UNIVERSIDAD FASTA

FACULTAD DE CIENCIAS
DE LA EDUCACIÓN

Error Correction Techniques in the EFL Class

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Carrera: Licenciatura en Inglés – Ciclo de Licenciatura

- Modalidad a Distancia-

Plan: 2011

2da Cohorte

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SANTO TOMÁS DE AQUINO

IT HAS BEEN A PLEASURABLE CHALLENGE THAT HAS COME TO AN END.

We all have Possibilities

We don't know about.

We can do things

We don't even dream

We can do.

Dale Carnegie (1888- 1955, American writer)

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To my dear son, Gerardo Andrés, for his unconditional love and help with technology, patience and enthusiasm.

To my Mum, who gave me the possibility of falling in love with English.

To my friends Georgia , Carolina, Cecilita , Ma. Albina , Maggie and Alice

To Me

To my dear son, Gerardo Andrés, for his unconditional love and help with technology, patience and enthusiasm.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Abstract

Errors are regarded as a natural part of the learning process, with the teacher performing the role of facilitator, providing help when necessary and creating a supportive environment in which students can obtain a successful enhanced learning outcome. They are significant indicators of the learning progress showing what learners have attained and what remains to be acquired and provide the language teacher the necessary information about how to deal with the problems that may arise and give a meaningful comprehensible feedback which proves to be beneficial in the long run. Furthermore, the teacher should guide learners to use the appropriate meta- language needed to communicate ideas and beliefs about their learning process. In addition, educators should be sensitive and sympathetic toward the different learning capabilities present in their classes and try to avoid learners' embarrassment and encourage them to take risks using the language. The influence of learners' age, level of proficiency and learning style lead them to react differently to error correction. In order to prevent students to feel misled and confused, teachers should avoid over-correction. Teachers should provide a positive affective feedback, reduce the tension caused by error correction and encourage all their students to improve their works. Language anxiety may affect students' self-esteem, self-confidence, hamper proficiency in language acquisition, and hinder their achievement. Encouragement and non-threatening instruction are good ways to ease learner anxiety and strengthen their motivation.

"Errors are clues to inner processes, windows into the mind"
Kroll and Schafer (1978:243)

CORRECTION IN THE ENGLISH CLASSROOM

1.INTRODUCTION

Not only is to err human, but there is none other than human error: animals and artefacts do not commit errors. And if to err and to speak are each uniquely human, then to err at speaking, or to commit *language errors*, must mark the very pinnacle of human uniqueness (James 1998:1).

When acquiring a foreign language learners make mistakes assuming that their L1 and the L2 work in the same way, i.e.: they encounter many problems due to erroneous concepts. They are the result of faulty deductions of grammar rules, transfer of learning habits in the L1 that do not match with the L2 and a lack of a proper command of the L2. In addition, learners may also experience various kinds of stressful situations as they have to deal with different areas of the L2, such as grammar, pronunciation and vocabulary.

In order to avoid learners' embarrassment and inhibition that my result in their discouragement to respond to the teacher's input, errors should be regarded as a natural part of the learning process, as a meaningful learning tool and not as an obstacle that may impede a successful learning experience. Kroll and Schafer (1978) refer to errors as manifestations of the learner's latent linguistic and cognitive procedures.

According to Corder (1967:167)

A learner's errors are significant in three different ways. First to the teacher, in that they tell him how far towards the goal the learner has progressed and, consequently, what still remains to be learned. Second, they provide the researcher evidence of how language is learned or acquired, what strategies or procedures the learner is employing in his discovery of the language. Thirdly, they are indispensable to the learner himself /herself, because we can regard the making of errors as a device the learner uses in order to learn.

There are different types of correction techniques the students may get acquainted with throughout their learning process: self-correction, peer correction, group correction and teacher correction. The teacher should choose the one/s that best suit the specific learning situation. More often than not, students' affective filter is high, which makes them oblivious to repairing feedback and thus shelter under a negative attitude that impedes language acquisition problems to be solved.

The classroom atmosphere should be friendly and cooperative in order to prevent learners' negative anxiety, hindrance and increase their self- reliance. The *affective impact* of error correction on learners depends on their level of proficiency and level of anxiety- the higher, the more negative the impact on the language acquisition process. In other words, aiming to diminish the tension provoked by error correction, positive and constructive comments should be provided to encourage learners to become risk- takers.

Krashen (2009:66) argues that " Methods and materials should not be a test of the student's abilities, should not merely reveal weaknesses, but should help the student to acquire more". Hence, students may not be 'on the defensive' and may attempt to communicate without fear of making faulty productions. For example, elicitation and repetition are techniques the teacher uses during the learner's oral production when he/she expects a more complete answer from the latter or repeats the student's idea so that he/she can realise that something has to be reframed. When correcting the written work the teacher may focus on a certain grammar point, for instance present simple tense, narrowing the scope of the different types of mistakes. Therefore, the teacher may help the learner to concentrate on that specific grammar point and may have more time to evaluate the errors made and the learner is corrected privately,without experimenting the annoyance and embarrassment of being corrected in front of the whole group.

Referring to the expected teacher's feedback , Long (as cited in Brown, 2001: 290) also points out the importance of considering errors and mistakes positively stating that

At the moment of providing corrective feedback, the teacher should recognise the importance of the error to the current pedagogical focus on the lesson, the teacher's perception of the chance of eliciting correct performance from the student if negative feedback is given, and so on. Teacher classroom feedback to students should give them the message that mistakes are not 'bad' but that most mistakes are good indicators that innate acquisition abilities are alive and well. Mistakes are often indicators of aspects of the new language that are still developing.

Nevertheless, it cannot be ignored that, no matter how well intentioned the teacher's feedback may be, if the student rejects the idea of being corrected, it will not be effective at all. In other words, the teacher will succeed in his/her attempt to correct his/her student only if the latter is open minded to acknowledge his/her weaknesses and accepts the feedback provided.

Due to the importance of repair and improvement of error in the English class, the present case study tries to show which type of error correction technique is more effective, how the affective factor influences students at the moment of receiving feedback from their peers and whether age plays a role in shaping learners' opinion about the different error correction techniques as they grow older. The information was obtained from a survey

carried out about which error correction technique the students thought more beneficial for their learning process at a semi-public secondary institute.

2.1 PART I: LITERARY REVIEW: ERRORS AND MISTAKES

Previous research into teacher and learner preferences either in written or speaking tasks, supported the idea that not all errors should be corrected. Different teaching methods hold different positions about this topic. As Brown (2001) states the Audiolingual Method makes a great effort to get students to produce free error utterances; the Natural Approach focuses on meaning , not on form, so error correction is banished, unless they are global errors- errors that really impede understanding- and the Communicative Approach sustains the concept that language is often created by the individual through trial and error.

Errors and mistakes play a vital role during the learning process of a language, widening students' knowledge scope and becoming a learning opportunity which in turn may help them reach autonomy. Brown (2001) claims that the learner's mother tongue exerts a great influence at the moment of acquiring a foreign language. In an attempt to use the new language his/her errors are the result of the wrong belief that both languages have the same system of rules. Referring to the same concept Krashen (2009:27) expresses that " The use of an L1 rule allows the performer to 'outperform' his competence, to meet a practical need in L2 communication". When the L1 rule used is equal to the one in the L2 -'positive transfer'- for instance, passive voice rule, the performer seems to have something for free. Even if the rule is not the same as the L2 rule, one could discern that the performer still comes out ahead as quite often, he can still communicate his point regardless of the inaccurate form, for example, adjectives in Spanish are either singular or plural depending on the noun, whereas in English they are never pluralized.

Teachers are expected to correct errors that affect understanding, i.e.: errors that interfere with the general meaning and accuracy of utterances. They may be also uncertain about what and how to correct students' errors and whether immediate or late correction is suitable. Awareness of the mistakes/errors made and early correction prevent them from being fossilized*.*

Hendrickson (1978) designed some questions in an attempt to explain how to deal with errors in the learning process: Who is expected to correct the learner i.e.: the teacher, the learner, or the peers? How should corrective feedback be provided? The techniques to be used depend on whether the student is being corrected in an oral or written activity.

When is feedback expected to be given? In the case of an oral task it is convenient not to interrupt the learner with corrections as he/she may find himself/herself in an embarrassing ackward situation and stop communicating. When the written production is overcorrected the student may feel demotivated and bewildered without knowing how to redo the work. What is going to be corrected? In a written task, the teacher should make it explicit which teaching point is going to be corrected, so the student may understand more easily the correction provided; while during an oral production, correction should happen only when the ideas are not clearly conveyed and the meaning cannot be grasped.

Long (1977) introduced the concept of *error detection* or *knowledge of result* according to which teachers are concerned with error detection, and is regarded as the previous stage to teacher's feedback.

Kathleen Bailey (as cited in Brown, 2001: 291) recommends the following taxonomy to deal with error treatment. The selection and use of a combination of any option and a suitable possible feature depends on the group of students and the different moments of the teaching situation:

Basic Options
    1- To treat or to ignore
    2- To treat immediately or to delay
    3- To transfer treatment (to say, to other learners) or not
    4- To transfer to another individual, a subgroup, or the whole class
    5- To return, or not, to the original error maker after treatment
    6- To permit other learners to trigger treatment
    7- To test for the efficacy of the treatment

Possible Features
    1- Fact of error indicated
    2- Location indicated
    3- Opportunity for new attempt given
    4- Model provided
    5- Error type indicted
    6- Remedy indicated
    7- Improvement indicated
    8- Praise indicated

2.2 <u>WHY DO LEARNERS MAKE ERRORS?</u>

According to Brown (2001:66)

The native language of learners exerts a strong influence on the acquisition of the target language system. While that native system will exercise both facilitating and interfering effects on the production and comprehension of the new language, the interfering effects are likely to be the most salient. Learner's errors give signals of an underlying system at work. Errors are, in fact, windows to a learner's internalized understanding of the second language, and therefore they give teachers something observable to react on. Errors of the native language interference may be repaired by acquainting the learner with the native language cause of the error.

In the view of Brown (2001:67) "Second language learners tend to go through a systematic or quasi-systematic developmental process as they progress to full competence in the target language. Successful interlanguage development is partially a result of utilizing feedback from others".

The Common European Framework of Reference for Language Learning (2004:155) states that

Errors are due to an interlanguage, a simplified or distorted representation of the target language. Learners unconsciously process, analyse and reorganize their interlanguage, so it is not fixed because it develops and progresses as they learn more.

In other words, errors occur when the student, in an effort to use the target language, tries to employ rules from his L1 to the L2- the correct use/ form of a target item does not reflect the speaker/writer's skilful use of the language. They are made only by the learners of the L2 and not by the native speakers. In this way error correction helps learners to become aware of the existing gap between both languages.

Errors are constant and usually show that learners are learning and that their internal mental processes are working on and experimenting with the L2. They provide researchers corroboration of how learners learn and acquire the language, as well as what strategies or proceedings they use in their finding of the target language.

2.3. MISTAKES AND ERRORS : DEFINITIONS AND CLASSIFICATIONS

Mistakes are the result of the writer/speaker's tiredness and stress. Although the correct use/form of a target item belongs to the learners' competence, mistakes are observable and acknowledged and the learners may make use of the self-correction technique. Mc Arthur (1992:381-383) states that "mistakes are a misapprehension of meaning or a fault in execution". Accordingly, he provides the following classification of mistakes:

Competence mistakes (sometimes technically called *errors*), that arise from ignorance of or ineptness in using a language, and *performance mistakes* (technically, mistakes), where one knows what to say or write but through tiredness, emotion, nervousness, or some other pressure makes a slip of the tongue, leaves out a word, or mistype a letter.

Common mistakes

his/he's   CONFUSABLE MISTAKES: two or more words that are easily

once/one's   confused with one another

lives/leaves
prize/price

their/there   HOMOPHONY: words with the same sounds but with different

its/ it's   spelling and meanings

CATACHRESIS: mistaken use of a word for another, for example:*acknowledge/ recognise*
CONSONANTAL BLEND: as Spanish does not have consonantal clusters beginning with *s* , learners tend to use an 'intrusive' *e* to make words sound more familiar, for instance *e*student for *s*tudent.
DEVELOPMENTAL ERRORS: where L1 and English come into contact with each other, there are often misunderstandings which provoke errors in a learner´s use of English either at the level of sounds, at the level of grammar, or at the level of word usage. They occur when learners attempt to build up hypothesis about the target language on the basis of

limited experiences.These errors are part of the natural learning attainment process, i.e.: as Harmer (2010:96) states that

They occur naturally as the students' language develops and are the result of the students making apparently sensible (but mistaken) assumptions about the way the language works. (…) By working out when and why things have gone wrong, students learn more about the language they are learning.

INDUCED OR HYPERCORRECTED ERRORS: errors happen as the result of low-level teaching classroom resources/ materials or the teachers themselves - it sometimes happens that teachers are not as qualified as they should be.

OVERGENERALIZATION ERRORS: unfitting use of grammatical principles for certain parts of the language to formulate a new target language. Generally these errors are likely to disappear as learners' language skills evolve.

According to Spratt, Pulverness and Williams (2005:45) "Fossilized errors are errors which a learner does not stop making and which last for a long time, even for ever, in his/her foreign language use". In other words, learners continue making them and are unable to correct them, no matter how hard they attempt to avoid them.

Referring to Hendrickson's distinction between 'global' and 'local' errors, Krashen (2009) states that teachers should correct those faulty attempts using the foreign language that really represent an obstacle to its understanding, the so called global errors, for instance, verb inflections- whereas when a 'local' mistake is made, such as word order, if the message is understood, correction should be given afterwards; otherwise the message can be misinterpreted. Harmerly (1991) presents a similar distinction and states that 'surface errors' need lesser corrections, whereas 'deep errors' do require the reasons of why they are made and what the accurate form is.

 Edge (1989) refers to errors as *slips* when the learner recognises the mistake he/she has made and can correct it; she speaks of *errors* when the learner is unable to correct on his own and requires the teacher's intervention. Lastly, Edge uses the term *attempts* to explain the errors made when the command of the target language is still out of the learner's learning scope.

Norrish (1983:8-127-128) establishes a similar distinction to the above given between an error –"a systematic deviation from the accepted code"- a mistake –"a non- systematic deviation from the language code indicating incomplete learning"- and a lapse – "a non-systematic deviation from the language code due to human limitations such as fatigue, poor memory, etc.".The following is a list of the errors most commonly made:

Grammatical: a) VerbTense

            b) Word order

            c) Omission of article

            d) Subject-Verb Agreement

            e) Pluralized adjectives

Phonology: a) Pronunciation

            b) Intonation

            c) Word stress

            d) Sentence stress

            e) Syllable omission

Semantic: a) Incorrect use of word collocation

            b) Incorrect use of function

2.4 THE AFFECTIVE FILTER

The affective filter is a mental block that prevents acquirers from fully utilizing the comprehensible input they receive for language acquisition. (Krashen1985:4)

Any effective feedback should take into account the students' psycho-affective reactions as affect and teacher's rapport play a role in shaping learners' attitudes to error correction- the affective feedback implies the affective relationship among participants- teacher and students alike- which brings about a low affective filter. Language anxiety may affect students' self-esteem, self-confidence and can be an obstacle to proficiency in language acquisition.

Krashen (2009:74-75) also states that

The most serious flaw in error correction is its effect on the Affective Filter. Error correction has the immediate effect of putting the student on the defensive. It encourages a strategy in which the student will try to avoid mistakes, avoid difficult constructions, focus less on meaning and more on form.

This author (2009) points out that both the absence of a silent period / wait-time, during which the learner can think over his / her ideas before speaking, and a too early correction prevent the lowering of the Affective Filter. Corder (1973) stated that once learners are conscious of their mistaken productions and are given time to elaborate their corrections and reformulate their utterances, they may benefit more from self-correcting than by receiving teacher's correction.

Encouragement and non-threatening instruction are necessary to ease learners' anxiety and enhance their interest. The affective filter functions as a barrier to the language acquisition, the higher it is, the more difficult it is for the learners to surpass their learning weaknesses and the less input is absorbed and processed.

Teachers must remember that the aim of correction is to help students overpass their difficulties and equip them with the necessary tools to advance in their learning process, avoiding learners' annoyance which may result in a prospective failure in the flow of communication or in their written productions. So, teachers should not insist on accuracy at the beginning of the acquisition process. Otherwise, the weak learners would be on the alert and have a high affective barrier accompanied with its sense of frustration.

For the best students the affective impact of error correction can have a positive effect, whereas the lower achievers frequently need to be released from viewing errors as a form of failure, in other words, criticism should not weaken learners' self- esteem. Krashen (1985:76) argues that "Improvement will come without error correction, and may even come rapidly, since the input will 'get in´, the filter will be lower, and the students will be off the defensive".

Brown (2001:61) states that "… all second language learners need to be treated with affective tender loving care" and strengthens the Language Ego Principle saying that

As human beings learn to use a second language, they also develop a new mode of thinking, feeling, and acting- a second identity. The new "language ego", intertwined with the second language, can easily create within the learner a sense of fragility, a defensiveness, and a rising of inhibitions.

2.5 FEEDBACK

Feedback may be defined as the information provided to learners concerning their performance either by the teacher or peers, aiming at bettering their knowledge of the target language. It is intended to motivate learners and help them become aware of their problems and improve them. The provision of corrective feedback can speed up the process of language learning by giving information about the rules and limits of the language use.

The effectiveness and usefulness of corrective feedback imply both correcting students and offering them an assessment of how well they have performed, and a tolerant and positive attitude to errors on the part of the teacher. Positive affective comments should be offered to encourage learners and reduce the tensions caused by error correction,

avoiding the risk of demoralizing students who can be tied to their own limitations and attitudes as regards accuracy and errors.

Teachers should give not only a selective correction, bearing in mind the learners' level of proficiency in the foreign language, the kinds of errors made, and the learners' attitude toward error correction, but also a supportive attitude to their learners, encouraging them to get over their fears and insecurities and fostering their self-confidence. A comprehensible and timely feedback should be provided in a safe and relaxed learning atmosphere so that learners can reach a low affective filter and acquire the language successfully.

As Harmer states (2001:105) "Correction is a highly personal business and draws, more than many other classroom interactions, on the rapport between teacher and students". Teachers should provide a fair cognitive feedback in order to be effective. On one hand, too much positive cognitive feedback may imply understanding when this might not have happened. The outcome is the lack of awareness of the errors made and their resulting fossilization; on the other hand, if the teacher focuses all his/her attention on the learners' errors, the correct utterances in the L2 may be neglected. In oral activities, permanent interruptions and correction should be avoided so as to prevent interfering with the natural flow of communication.

As regards correcting written work, Chastain (1971) argues that over-correction obstructs learners from focusing on the task and may even spoil the amusement of learning the target language. Valette (1973) adds that due to over- correction students produce unsophisticated, plain sentences. Teachers can prevent this embarrassing situation by telling the students which mistakes are going to be taken into account in a particular task, such as punctuation, spelling, or grammar. In this way the students focus on certain mistakes narrowing the scope of correction. Teachers may give their students a list of correction written symbols, for example, Sp. for spelling, Gr. for grammar. So, when teachers come across a mistake, they underline it and write the corresponding symbol on the margin and the students can correct themselves with the aid of the list.(See Appendix for an error correction key list)

Vigil and Oller's traffic lights model (as cited in Brown, 2001:289) aims to explain how the flow of communication may be affected at the moment of providing and receiving affective and cognitive feedback – it refers to the way teachers support their students and help them to take away fear of making mistakes when they are trying to communicate and how the teachers convey the idea that the message is being understood or not.

Figure 17.7. Affective and cognitive feedback
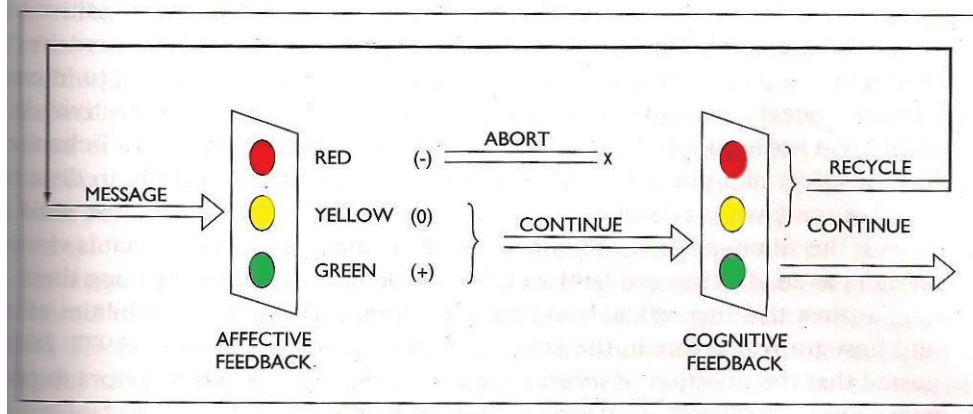
A 'green light' means that the speaker-learner is allowed to continue trying to transmit the message because the general idea can be grasped, so no corrective feedback is needed; a'red light' tells the sender to void his/her message, to make up his / her mind and think of another alternative for the message; it implies corrective feedback. In between, a`yellow light´ calls the learner's attention indicating him/her to make some changes in his/her production in order to attain an accurate outcome. Unless there is a balance of 'lights', fossilized errors may occur ,i.e.: too much 'green' light given to understanding when the message has not been really understood and too much negative feedback may inhibit the learner in his/her attempts to use the language, rise his/her affective filter and impede any other possible endeavor.

As the speakers perceive 'positive' reinforcement (the green lights), they will be led to internalize certain speech patterns. Because ignoring erroneous behaviour also has the effect of positive support, teachers must be careful to discern the possible consequences of neutral feedback- the learner may infer that what he/she has said is right when actually it is not. It is also advisable to preclude the administration of corrective reinforcement- correction viewed by learners as devaluing, dehumanizing, or insulting them.

Lyster and Ranta (1997:40) combined different types of error treatment or correction feedback with students' responses to that feedback, or 'learner uptake'. They described six main corrective *'moves'*- a move consisting of the teacher's action and reaction:

Explicit correction: it is used to indicate that the student´s production was incorrect, with the teacher providing the correct form.

Recast/ Rephrase: the teacher implicitly reformulates the learner's wrong utterance except the error or gives the correct structure without openly referring to the learner's faulty utterance. Recasts include scaffolding help, i.e.: it is a way of backing the learner to attain a certain level of proficiency

and the corresponding autonomy, with the teacher gradually stepping aside. They are unobtrusive and do not interfere with the flow of communication.

Clarification request: phrases like 'Excuse me' or 'I don't understand' are used to show bewilderment on the part of the teacher because the message has not been understood and a repetition and/ or reformulation is required.

Metalinguistic clues: without providing the correct form, the teacher poses questions or makes comments related to the student's utterance, such as 'Do we say it like that?'

Elicitation: the teacher directly elicits the correct form from the students. Elicitation questions require more than a Yes/No answer, for example 'How do we say this in English?'

Repetition: the teacher repeats the student's error and adjusts the intonation to draw the learner's attention to it.

Levinson (1983:339-341) definesa repair as "An alteration that is suggested or made by a speaker, the addressee, or audience in order to correct or clarify a previous conversational contribution". In other words, the repair begets a problem to the student's production. A repair organization is made of three basic parts: the generation of the problem; the beginning of the repair, and its completeness. Four kinds of repairs can be discriminated during a verbal intercourse: 1) the student initiates and completes the repair, i.e.: the trouble-source maker begins and finishes the repair- he/she can self-correct ; 2) the teacher begins the repair and the learner completes it, i.e.: the addressee recognizes the origin of the difficulty and begins the repair with the producer of the trouble-source finishing it; 3) the learner begins the repair and the interlocutor finishes it: the trouble-source maker begins the repair; the addressee carries it through; 4) the repair is both begun and finished by another person, i.e.:both the trouble-source identification and the completion of the repair is accomplished by the addressee".

2.6 ERROR CORRECTION TECHNIQUES

Referring to the different techniques to be used at the moment of providing correction, Spratt, Pulverness & Williams (2005:153) state that

In the classroom, we use a mix of teacher correction, peer correction and self-correction. Sometimes we need to correct learners. Sometimes we indicate to them that there is a mistake and they are able to correct themselves or other learners can help them. Sometimes we ignore learners' mistakes. We choose what is appropriate for the learning purpose, the learner and the situation.

Dealing with the concept of how learners manage to achieve their learning independence Brown (2001:43) says that " Students are given the opportunities to focus on their own learning process through an understanding of their own styles of learning and through the development of appropriate strategies for autonomous learning".

If error correction is intended to be meaningful, a combination of the different types of error correction techniques- self, peer, group and teacher correction- ensures that the teacher has the possibility of pointing out problems with the language, and that the learners may be able to build confidence and responsibility for their own learning.

<u>Self- Correction</u>

Tell me and I'll forget.
Show me and I may remember.
Involve me, and I'll learn.
Benjamin Franklin

Brown (2001:45) says that for Communicative Language Teaching/ Communicative Approach "Language is often created by the individual through trial and error". Self-correction is a visible behaviour from which teachers can grasp their students' engagement and commitment in the use of learning strategies that help them get over the awkwardness they encounter throughout their learning process.

In this type of correction the classroom dynamic shifts from teacher-centred to student-centred, i.e.: learners become active participants, experiencing an autonomous role in their learning process. Once students know how to work on their own, grammar books with answer keys are the ideal handy companions to foster learner independence.

Edge (1993:10) states that "People usually prefer to put their errors right than be corrected by someone else. Also, self- correction is easier to remember, because someone has put something right in his or her own head". Accordingly, the teaching/learning situation is essential to promote learner autonomy in such a way that learners may become fully aware of their achievements and faulty results.

Sultana (2009:11) also points out that "The idea of self-correction is closely tied with learner autonomy. … Self-correction is the technique which engages students to correct their own errors".

Forbes, Poparad & Mc Bride (2012:570) state "Teachers who observe, encourage, and teach self-correcting behaviours create opportunities in their classroom for their students

to develop effective [learning] processes". These authors also express (2004:567) that "self-monitoring and self-correction are strategic processes that may lead to metacognition". In other words, students would be capable of deciding when, which and how to deal with the strategies they need to correct their works and this attitude in turn, would help them understand the target language better.

Referring to how learners manage to achieve their learning independence, Brown (2001:43) expresses that "Students are given the opportunities to focus on their own learning process through an understanding of their own styles of learning and through the development of appropriate strategies for autonomous learning".

Bhattacharya and Chauhan (2012:24) define independence or learner autonomy as a "capacity for detachment, critical reflection, decision making and independent action". When correcting their own productions, students feel a sense of achievement and acknowledgement of their faulty works. Autonomous learning, according to Holec (in Gardner 2000:50) is "the ability to take charge of one's learning".

"… Independent learners are more likely to succeed in their studies than those students who are heavily dependent on the teacher". (ESOL Examination, 2012:24)

To err is human,
to self- correct is to learn.
The Reading Teacher, 2004:566

<u>Peer Correction</u>

The Communicative Language Teaching and Learner-centred Teaching has brought about students' active participation in language learning. Peer correction has gained popularity among learners and has been remarkably valued as a learning tool in educational environments. Peer correction provides the ground for the enhancement of learner autonomy and participation, inter alia. Its affective advantage over teacher correction is that it is less threatening, less authoritarian, and more supportive- when correction comes from the teacher, it stresses teacher's authority.

This technique fosters learner independence, is student-centred and implies active student involvement in the learning process. It may also raise learners' awareness of their strengths and weaknesses. Consequently, it changes the traditional teaching classroom

situation from a teacher-centred to a learner-centred one, reducing learners' anxiety and increasing their confidence.

In order to correct themselves successfully, learners should have the necessary linguistic knowledge that would enable them to be conscious of their learning difficulties and how to overcome them. Teachers who support the suitability of this technique should familiarize their students with classroom opportunities to develop a meaningful effective learning process. In this way, teachers gradually become facilitators and students themselves active participants and risk-takers in making and correcting their own errors.

Though peer correction is valued mainly for its cognitive, social and affective value, some students may be unwilling to correct their mates' errors as it might affect their relationship because the corrected student might feel that he/she is being inferior to his/her peers. It may even deprive the students of the possibility to correct the errors themselves and they might prefer to be gently corrected by the teacher.

It is worth pointing out that this technique works well in classes with a friendly, supportive and cooperative atmosphere that aims to avoid underestimating learners' self-esteem.

<u>Group Correction</u>

As well as with peer correction, students should be used to taking responsibility for the language they produce, otherwise, if they are teacher dependent they might become hesitant speakers unsure of their abilities, and experiment inhibition and a negative attitude toward learning. The difference between both techniques lays in the number of students working together: peer correction implies small subgroups within the whole group.

Using this technique students make different comments from those of the teacher and get more self-confident. They can be effective at monitoring and judging their mates' language production. Students doing correction, with the teacher only guiding and assessing them when necessary, strengthen their attitude toward self-correction. Collaborative effort in the group interaction fosters language learning and student participation is regarded as an important tool in any error correction attempt leading learners toward self-correction and an autonomous behaviour.

In order to familiarize learners with this technique the teacher may hand in a photocopy from a coursebook/ grammar book that contains a mistake- either a printing mistake, a punctuation mistake, a spelling mistake or even a concept mistake. In groups, the students have to find out and correct the mistake, and explain it. They may also provide their

own examples. The following is a printing mistake found in a grammar book: ***water*** and ***time*** are ***uncountable nouns***.

16 ***a few, a little*** **and** ***much, many, a lot of***

- ***a few*** and ***many*** are used with plural countable nouns:
  *I've got **a few** friends.*
  *They haven't got **many** friends.*

- ***a little*** and ***much*** are used with plural countable nouns:
  *Could I have **a little** water please?*
  *We haven't got **much** time.*

New Grammar Practice for Pre-Intermediate Students-

Walker and Elsworth (2000:17)

<u>Teacher correction</u>

Harmer (2004:59) provides the following definition regarding teacher correction

One of the things that students expect from their teachers is an indication of whether or not they are getting their English right. This is where we have to act as an assessor, offering feedback and correction and grading students in various ways.

It is important for students to feel that their needs are being taken into account by their teacher who is interested in their progress, and that they are given the possibility to understand the correction done. Not only do students want their errors to be corrected by the teacher, but they also prefer such correction to be comprehensive rather than selective. Using positive feedback the teacher can help his/her students to build up their self-confidence and realize the differences between their L1 and the target language.

Teachers should provide either explicit or implicit correction depending on the class activities- the former is a detailed direct correction whereas the latter is an indirect one and means that teachers indicate the presence of errors and facilitate some sort of clues aiming at peer or self-correction.

3. RESEARCH STUDY

3.1 METHODOLOGY

This is a twofold work: Part 1: a survey was done by 108 students from a semi-public secondary institute- público de gestión privada- in the city of Viedma,Río Negro Province, where they had to answer which method of correction they preferred. This same survey was given to the same group in two consecutive years in order to see if the participant's age had any effect on error correction preference. The survey is attached in the Appendix. Part 2: various activities were performed by the students, where different error correction techniques were used in order to see how they reacted to each.

3.1.1 Instrument

A qualitative research was carried out through a survey in 2013. It was based on a single close question about how each error correction technique was valued according to the students' experience: Peer- correction, Self correction, Group correction and Teacher correction as Very Good, Good, Fair, Bad, or Never Done respectively. (See Appendix)
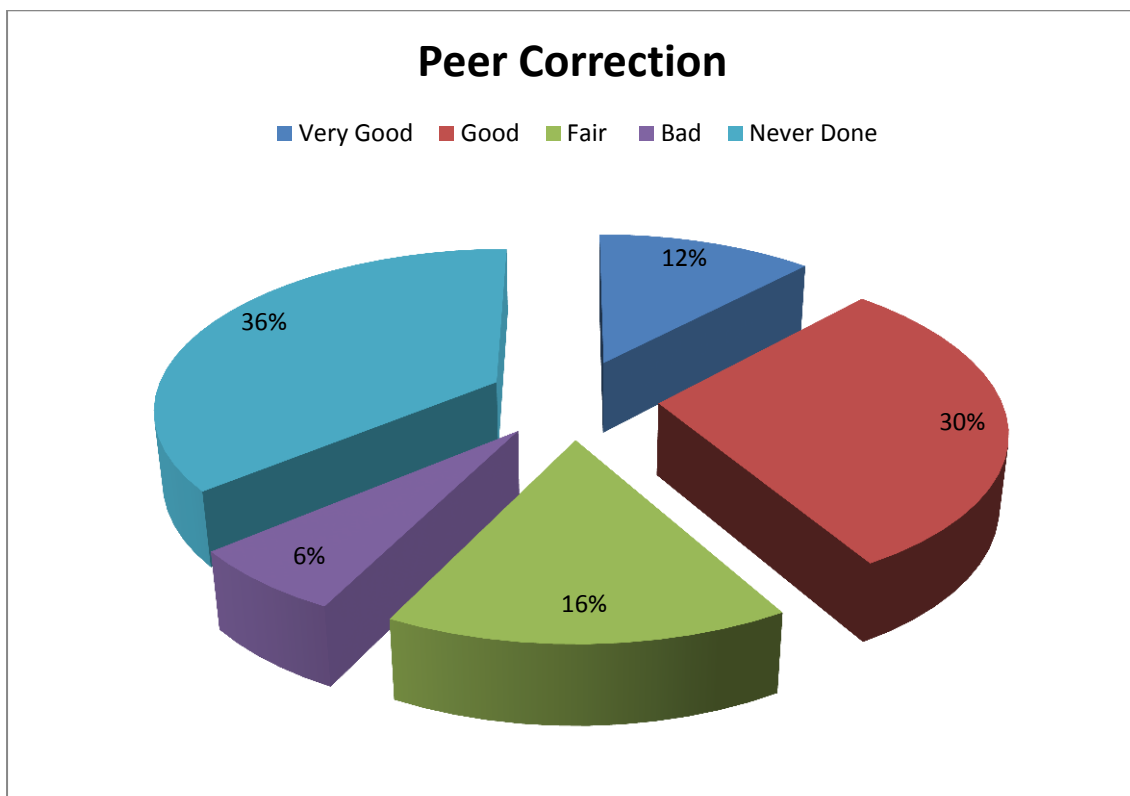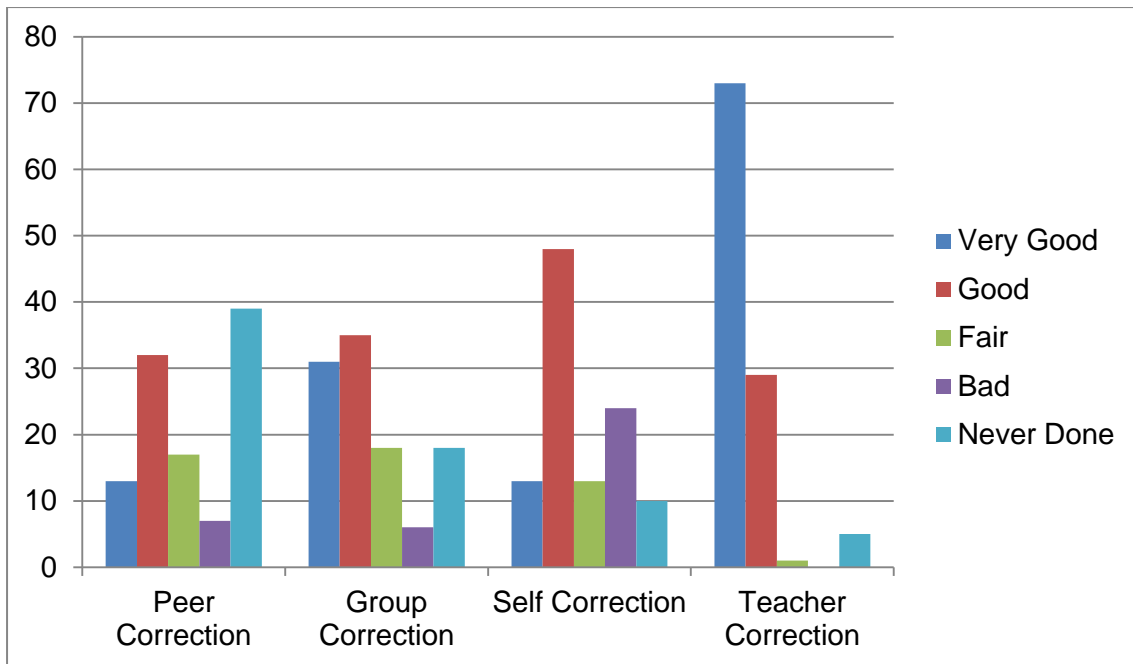
3.1.2 Part 1: Procedure

Two teachers were involved in the present work- one was in charge of three courses and the other of four courses respectively. They told each group of students from 1st to 5th year what they were expected to do and explained briefly what each technique consisted of. The students were also told that the survey was anonymous and in order to prevent misunderstandings, the information was given in Spanish.Each student had to copy the chart from the board and complete it according to their preferences for each error correction technique. Then the teacher gathered all the surveys and classified the learners' judgement for each type of error correction technique.
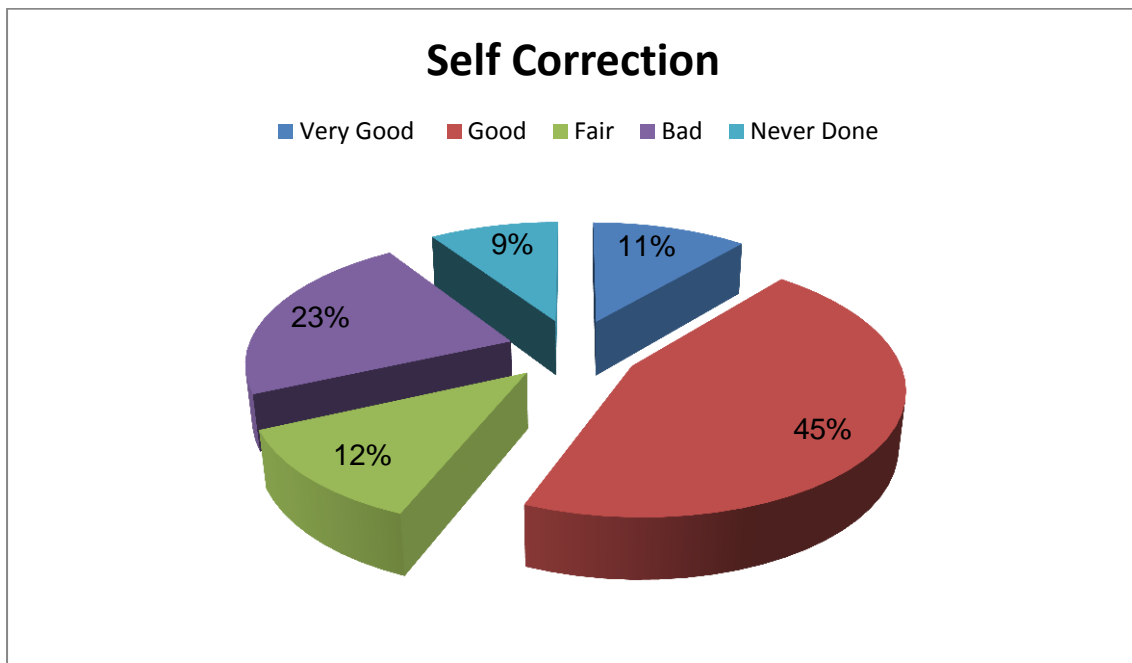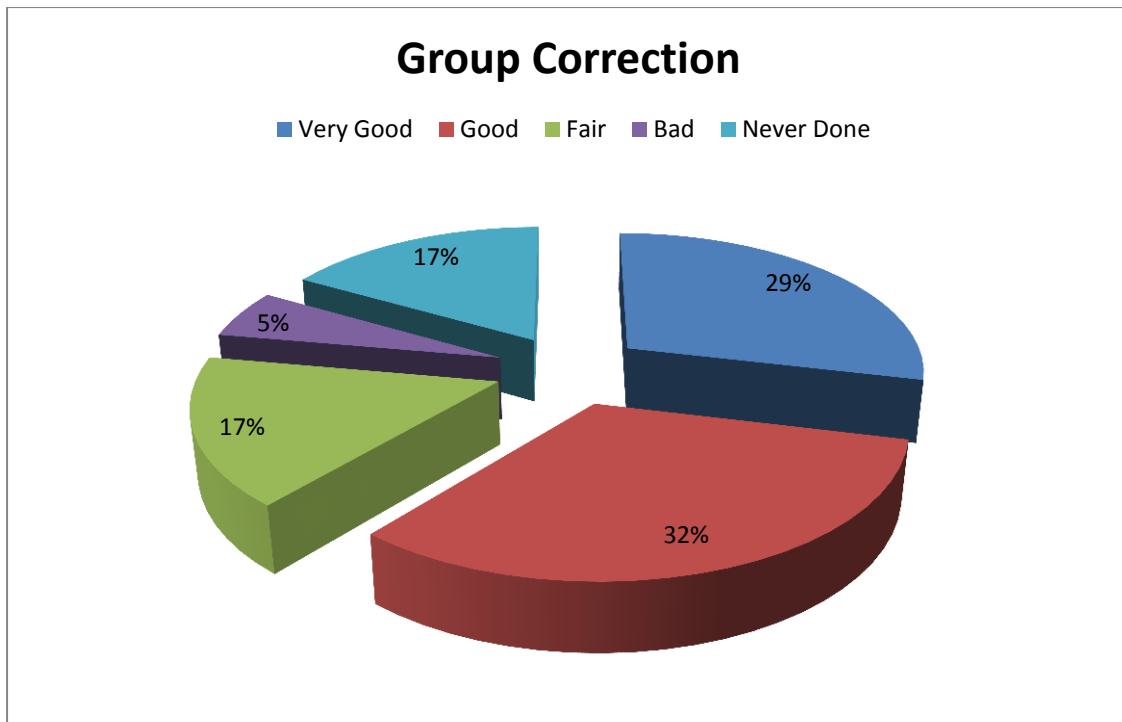
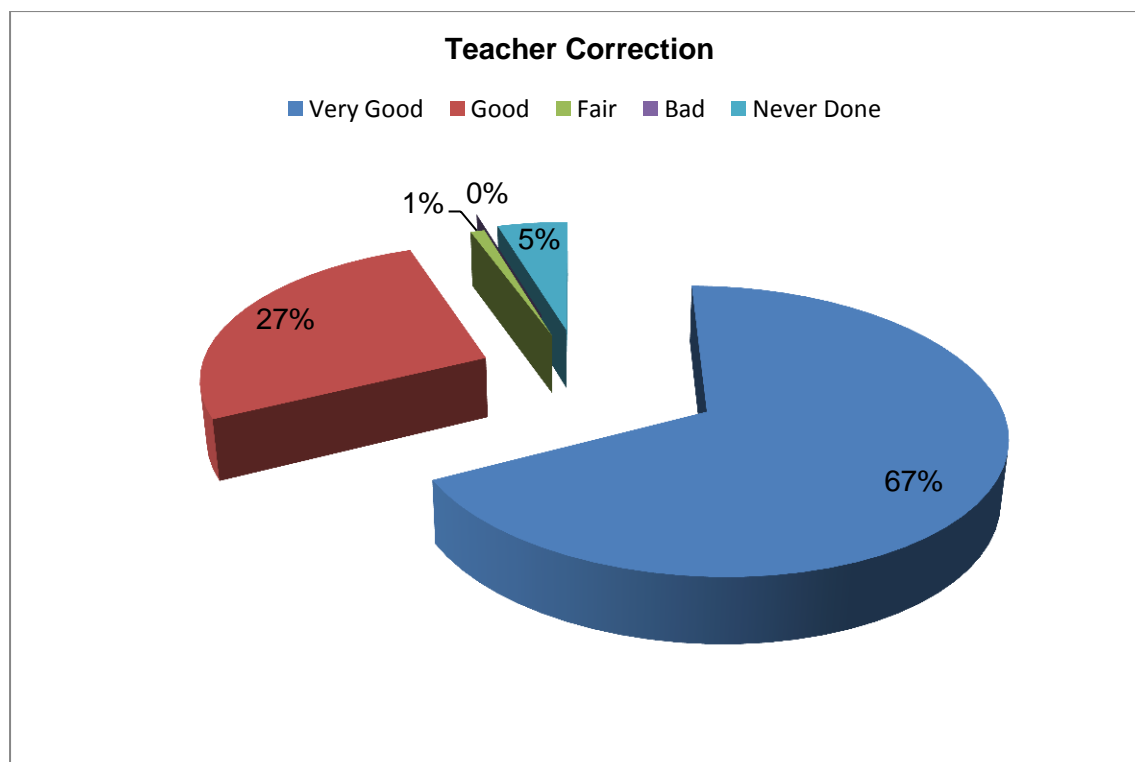Graph showing students' evaluation/perception of error correction techniques from 1st year to 5th year.

Year 2013

Group Correction

Very Good ■ Good ■ Fair ■ Bad ■ Never Done

29%
32%
17%
5%
17%

Self Correction

Very Good ■ Good ■ Fair ■ Bad ■ Never Done

11%
45%
12%
23%
9%

Teacher Correction

■ Very Good ■ Good ■ Fair ■ Bad ■ Never Done

1% 0%
5%
27%
67%

3.2 Analysis of Data

As the graphs show, the majority of the students, with 67%, preferred teacher correction, followed by peer correction, with 36% and group correction with 29%. Self-correction had the lowest preference with only 9% of students rating it as very good.
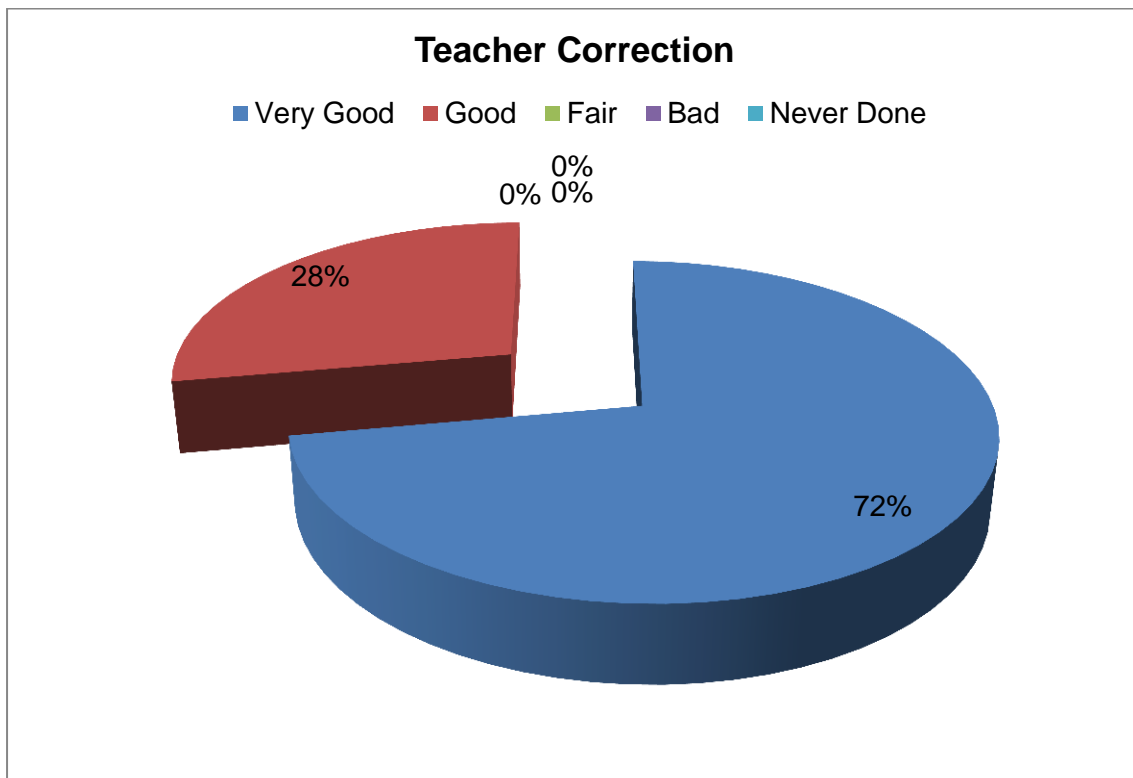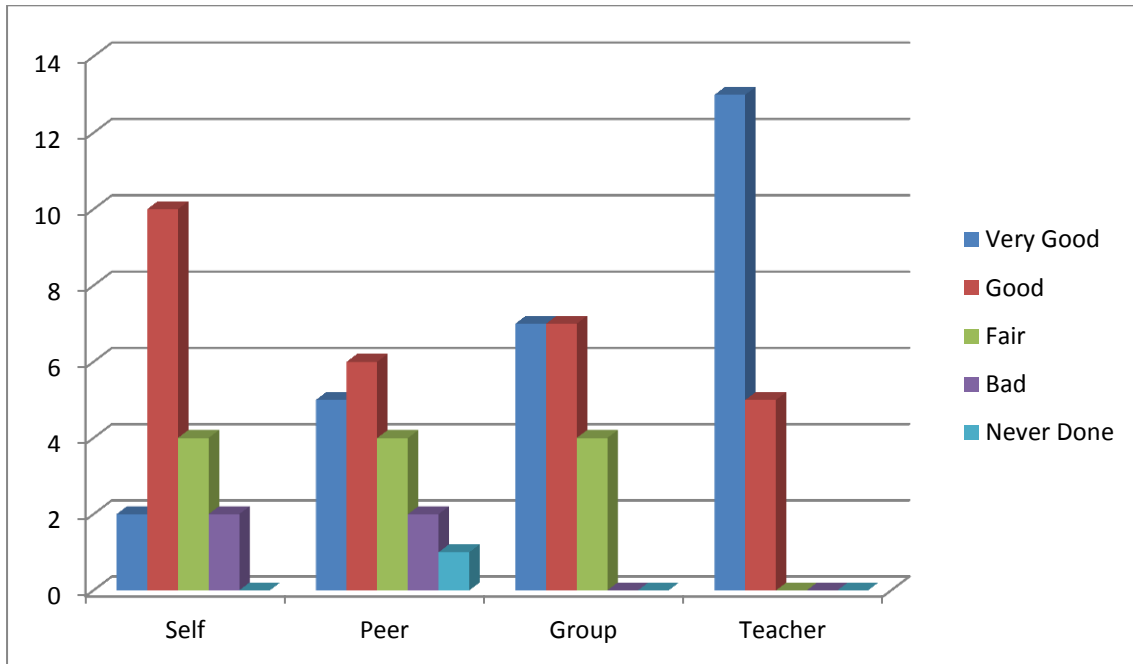
When asked if making mistakes was beneficial or not, some learners expressed that they learned through errors. They regarded their deviant productions as learning tools which also helped them become more active participants in their learning process. Even though group correction ranked in the third place, some students felt in an awkward position as not all of them took part in the correction activity or did not make the corrections properly.
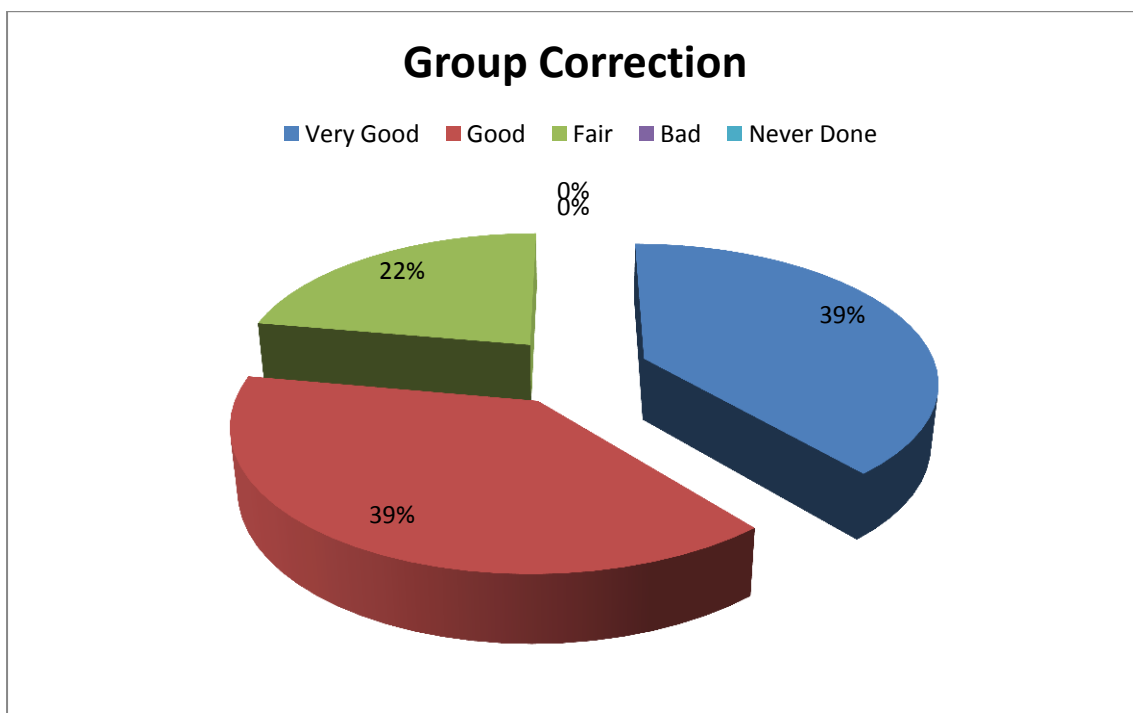
The great majority of the learners believed that teacher correction was the most beneficial one as they considered the teacher the one who `knows´. But they also pointed out that sometimes teachers lack the knowledge needed because they do not have the appropriate required teacher training skills.

In order to know whether age is an important factor to be considered at the moment of checking if learners change their ranking of the error correction techniques from one year to the next, the same group of students that in 2013 was attending 3rd year, in 2014 took part of an activity and evaluated the different error correction techniques once again.

4th Year 2014

Peer Correction

■ Very Good ■ Good ■ Fair ■ Bad ■ Never Done

28%

33%

22%

11%

6%

Group Correction

■ Very Good ■ Good ■ Fair ■ Bad ■ Never Done

0%
0%

39%

39%

22%

Students were revising tenses- present and past- and had to complete some sentences either with present perfect simple or simple past. They worked and practiced the different error correction techniques.

The majority of the learners, with 72%, valued teacher correction technique as Very Good. 56% considered self-correction technique as Good. Group correction occupied the 3rd place with 39% that valued it as Very Good and peer correction closed the survey with 33% ranking it as Good.

As regards *peer correction* technique, they did not feel at ease with this type of correction because they rejected the idea of being corrected by their equals. Some even complained saying "My mate has no authority to correct me" or "I do not think that I am being corrected correctly". Last year students did not dislike the idea of Peer correction as they did this year. Most of them preferred *teacher correction* technique followed by *group correction* technique -the former was regarded as the most reliable one.Their option for self-correction technique changed with the course of time, i.e.: it changed from 9% of acceptance to 56%, which means that as they grew older they became more self-confident and capable of recognising and correcting their erroneous work.

3.2.1 Part 2

The following are some of the activities carried out by the different groups of students using different error correction techniques-not all of them had the experience of applying the different error correction techniques before.

A) A group of students from 1st B year was preparing for a written test on Present Simple Tense. They were suggested to practice using the educational site *agendaweb.org*. They could check the exercises, thus *self-correction* technique was put into practice. The class before the test the teacher wrote sentences with mistakes about Present Simple of to Be on the board, and a *group correction* technique was performed successfully, with students really involved in their learning process- the sentences were provided by a girl who studied practicing with the above mentioned page and who could not understand the mistakes she had made.

B) The teacher brought to a group from 1st A a set of pictures to practice speaking and writing activities. Students worked in pairs and each pair chose randomly a card. They had to speak about the chosen picture and then write about it. After both activities were finished, the teacher collected the pieces of writing and distributed to a different pair of students who had to correct their mates' written production. At the end of the day, there was a group activity reflecting upon each error correction technique that had been used.

C) The following productions include some of the moves mentioned in 2.5 FEEDBACK. They were done by students attending 2nd year . They had to give an oral assignment explaining some units from their coursebook. The teacher took down notes and once they had finished with the exposition she gave each of them the corresponding feedback, first to the group and then individually.

S: Because she *like* it.

T: Because she *likes* it? With raising intonation, teacher's repair/ rephrase

S: Because she *likes* it.   Student's uptake/recast

S: … depend the ending

T: Depending on…   The teacher begins the repair and the learner finishes it

S: Yes, depending on the verb ending

S1: He isn't play tennis.

S2: The "s" is missing.

S1: No, because you've got "isn't".

None of the students was sure about the rule for the Present Continuous – to be+ -ing

S: … *and* is used when comparing similar ideas.

T: Comparing or joining?

   The student did not answer.

S (speaking about clothes): To use a hat

T: In Spanish we have the verb *usar* for clothes and for objects as well, e g: Uso la computadora / I use the computer; uso un vestido / I wear a dress, whereas in English there are two verbs, to wear for clothes and to use for objects - this type of error has to do with a faulty cross- association between the L1 and the target language.

D) A group of students attending 1st year had the following dictation about Charlie and the Chocolate Factory (see Appendix for the original copy). They practised self and peer correction. The teacher also corrected the dictations. Neither peer nor self-correction led the students to have a whole picture of their mistakes. Most of them could not recognize their erroneous sentences. It was the teacher's correction the one that helped them see and understand the mistakes made

Friday 3rd, October. 1

• Written test

7th / 10th, November

From page 4 to page 33

52, 53, 56, 57

Oral assignment

Charlie 15th / 17th, November

★ Play to be confirmed

Dictation : summary : Charlie and the chocolate
factory

Charlie Bucket lives in a small house with his
family, in a very poor house. His four grandparents
live in the house too. They are very, very old. They only
eat cabbage and potato soup too. His father works in a
toothpaste factory, but one day he is fired.
You can see the biggest chocolate factory in the world ★
The owner is Willie Wonka, the greatest chocolate
maker in the world. Unfortunately he closes the

doors of the factory and his workers go home. [He is] H
enemies steal his secret recipes and made a lot of
money.

One day, on his way to school, Charlie sees a big
notice about Willie Wonka's Chocolate: "Five golden tickets
are wrapped inside five chocolate bars. The prize is to spend
a whole day in the factory". There is a special price that
nobody knows what it is about. Charlie has very few
possibilities of winning: he eats a chocolate once a year, birthday,
possibilities   birthday

★ in Charlie's town

Monday 6th, October
birthday

His parents give him his birthday present but
the golden ticket is not there. His grandpa
another
gives him money to buy and other chocolate
bar. But, once again, the ticket is not there.

One day, Charlie finds a note in the snow. He
rushes to a kiosk and buys a Wonka bar and...
He finds the golden ticket! Charlie is the
fifth winner.
their
The children and there families meet at the

entrance of the Factory. Augustus with his mum,
Violet with her mom, Veruca with her father,
Mike with his father and Charlie with his
grandpa, get into the Factory.

I Inside the Factory. Willie Wonka shows his guests
the different ⑤ rooms and they can eat sweet
things.

But, one by one, the children() live leave Charlie along above.
Mike, Veruca, Agustus and Violet behave badly.
To his great surprise, Charlie is the winer.
Willie Wonka tells Charlie about the special
price: Charlie is Willie's heir and the Factory belongs
to Charlie. The little boy can not believe his
ears!!!

At the end of the day, Charlie, his family and
Willie all live happily together in the Bucket's' house
inside the Factory.

4. CONCLUSION

Although teachers are ideally expected to provide accurate assessments of their students' performance, students can also be extremely successful at monitoring and judging their own language production. Student self-assessment is bound up with the whole matter of learner autonomy. Addressing the teachers Brown (2001:68) advises: "Try to get students to self-corrected errors; the ability to self-correct may indicate readiness to use that form correctly and regularly".

Error correction is regarded as conducive to foreign language acquisition in a classroom atmosphere that benefits learning and favours the learners to feel freer to experiment with the language regardless of the errors that may be made.The nature of the teacher's feedback differs widely among teachers and classes of errors, and it depends on such factors as courses, objectives, assignments objectives, individual expectations, strengths and weaknesses and attitude toward learning.

During communicative tasks, teachers should not interrupt students to point out a grammatical, lexical or pronunciation error, as the train of thought may be cut, focusing on language form and accuracy rather than on communication. The language teacher should help his/her learners to gain self-confidence and overcome their weaknesses, especially at the beginning stages of the learning process, in a friendly comprehensible low anxiety atmosphere. He/She should also provide feedback to their ill-formed structures in a supportive manner, always reminding them the concept that errors and mistakes naturally happen when learning a foreign language. In this context, learners may feel cared and backed by their knowledgeable teacher and encouraged to use the language more confidently. All the same, if the teacher provides a delayed correction it may mislead the learner to understand that his/her erroneous work is correct.

Teachers should train their students to become active participants and correct themselves, so they can be more confident and less teacher dependant. In Harmer's words

Teacher's treatment of errors can be either explicit or implicit correction. The former case implies a detailed, direct correction, the teacher provides his/her learners with exact forms or structures of their erroneous productions; the latter implies an indirect correction, the teacher indicates the presence of errors providing some sort of clues with the intention of peer or self- correction.

At the moment of error correction teachers have to bear in mind not only what type of mistake was made but also how to provide a gentle correction to avoid discouraging students in their attempts to use the target language. The affective impact of error correction

depends on the learners' proficiency level, i.e. for good hard-working students it can have a positive effect, whereas for the low-achievers it may cause a negative effect. Teachers need to develop intuition, through experience, for ascertaining which teaching error technique is most suitable for each group of learners, depending on the teaching objectives.

As far as the the percentages obtained in the present work, the survey shows that, contrary to Edge's preference for self-correction, the learners participants are still teacher dependant. They agreed with Rollinson who supports the belief that in many cases neither teacher nor students recognise the usefulness of peer feedback and consider teacher correction as the only authoritative one.

As regards *affect,* it played a negative role in shaping learners' attitude toward error correction when correction came from the students themselves- their affective filter was high.Some even said that the corrections provided by their mates were not always taken into account by the corrected learner. They even complained that it was always the same students who did participate in the oral group correction and felt frustrated at being pointed out their difficulties and limitations by their classmates, developed a sense of inferiority and felt that 'Bullying' was exercised on them.

Finally, age also played its part in determining learners' evaluation of the error correction techniques. It confirmed that during two running years teacher correction technique remained in first place. Their opinion about Self-correction technique changed as learners grew older,i.e.: they identified more with this technique, whereas peer correction was no longer accepted.

We can conclude by saying that it would be convenient to keep on working on the concept of student self-assessment and providing suitable learning situations that may encourage learner autonomy since, if we, teachers, can guide them to reflect upon their own learning, we may be equipping our students with a powerful tool for future language development.

APPENDIX

Dictation: Summary of Charlie and the Chocolate Factory- 1st Year

Correction Symbol Key

Sample Survey

APPENDIX

Dictation: Charlie and the Chocolate Factory

Charlie Bucket lives in a small poor house with his family. His four grandparents live in the house, too. They are very, very old. They only eat cabbage and potato soup. His father works in a toothpaste factory but one day he is fired.

You can see the biggest chocolate factory in the world in Charles' town. The owner is Willy Wonka, the greatest chocolate maker in the world. Unfortunately, he closes the doors of the factory and his workers go home. His enemies steal his secret recipes and make a lot of money.

One day on his way to school, Charlie sees a big notice about Willy Wonka's chocolate: five golden tickets are wrapped inside five chocolate bars. The prize is to spend a whole day in the factory. There is a special prize that nobody knows what it is about. Charlie has very few possibilities of winning: he eats a chocolate once a year, for his birthday.

His parents give him his birthday present but the golden ticket is not there. His grandpa gives him money to buy another chocolate bar. But, once again, the ticket is not there.

One day Charlie finds a note in the snow. He rushes to a kiosk and buys a Wonka bar and... HE FINDS THE GOLDEN TICKET!! Charlie is the fifth winner.

The children and their families meet at the entrance of the factory. Augustus with his mum, Violet with her mum, Veruca with her father, Mike with his father and Charlie with his grandpa get into the factory.

Inside the factory Willy Wonka shows his guests the different rooms and they can eat sweet things. But, one by one, the children leave Charlie alone. Mike, Veruca, Augustus and Violet behave badly. To his great surprise, Charlie is the winner. Willy Wonka tells Charlie about the special prize: Charlie is Willy's heir and the factory now belongs to Charlie. The little boy cannot believe his ears!!

At the end of the day, Charlie, his family and Willy all live happily in the Buckets' house inside the factory.

ERROR CORRECTION TECHNIQUE SURVEY

	A	B	C
1		Teacher Correction	
2	Very Good		
3	Good		
4	Fair		
5	Bad		
6	Never Done		
7			
8			
9			

4th Year 2014

	A	B	C
1		Teacher Correction	
2	Very Good	13	
3	Good	5	
4	Fair	0	
5	Bad	0	
6	Never Done	0	
7			
8			
9			
10			

Correction Symbol Key

W.O.: Word Order

SP. :Spelling

V.T.: Verb Tense

S-V. A.: Subject- Verb Agreement

^ Missing Word/s

H.: Homophony

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