

Can You Give a Constructive Feedback?

Dr. N. Pratheeба

Abstract

Over the past several decades, language teaching in India has drastically evolved from a mere chalk and talk, grammar-driven approach to one that focuses on computer aided language learning and task based approach. Gone are the days of rigorous drill exercises. The learners are taught or rather facilitated to learn the target language on their own. Under these circumstances, the teacher has receded to the backseat and the learners are given prime importance. The way in which the performance of the students is assessed has also undergone massive changes. Oral assessments are also given credit in addition to written assignments. Accordingly, learners learn the communicative and functional use of language and develop the ability to converse the target language in real-life situations. The focus of the present paper is to demonstrate that feedback is an integral part of the assessment process - be it oral or written assignment.

Keywords: constructive feedback, oral assessments, written assessments

Introduction

Over the past several decades, language teaching in India has drastically evolved from a mere chalk and talk, grammar-driven approach to one that focuses on computer aided language learning and task based approach. Gone are the days of rigorous drill exercises. The learners are taught or rather facilitated to learn the target language on their own. Under these circumstances, the teacher has receded to the back-seat and the learners are given prime importance. The way in which the performance of the students is assessed has also undergone changes. Oral assessments are also given credit in addition to written assignments. Accordingly, learners learn the communicative and functional use of language and develop the ability to converse the target language in real-life situations.

Significance of Constructive Feedback in the Current Scenario

Constructive Feedback is an integral part of the assessment process and it has a powerful effect on student learning. Teaching and learning without giving and receiving feedback respectively makes the entire process of implementing total quality education futile. Same is the case with English Language Teaching. Race says, “We can’t plug a knowledgometer to our learners and measure how much they know – we can only measure what they show of what they know. We can’t directly measure the learning which has happened inside learners’ heads. We can only measure what they produce as evidence that they have learned successfully” (66). In such a situation, feedback to students’ assignments is very essential and indispensable.

Definition of Feedback

The Dictionary of Language Teaching and Applied Linguistics (1992) defines feedback as: “Comment or information learners receive on the success of a learning task, either from the teacher or from other learners” (p.137). Chastain (1971) echoes this idea. He believes that feedback is equal to correction. The correction can be done by teachers or other students (peer-correction) or students themselves (self-correction). Ur (1996) says that feedback is the “information that is given to the learner about his or her performance of a learning task, usually with the objective of improving this performance”. Keshavarz (1997) believes “feedback is the response to efforts by the learners to communicate” (p.283).

Different Types of Feedback

There are different types of feedback. According to Ur (1996), applied linguists divide feedback into three types: Feedback on language ,Feedback on content and Feedback on organization. But Hammerly (1982) states “teacher should divide feedback into three classes according to their importance: 1) affective, 2) communicative, 3) linguistic” (qtd .in Chastain, 1971, p.139). Lyster and Ranta (1997) investigate corrective feedback and they have classified the various teachers’ responses to learners’ incorrect turns into six categories: explicit correction, recast, clarification request, metalinguistic feedback, elicitation, and repetition.

Feedback to Written Assignments

When it is a written task like hints development, seminar paper, paragraph writing or essay writing, teachers need not give instant feedback; instead they can record their feedback in writing. They can notify the errors committed by the students in the margins. Another thing they can do is to insist that the students write their seminar paper and to give hints only on the even pages of their notebooks. In that way, they can use the free space on the odd pages for noting the correction done. Students can also be guided to do a composition exercise on the topic in which they have the maximum errors, and this will definitely help to train up the students in that particular usage.

Feedback to Oral Assignments

Feedback to oral assignments is different from feedback on written assignments in several ways. Verbal or face to face feedback for oral assessments can be made on the spot, that too in the presence of the learners or presenters. If it is a recorded version, then one can follow the written mode.

As far as the oral assessments are considered, if the teacher is ready to correct the students then and there during the presentation, the students may struggle for coherence and fluency. In that case, they have to track if the mistake was major or minor. For major mistakes and glaring ones, the teachers can correct the students during the presentation itself. For this purpose, out of the six ways of corrective feedback listed by Lyster and Ranta, importance may be given to the ones other than explicit correction, i.e., Recasts - that is teacher's reformulation of all or part of students' utterance, or Implicit correction which means that the feedback must be given rather indirectly and not directly or clarification requests. They can also go for meta linguistic feedback by giving extra comments and information without explicitly providing the correct form. The teacher has to be very judicious in timing his feedback.

While assessing oral assessments, the teacher needs to be specific in judging the content, style and language usage. If the oral assignment is on any scientific theme or concept, feedback should inevitably record the extent or degree to which concrete conceptualization of the scientific theme is reached. Specific feedback regarding the apt usage of technical terms for the

elaborate orality of the scientific concepts if given will help the students rectify their usage regarding the clarification of the various scientific concepts.

Conclusion

Constructive feedback, if given in a neutral manner will enrich the positive ambiance of the classroom very much and it will certainly help in tuning the students to the acquisition of the overall course objectives. Feedback thus emerges as a vital weapon and one of the most powerful influences on the entire process of learning and teaching. Its power is frequently mentioned in articles about learning and teaching. A conceptual analysis of feedback and its impact on the overall process of education is deemed to be a less trodden area in the realm of research. Such an analysis will help teachers to find the way in which feedback can be used further to enhance its effectiveness in language classrooms.

References

Chastain, K. (1971). The modern language skills. development of U.S.A.: Houghton Mifflin company.

Keshavarz, M. (1997). Contrastive analysis and error analysis. Tehran: Rahnama publication.

Lyster, R., & Ranta, L. (1997). Corrective feedback and learner uptake. Studies in Second Language Acquisition, 19(1), 37-66.

Richards, J. Longman. Dictionary of Language Teaching and Applied Linguistics. Harlow, Essex, UK: Longman, 1992.

Ur, P. (1996). A course in language teaching. Great Britain: Cambridge university Press.

<http://www.port.ac.uk/departments/services/dcqe/developingyouracademicpractice/downloads/filestodownload,177017.en.pdf>

Dr. N. Pratheeba
Professor
Department of English
Kamaraj College of Engineering and Technology
Virudhunagar 626001
Tamilnadu, India pratheeба.bose@yahoo.com
