

The Effects of Learners' Gender on Their Preferences for Corrective Feedback

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Abstract. This study aimed at investigating the effect of learners' gender on their preferences for corrective feedback. Learners' preferences which were investigated included the necessity, frequency, timing, type, method, and delivering agent of error treatment. To this end, a questionnaire was administered to a random sample of 100 participants (50 males and 50 females) studying English (EFL) at Shiraz Azad University. Pearson Chi-square was used to investigate the relationship between learners' gender and their preferences for corrective feedback. The findings revealed that there were no statistically significant differences between males and females regarding their preferences for corrective feedback except for their choice of necessity of error correction and the no corrective feedback option. In other words, males and females were different in rating necessity of error correction and also choosing no corrective feedback as a viable option. Furthermore, clarification request and repetition were the most frequent feedback while explicit feedback was the least frequent feedback among males and females.

Keywords: Corrective feedback, learners' preferences, gender.

1. Introduction

For decades, corrective feedback has been hotly debated. It is the basis of a great deal of the theoretical and empirical research. Corrective feedback is essential in the field of education and in learning generally. Many studies have been done on corrective feedback. Usually, the previous studies paid more attention to teachers' preferences rather than to learners' preferences. While the learner has an important place in the present methodology, the role of learners' gender in their preferences for corrective feedback should not be ignored. Therefore, teachers should be familiar with different aspects of corrective feedback such as different types of corrective feedback, learners' need for error correction, time of corrective feedback, the way of error correction, the strategies for error correction and cognitive and affective feedback in order to maintain their confidence.

1.1 Corrective feedback and language learning

Corrective feedback (CF) or negative feedback are the terms which are used to refer to teachers' reactions to learners' errors. Chaudron (1988) has pointed out that the term "treatment of the error" may refer to "any teacher behavior following an error that minimally attempts to inform the learner of the fact of error" (p.150). According to several studies, the success of corrective feedback in language learning is affected by its format, the type of error corrected, and certain learner characteristics. Also, a variety of factors may influence the effectiveness of corrective feedback in language learning. These factors include the type of feedback (e.g. explicit or implicit), the amount of feedback, the mode of feedback (i.e. oral or written), the source of feedback, learners' proficiency level, learners' attitudes towards feedback, learner's aptitude, motivation and anxiety, learner's age of noticing and interpretation of feedback (Russell & Spada, 2010).

1.2 Learners' preferences for corrective feedback

Corrective feedback has a long and controversial history in educational systems. Different methodologies have different perspectives on error correction. In the 1950s and 1960s, behaviourist teaching models such as audiolingual method emphasized that errors should be avoided at all costs. So, they should be corrected immediately. According to this theory, language learning involves the formation of habits: this belief stems from work in psychology that viewed the learning of any kind of behavior as being based on the notions of stimulus and response (Ellis, 1994; Mitchell & Myles, 2004). They believed that humans are exposed to a lot of language stimuli and responses in their environment and if these responses are repeated to these stimuli, they will lead to formation of habits. In the 1970s and 1980s, error correction was unnecessary and harmful from some scholars' points of view. One of the proponents of this view is

Stephen Krashen. Krashen distinguished between acquisition and learning. Language acquisition happens when language is absorbed within the language environment for daily communicative purposes; meanwhile, language learning involves studying the various rules and structures of second language. To this end, Krashen argues that error correction may have little or no effect on the acquisition process because language acquisition occurs naturally. Afterward Terrell used Krashen's hypotheses and proposed natural approach which is used for the development of communicative competence. Natural approach is against error correction because it increases anxiety in learners. In the 1980s, the Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) became popular. CLT focuses on fluency and meaning over form. In CLT, the correction of grammatical errors is not so important because errors are viewed as evidence of learners' development (Brown, 2007; Larsen-Freeman, 2000; Richards and Rogers, 2001).

To them learners' errors were considered as a sign of achievement or progress in language learning as well as that of language creativity not as a sign of failure or serious problems. So, errors should be corrected in a flexible and rational manner. Many studies have been done in the field of corrective feedback. But studies on learners' preferences and beliefs about corrective feedback are scarce (Yoshida, 2008). Some of the studies show teachers' and learners' preferences for error correction but in most of them, the types of corrective feedback that they prefer differ from each other (e.g. Yoshida, 2008; Hendrickson, 1978). For example, in 1997, Lyster and Ranta examined four French immersion classrooms at the primary level in Canada and outlined six different types of oral feedback as follows: explicit correction, recasts, clarification requests, metalinguistic feedback, elicitation, and repetition. The findings showed that teachers preferred to use recast and they believed that student-generated repair is ineffective because this can break the flow of communication. Learners, however, preferred to use self-repair in their error correction. In another study, Farrokhi (2011) reports a case study investigating teachers' beliefs and preferences about corrective feedback in relation to their practices in EFL classes. Teachers' beliefs about different feedback types were explored by a questionnaire. The results show that teachers' stated beliefs do not always match what they actually do and also, findings show that teachers' beliefs about the differences of feedback are not congruent with their beliefs about the opportunities of feedback types influencing contexts. This study suggests that there is a cost to be paid for each decision about the differences and appropriateness of feedback types.

In another study, Corpuz (2011) investigated the beliefs and the preferences of two ESL teachers and two groups of adult intermediate L2 learners regarding written error correction in the context of a language institute situated in the Brisbane metropolitan district. According to the results, teachers believed that

written error correction helps students to improve their proof-reading skills but it is very time-consuming. Also, students believed that written error correction helps them locate their errors and revise writing.

Also, Smith (2010) investigated learners' preferences in error correction regarding which errors needed correction and when and how these errors should be corrected. Fifty participants (26 females, 24 males) were completed this survey. These participants were adult ESL who enrolled these programs in a small rural town in Central Florida. The aim of this study was examining the affective impact of oral error correction and learners' preferences regarding which errors should be corrected, and when and how these errors should be corrected. Data analysis shows that learners prefer to be corrected individually, in class, immediately after their errors. Ninety percent of the participants reported feeling positive or neutral emotions when being corrected. The results of this study show that CF does not generally create a negative emotional experience for students.

1.3 The relationship between learners' gender and their preferences for corrective feedback

As mentioned before, there are some factors that influence the choice of corrective feedback. One of these factors is gender that will be examined in this study. Gender is one of the aspects of psycholinguistic and sociolinguistic mechanisms. There are few studies about males' and females' preferences for different types of corrective feedback. Different researches focus on learner-learner and teacher-learner interactions in the classroom. Gender can influence these interactions. So, the role of gender in this interaction is so important that has become an important variable in these studies.

In this regard, Mersi (2012) investigated the relationship between EFL learners' Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety (FLCA) with regard to gender. 52 Iranian EFL students (20 males and 32 females) completed the questionnaire. Data analysis showed that males had less anxiety than females in EFL context. One factor in females' anxiety is the fear of negative evaluation. This anxiety can be higher when teacher asks questions and makes error correction.

Rassaei (2010) investigated the possible effects of gender in classroom interactions on the effectiveness of the feedback. 20 Iranian EFL learners participated in this study. They received feedback from their interlocutors of either the same or opposite gender. Data analysis shows that in classroom interaction, the role of gender should be taken into consideration. Learners in mixed-gender dyads benefit more from feedback than in matched-gender dyads. So, the superiority of feedback directed from an opposite-gender interlocutor rather than a same-gender interlocutor.

Also, Zarei (2011) investigated the relationship between gender and corrective feedback. 205 participants (100 females and 105 males) completed a

questionnaire, consisting of 24 questions. The aim of this study was investigating the relationship between gender and the choice of different strategies for error correction during communicative activities in the classroom. Data analysis showed significant differences between males and females in different aspects of error correction. According to this study, females had higher tendency toward error correction than the males. Also, data analysis showed that males prefer meaning based approach to learning form while females prefer analytic approach because according to them, direct grammatical explanation is more helpful.

In another study, Budiani (2011) examined the strategies of giving corrective feedback used by male and female native-American teachers in the classroom. The finding revealed that both male and female native-American teachers used repetition with change in their response to the learners. This strategy helps students to understand their errors and also, to give correction on their errors. Both of them preferred direct strategies more than indirect ones. In addition, they used combination of strategy in correcting errors.

Finally, Baleghizadeh and Firoozbakht (2009) investigated gender differences in students' and teachers' perceptions and beliefs of corrective feedback. They used a questionnaire for 60 male and female intermediate EFL students (30 males and 30 females) and 40 teachers (20 males and 20 females). Data analysis showed that while there was high agreement between students and teachers on majority of questions, some discrepancies were between students' and teachers' beliefs within each gender.

Numerous studies have investigated the effects of corrective feedback and different types of corrective feedback. Moreover, many researchers have examined the effect of gender on their language learning. Although, teachers should be familiar with learners' preferences for corrective feedback, relatively few studies examined this aspect. Furthermore, to the researchers' knowledge, no studies have investigated the effect of gender on different aspects of learners' preferences for corrective feedback. As a result, this study examines learners' opinions and preferences for corrective feedback including the necessity, frequency, timing, type, method and agent of error correction along with investigating such differences among males and females on learners' preferences for corrective feedback.

2. Research Questions

The current study has addressed the following research questions:

- 1) Is there any statistically significant relationship between learners' gender and their preferences for corrective feedback?
- 2) What types of corrective feedback do male and female EFL learners prefer?

3. Method

3.1 Participants

The participants were randomly selected from male and female students studying English (EFL) at Shiraz Azad University. They were adult learners and their level was from intermediate to advanced. This information was inferred from demographics at the end of learners' preferences questionnaire. The reason for selecting them was that they were mature enough to understand each item and answer questions. All students were native speakers of Persian. A total number of 100 participants (50 males and 50 females) completed the questionnaire. This questionnaire evaluated learners' preferences for corrective feedback. Gender was the variable of this study. For this reason students were dealt with as two groups- males and females.

3.2 Instruments

To examine the effect of learners' gender on their preferences for corrective feedback, a questionnaire was used. This questionnaire, adapted from Fukuda (2004), was used for examining learners' preferences for error correction and then learners' preferences were compared according to their gender. The questionnaire had seventeen questions investigating students' perceptions of the necessity of error correction, frequency of error correction, preferences for timing of error correction, types of errors that needed to be corrected, methods of corrective feedback, and agents of error correction. At the end of this questionnaire, demographics were presented. In this part, gender and level of their studying of English were determined. The average time needed to complete this questionnaire was seven to ten minutes.

3.3 Data collection

Data collection was done in four sessions at Shiraz Azad university in April 2013. A questionnaire was delivered to learners. All the questions were in the form of multiple choices. The nature and purpose of the research were explained to the students. Each item was explained for better understanding. The participants were assured that their responses would be kept confidential. During the administration, the participants' questions were answered.

3.4 Data analysis

The questionnaire for students was based on Likert scale. For the first questionnaire, the items were divided into six categories: necessity of error correction, frequency of error correction, timing of error correction, types of errors that need to be corrected, methods of corrective feedback, and agents of error correction. With regard to necessity for error correction, the scales ranged from strongly agree to strongly disagree (5- points). With regard to the frequency of error correction on the other hand the scales ranged from always (100%) to

never (0%). Also, with regard to methods of error correction questions, the scales ranged from very effective to very ineffective (5- points). For analyzing the questionnaire regarding learners' preferences for error correction, the data was simplified by collapsing the 5- point scale used to elicit responses (e.g. strongly agree, agree, neutral, disagree, strongly disagree) into a 3-point scale (e.g. strongly agree/agree, neutral, disagree/ strongly disagree). The SPSS software was used for analyzing and describing the data. Pearson Chi-square was applied to analyze the data.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 The relationship between learners' gender and their preferences for corrective feedback

Learners' preferences for corrective feedback were divided into six categories, that is necessity of corrective feedback, frequency of error correction, timing of error correction, types of errors, methods of corrective feedback, and delivering agents of corrective feedback. Pearson Chi-square was performed in order to see if there is a statistically significant relationship between gender and different aspects of their preferences for corrective feedback.

4.2 The relationship between learners' gender and necessity of error correction

In Question 1 of the questionnaire, the students were asked to respond to this statement, "I want to receive corrective feedback when I make mistakes". With regard to this item in the preferences questionnaire, the following table indicates males and females preferences for the necessity of CF. 81 learners agreed to receive CF while 7 disagreed with receiving feedback. The Chi-square analysis indicated statistically significant differences between males and females for necessity of CF, $\chi^2 (2, n=100) = 5.90, p = 0.05$.

Table 1. Learners' responses on the necessity of error correction

Group		Necessity			Total
		Strongly Agree/Agree	Neutral	Disagree/ Strongly Disagree	
Gender	Male	45	4	1	50
	Female	36	8	6	50
Total		81	12	7	100

4.3 The relationship between learners' gender and frequency of error correction

Question 2 asked the students: "How often do you want your teacher to give corrective feedback on your spoken errors?" According to this question, 71 learners preferred their spoken errors to be always corrected, but 9 learners did not agree with the frequency of error correction. Analysis of data showed that there was no statistically significant difference between males and females in frequency of error correction, $\chi^2(2, n = 100) = 4.45, p = 0.1$.

4.4 The relationship between learners' gender and timing of error correction

Question 3 is related to the appropriate time to correct learners' spoken errors. The category consists of two choices: 1) as soon as errors are made, 2) after I finish speaking. The students were asked to rate each question with "Always, Usually, Sometimes, Occasionally, or Never."

According to the responses of male and female learners to the timing of error correction, 72 learners agreed with error correction after they finished speaking but only 32 learners thought that their errors should be corrected as soon as they are made. These findings showed that most of the learners preferred their errors to be corrected after their speaking. The findings are similar to the previous findings in that students usually expected teachers to correct their errors without interrupting their conversation (Park, 2010). Data analyses indicated that there was no significant difference between males and females about providing corrective feedback as soon as the learners made errors, $\chi^2(2, n = 100) = 1.09, p = 0.57$ or after finishing speaking, $\chi^2(2, n = 100) = 2.49, p = 0.28$.

4.5 The relationship between gender and types of errors that need to be corrected

Question 4 asked which types of errors should be corrected by teachers. This category consists of three types of errors: 1) serious spoken errors, 2) frequent errors, and 3) individual errors. According to their responses, 79 learners preferred their serious spoken errors to be treated, 57 learners preferred their frequent spoken errors to be corrected, and 63 learners preferred their individual errors to be corrected. So, "Serious spoken errors that may cause problems in a listener's understanding" received the highest percentage from both males and females. Female choices for correction of different types of errors (serious spoken errors, frequent spoken errors, and individual errors) were higher than males. Data analysis indicated that there was no statistical difference between male and female learners' preferences for error correction in serious spoken errors, $\chi^2(2, n = 100) = 1.58, p = 0.45$; frequent errors, $\chi^2(2, n = 100) = 3.43, p = 0.18$; and individual errors, $\chi^2(2, n = 100) = 0.83, p = 0.96$.

4.6 The relationship between learners' gender and method of corrective feedback

The questions in the fifth category asked learners about their preferences for types of corrective feedback. This category consisted of seven methods of corrective feedback, including clarification request, repetition, explicit feedback, elicitation, metalinguistic feedback, recasts, and no corrective feedback. This categorization is based on Lyster and Ranta's (1997) perspectives.

According to learners' preferences, the percentage of each type of corrective feedback is as follow: clarification request (82%), repetition (79%), explicit feedback (49%), elicitation (64%), metalinguistic feedback (60%), recast (53%), no corrective feedback (10%). From learners' preferences, clarification request, repetition, elicitation, metalinguistic feedback, recast and explicit feedback were rated as effective respectively. Clarification request and repetition were the most favored methods of corrective feedback among learners. Interestingly, 76% of the learners rated no corrective feedback as ineffective (see Table 2). So, no corrective feedback had the lowest percentage among both male and female learners. These findings showed that both male and female learners value corrective feedback on spoken errors.

They wanted their errors to be corrected in accordance with item 1 of this questionnaire that 81 learners agreed with this statement "I want to receive corrective feedback when I make mistakes".

Pearson Chi-square analysis showed that there was no statistically significant difference between male and female learners in their preferences for different types of CF.

Data analyses are as follow: Clarification request, $\chi^2(2, n = 100) = 0.54, p = 0.76$; repetition, $\chi^2(2, n = 100) = 3.88, p = 0.14$; explicit feedback, $\chi^2(2, n = 100) = 2.15, p = 0.54$; elicitation, $\chi^2(2, n = 100) = 0.0, p = 1.0$; metalinguistic feedback, $\chi^2(2, n = 100) = 1.33, p = 0.51$; recast, $\chi^2(2, n = 100) = 1.74, p = 0.41$. Chi-square analysis for no corrective feedback option indicated a statistically significant difference between male and female learners, $\chi^2(2, n = 100) = 11.3, p = 0.003$.

Table 2. Learners' responses on the methods of corrective feedback

Types of errors	Groups	Very Effective/ Effective	Neutral	Ineffective/ Very Ineffective
No corrective feedback	Male	3	2	45
	Female	7	12	31
Total		10	14	76

4.7 The relationship between learners' gender and agents of error correction

The last group of questions asked learners who they prefer to correct their errors. The statement in the question was "The following person should treat students' errors". There were three options: classmates, teachers, and learners themselves. According to responses, 88 learners agreed with error correction by teachers, 81 agreed with self-correction, whereas 51 learners agreed with peer-correction. Therefore, learners valued and preferred teacher-correction and self-correction to peer-correction. According to data analysis, no statistically significant difference was found between male and female learners in delivering agents: peer-correction, $\chi^2(2, n = 100) = 3.26, p = 0.19$; teacher-correction, $\chi^2(2, n = 100) = 0.54, p = 0.76$; and self-correction, $\chi^2(2, n = 100) = 0.59, p = 0.74$.

4.8 Types of corrective feedback that male and female EFL learners prefer

In order to examine learners' preferences for selecting methods of corrective feedback, the frequency for each type was determined. According to following table, males' preferences for different types of corrective feedback were as follows: repetition (43%), clarification request (40%), elicitation (32%), metalinguistic feedback (28%), recast (27%), and explicit feedback (26%). On the other hand, females' preferences for corrective feedback were as follows: clarification request (42%), repetition (36%), elicitation and metalinguistic feedback (32%), recast (26%) and explicit feedback (23%) respectively.

Interestingly, both groups' preferences were the same just as in clarification request and repetition. Male learners preferred repetition more than other types of methods of corrective feedback whereas female learners preferred clarification request more than others. Both groups rated explicit feedback as ineffective methods of error correction.

Table 3. Frequency of male and female learners' responses for selection of methods of corrective feedback

Group	Clarification Request	Repetition	Explicit feedback	Elicitation	Metalinguistic feedback	Recast
Male	40	43	26	32	28	27
Female	42	36	23	32	32	26

5. Conclusion

Based on the procedures followed, the present study provided answers to previously stated research questions. With regard to the first research question, Pearson Chi-square was performed in order to see if there was a statistically significant relationship between gender and different aspects of their preferences for CF. Data analysis in different aspects of learners' preferences such as frequency of error correction, timing of error correction, types of errors that need to be corrected and delivering agents of error correction indicated no statistically significant differences between males and females whereas this analysis showed statistically significant differences between males and females for necessity of CF. Regarding methods of CF based on Lyster and Ranta (1997), clarification request, repetition, explicit feedback, elicitation, metalinguistic feedback and recast did not make a difference between male and female learners while the no corrective feedback option indicated difference between these two groups. So, the relationship between learners' gender and their preferences was found statistically significant only for the necessity for error correction and no corrective feedback as an option to address learners' errors.

Data analysis for the second research question showed that clarification requests and repetition were the most frequent feedback while explicit feedback was the least frequent feedback among both groups. The above mentioned conclusions of the present study revealed that learners' gender does not have significant effects on their preferences for corrective feedback except for a few aspects.

6. Pedagogical Implications

Focusing on learners' preferences and opinions toward different aspects of corrective feedback can help educators and teachers provide situations in which learners can increase their learning. Also, it can help teachers understand which aspects of corrective feedback can make their learners anxious. So, they can help learners overcome these problems.

As indicated earlier, most of students showed tendency to receive error treatment as much as possible and they agreed with different aspects of corrective feedback. However, constant corrective feedback from the teacher could increase anxiety. Hence, EFL teachers should take into consideration the individual differences, learners' preferences and opinions among students.

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