activity that included only 20 minutes in which the behavior under investigation (the teacher's verbal feedback) was displayed, my conclusions and interpretations were much more limited in scope.

The second problem I have come across during the pilot study was related to the statistical analysis of my data; that is, I was stuck at some point with statistics in spite of the simplicity of the statistical procedure (test of two proportions) involved in my data analysis. This little problem prevented me from moving forward in writing this pilot study report though I felt I was going through a deeper level of looking into my verbal data and what it really means. I do believe that this problem is caused by the fact that I have no real statistical background knowledge except for some general information obtained in the 520 course of the MA program. On trying to solve this problem and have better understanding of the statistical concepts involved, I kept playing with numbers trying to figure out what really happens. Eventually, the course instructor demonstrated to me how my data can be statistically analyzed.

VIII- Proposed solutions to the problems and changes in the future study

To solve the first problem, necessary arrangements should be made in advance. I think we should not always depend on the assumption that the class is always there; we should contact people and arrange things to make sure that we have access to a certain situation. As for the second problem, I think knowledge of statistics is quite important to researchers. Here I am not talking about carrying out statistical procedures, but rather about how to understand what numbers really mean. To overcome this problem, I am planning to enroll in the advanced testing

course 'as a non-degree elective course' as I think it will help me more with statistics. The reason for doing this is that I am deeply interested in research and I enjoy reading and writing research papers even though I am not going to write an MA thesis.

References

Allen, P., Swain, M., Harley, B. & Cummins, J. (1990). Aspects of classroom treatment: toward a more comprehensive view of second language education. In Harley, B., Allen, P., Cummins, J. and Swain, M. (Eds.). *The Development of Second Language Proficiency*, (pp. 57-81). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Perry, F. L. (2005). *Research in applied linguistics: becoming a discerning consumer*. New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates Publishers.

Shah, M. A. (2003). Language learning content-based English as a second language (ESL) Malaysian classrooms. *Journal of Language and Learning*, *1*, 73-97. Retrieved on Monday Feb.26, 2007 from http://www.shakespeare.uk.net/journal/jllearn/1_2/shah.html