

## The Important Role of Teachers' Feedback during Speaking Activities in Moroccan Classes

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### Abstract

Throughout the teaching/learning process of speaking, a teacher's role is believed to hold great importance. Teachers initiate learners to the whole learning process, and their feedback constitutes the significant step forward that triggers learners towards enunciating a language. As an illustration, Swain (1985, 2000) uses empirical evidence to show the importance of teacher's feedback during the production of speaking. Relatable to feedback during oral activity are issues that highlight teachers' pronunciation, fluency, body language, facial expressions, and error correction during the production phase. To identify these areas, the current article used students' questionnaires. The general aim is to gauge learners' perceptions, practices and problems. Results highlight the pivotal teachers' role in the whole process. Therefore, the specific aim of this study is to investigate the role of teachers' feedback during speaking activities in Moroccan classes. Results show that interaction enhancement and negotiation density do indeed establish the interconnection between accuracy and fluency. Some speech strategists and specialists have already demonstrated how instruction and the way teachers provide feedback do play a major role in learners' speaking skills including the need for a contrary evidence.

**Key words:** feedback, learners' perceptions, Moroccan classes, speaking activity, teachers' role

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### 1. Empirical studies on teachers' feedback

It is with the introduction of Swain's concept of 'comprehensible output' that the idea of 'being pushed up' has paved the way for more research on the area of teacher-student feedback. Swain (2008, pp. 471-484) reports Mackey's (2002) experiment, which showed that students' perception of being pushed is highest when the feedback comes from the teacher. Reporting Mackey's findings in that area, Swain registers that the fact that learners received teachers' feedback made the students establish *modifications* to suit their interlocutors with varying degrees according to the setting, type of interaction and whether they interact with native speakers or non-native speakers.

Taking into account these findings, Swain, (2008) concludes that: "the students' perception of being '*pushed*' is '*highest*' when the feedback comes from the teacher and that it is '*least*' when it comes from a nonnative speaking peer". (p. 473) These empirical findings show the importance of teachers' feedback in the classroom in pushing students to make more repair or modification in their speaking which results in fluency and density of *negotiation*.

Joining this idea, Williams (2008, pp. 684-691) points out that the main virtue of negotiation is focused on both form and meaning or the establishment of the form-meaning connection. She refers to the distinction set by Lyster (1998) between *the mediation of purpose* and the *negotiation of form*. The latter is usually initiated by the teacher and in this case message comprehensibility is not the problem, instead it is the different forms of *feedback* on an error in message form. However, this implies that the *negotiation of style* is a problematic process. Practically, teachers' input on message form is of utmost significance for students who need contrary evidence to correct their errors in the form, which helps them establish the link with the meaning.

Correspondingly, an important issue concerning the validity of teachers' rectifications of the errors learners make is at hand. Williams argues that not all errors pointed out by teachers will be rectified or at least recognized as such by learners. Lyster and Ranta (1997), as Williams reports, distinguish among various types of feedback. On the other hand, Murano (2000), as Williams explains, suggests a particular feedback technique to help increase accuracy. It is described as a "*pedagogical technique that interconnects input and output enhancement*", Williams, (2008) explains this technique as follows:

.... in response to TL (teacher language) use, the teacher repeated learners' output, helping to confirm learners' hypotheses. In response to non-target like output, the teacher requested repetition, and if necessary, recast learner output. Muranoi found this technique effective in increasing accuracy... (p. 685)

Like Swain, Williams also holds that "modifications of learner output toward the target language by the intervention of an interlocutor/teacher" are effective as a method of providing concentrated feedback on form. She calls them 'recasts' and qualifies them as 'a subset of feedback' (p.685). According to Williams, this is true either in experimental studies (Braid, 2002; Mackey & Philip, 1998; Long, & Robinson, 1998; Ortega, 1999), or in classroom studies (Ayoun, 2001; Doughty & Varela, 1998).

These experimental studies, according to Williams, show the efficiency of recasts and interaction enhancement used by teachers. The teachers did not just reformulate the utterance but also used “*emphatic and rising intonation in their repetition of the learner error*” (p.685), highlighting thus the learners' error before providing the accurate forms, which made their feedback less ambiguous.

In an attempt to establish a compromise or a link between form and meaning and basing her argument on a FonF (Focus on Form) approach to language, Williams (2008, p. 686) adheres to the belief that learners need to recognize the gap between their production and the teachers' language. To do that, they have to notice the teachers' response as being corrective increasing, therefore, their need for a clearly signaled contrary evidence. Based on the above -mentioned studies, this becomes absolutely crucial to speaking situations in second language (L2) classes.

## 2. Research Question

Basing on above- evoked studies, the current article investigates the important role of teachers' feedback in an attempt to answer the following research question:  
“What are students' responses and perceptions about teachers' role and feedback in Moroccan secondary school classes?”

## 3. Methodology

In the human sciences, in addition to pure experimental research, many adaptations of exploratory models, called quasi-experimental, non-experimental or diverse designs have been developed. The nature of the present article required the adoption of a mixed design. Thus, two hundred (200) students' questionnaires have been issued. The students' questionnaire was used to attempt at gauging learners' perceptions, practices and problems. This is done through multiple assumptions that need to be tested using statistical analysis basing on SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences).

For quantitative data analysis, since chi-square test is a statistical test commonly used to compare observed data with expected data, it is used to test the Goodness-Of -Fit (Macfarland, 1998) for the multiple hypotheses. The Chi-Square tests do imply and are analyzed through:

- (a) Determining the chi-square value to see whether it is received by mere chance or that other factors do interfere. The chi-square value represents the degree of interference, so the higher the cost, the higher the degree of obstruction.
- (b) Determining the critical p value (the percent probability divided by 100) that a specific chi-square value was obtained by chance alone. In studies similar to the present one, the p- value means the probability that the observed results deviate from the expected results due to random variation in the sampling process.

Concerning the significance level, the present study has set a .05 p level. Therefore, all levels found less than this level  $< .05$  are reported significant, and those beyond that level  $> .05$  are reported insignificant.

#### 4. Students' sample

The students chosen as a sample for this study come from different schools in the academy of Rabat-Salè-Zemmour-Zaer area and belong to three different educational levels including common core, first year and second -year baccalaureate. Taking into account the fact that the new sub-categorization of programs includes fourteen branches, the sample has been selected from the two broadest ones, namely literary and science without specific sub-categorization of the two.

The sample included both male and female students covering age categories ranging from 15 to 21 years. The following table shows information related to the learners' number, gender, educational level and age range in more detail.

Table 1. *Demographic information on learners*

Educational level/profile	Nu	Gender		Age range						
		Mal	Femal	15	16	17	18	19	20	21
Common core literary	40	17	23	19	12	6	3	0	0	0
Common core science	39	21	18	22	14	3	0	0	0	0
First year science Bac	30	16	14	0	21	6	2	1	0	0
First year literary Bac	33	15	18	0	19	9	3	1	0	0
Second year science	28	13	15	0	0	15	9	2	1	1
Second year literary	30	14	16	0	0	16	10	2	2	1
	20	96	104	41	66	55	27	6	3	2
		48	52	20	33	27	13	3		1

Approximately an equal gender proportion is reported in the current research paper. The group is composed of (104) females versus (96) males. The reason behind this situation is a remarkable higher/growing rate of female presence in the secondary as has been registered. The table also shows that a right proportion of learners' age category is fixed at sixteen to seventeen years (60.5%) totaling 33% aged 16 and 27.5% aged 17. A growing population (20.5%) of students aged just 15 is recognized while the least age category proportion is aged 20 to 21 with a percentage estimated at only (2.5%).

All three secondary educational levels have contributed to this research, as table 1 demonstrates. Since oral activity is a long process that needs to be improved through both knowledge building and skill- building, samples from all three levels have been represented. This was done to engage learners who have developed several observations throughout their learning process including all levels. Finally, on the whole, both science and literary students have been represented in this research with approximately equal student frequency proportions (science= 97; literary= 103)

### 5. Results on Students' responses on teachers' role and feedback

The following tables report results related to students' perceptions of teachers' role and feedback during a speaking activity in its multi-task dimension. This part includes students' perceptions of their teachers' characteristics, including language use, behavior towards students' mistakes, use of praising or rewards, etc. as shown below. The following table is a compilation from the different chi-square tests run on this item of students' questionnaire. It consists of the different values registered throughout:

Table 2. *Students' responses on teachers' role and feedback*

During speaking activities :	A	U	S	R	N	M	T	q	p
1. T fluent speaker	131 65.5%	28 14.4%	14 7%	10 5%	11 5.7%	6 3%	200 100	776 100	.000
2. T pronunciation is good.	161 80.5%	20 10%	6 3%	9 4.5%	3 1.5%	1 0.5%	200 100	796 100	.000
3. Teaches you how English words are pronounced	110 55%	38 19%	30 15%	10 5%	11 5.5%	1 0.5%	200 100	796 100	.000
4. T makes you listen to native speakers or meet them	22 11%	25 12.5%	35 17.5%	13 6.5%	100 50%	5 2.5%	200 100	780 100	.000
5. T teaches you how to pronounce new words in English	87 43.5%	42 21%	41 20.5%	14 7%	15 7.5%	1 0.5%	200 100	796 100	.000
6. T facial expressions/ body gestures user	103 51.5%	40 20%	35 17.5%	11 5.5%	5 2.5%	6 3%	200 100	776 100	.000
7. T prompter	83 41.5%	53 26.5%	40 20%	19 9.5%	2 1%	3 1.5%	200 100	788 100	.000
8. T explainer of unfamiliar words	90 45%	38 19%	36 18%	18 9%	13 6.5%	5 2.5%	200 100	780 100	.000
9. T interrupter ( to correct your mistakes)	112 56%	33 16.5%	20 10%	14 7%	16 8%	5 2.5%	200 100	780 100	.000
10. T uses St' names and pays attention	91 45.5%	46 23%	26 13%	16 8%	18 8.5%	3 1.5%	200 100	788 100	.000
11. T is always at the center of the activity	39 19.5%	36 18%	56 28%	31 15.5%	33 16.5%	5 2.5%	200 100	788 100	.000
12. T encourages you to talk even when you make mistakes	124 62%	22 11%	18 9%	9 4.5%	20 10%	7 3.5%	200 100	780 100	.000
13. T pays attention to the best students only	25 12.5%	13 6.5%	30 15%	41 20.5%	82 41%	9 4.5%	200 100	764 100	.000
14. T does not give much time to spk skills	16 8%	18 9%	40 20%	27 13.5%	92 46%	7 3.5%	200 100	772 100	.000
15. T laughs at St spk	14 7%	16 8%	15 7.5%	11 5.5%	141 70.5%	3 1.5%	200 100	788 100	.000
16. T praises or rewards St who talk	79 39.5%	46 23%	39 19.5%	18 9%	15 7.5%	3 1.5%	200 100	788 100	.000
17. T helps you spk	114 57%	45 22.5%	20 10%	11 5.5%	7 3.5%	3 1.5%	200 100	788 100	.000

18. T does not prevent students from laughing at each other	30 15%	19 9.5	35 17.5	17 8.5	89 44.5	10 5%	200 100	760	.000
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\*p<.05 (all cases) ; \* q= 776; 796; 796; 780; 796; 776; 788; 780; 780; 788; 788; 780; 764; 772; 788; 788; 788; 760 (respectively)

Students' perceptions of teachers' role and feedback reveal highly significant values related to pronunciation. As items 2, 3, five show, estimations of students' perceptions record that teachers do pronounce English well and do initiate students to how words are marked with a p high value (.000) obtained for all these items. On the other hand, the top p values obtained (p=.000) along with their corresponding high q values emphasize the pivotal role teachers play during speaking activities. This is particularly true concerning positive reinforcement (q=788), non-verbal communication (q= 776) and prompting (q=788).

Very significant results also relate to teachers' feedback on errors. Therefore, students believe teachers do help them speak (q=780), use their names (q=788), do not interrupt them to correct their mistakes (q= 780) and do encourage them to talk even when they commit mistakes (q=780).

## 6. Discussion and pedagogical implications

Both the quantitative and the qualitative findings pinpoint to teachers' role as being highly significant regardless of how long they have been teaching. In sum, for teaching experience particularly, hypotheses related to waiting time instruction and thanking have registered slightly higher deviations for the less than ten years of teaching experience. Given these results, further investigation of this issue involving more extensive samples of teachers should be conducted in the Moroccan English as a foreign language (EFL) classes.

It is essential, however, to mention that results linked to the initial RQ (research question) and regardless of teaching experience have corroborated other findings showing the importance of the teachers' role given the high significance values obtained for both quantitative and qualitative results. All items relating to the teacher's role, particularly in the area of feedback have registered high significance repeatedly. These results match with those of previous research on this issue.

Thus, Swain's findings concerning French immersion learners, for instance, revealed the same importance for teachers' role. For Swain (1985, 2000, 2008), it is output that pushes learners to process language more deeply. She uses the concept of 'comprehensible output', which implies the underlying idea of 'pushing up' learners to produce more output through negotiation. A question worth raising here is: "to what extent can the present study results corroborate Swain's notion of comprehensible output?" Answer to this question needs further research in the area of teacher-student feedback or interaction in the Moroccan EFL context.

An attempt to reply to this question through the findings in the present study will necessitate grounding argument on Swain's investigation (2008:471-484) Swain reports Mackey's (2002) empirical findings which retained that students' perception of being pushed is highest when the feedback comes from the teacher. Swain, in this instance, advocates the necessity to push learners to produce messages that are not only coherent and appropriate but also linguistically correct. The

relevance of these results to the present study refer to both appropriateness and accuracy. In the same respect, the Moroccan learners included in the current research have identified form-negotiation as one of the factors impacting the speaking skill at the level of repair more particularly.

Henceforth, the pertinence to Swain's findings is undeniable especially as she registers that learners receiving teachers' feedback or what she identifies as being pushed up made the students bring modifications to suit their interlocutors with varying degrees according to the setting, the type of interaction and whether they interact with native or nonnative speakers. More clearly, research on this area may refer to peer correction during repair more particularly. Swain retained that "the students' perception of being pushed is highest when the feedback comes from the teacher her/himself and that it is least when it comes from a nonnative speaking peer."

## 7. Conclusion

These empirical findings emphasize the importance of teachers' feedback in the classroom in pushing students to make more repair or modifications in their vocal performance, which results in a density of negotiation.

In conclusion, current article shows the pertinence of teachers' feedback in the classroom particularly when pushing students to make modifications in their responses. This results in improving performance and intensifying negotiation

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