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Error Treatment in EFL S-CMC Tasks: An Analysis of Corrective Feedback

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This research is a classroom-based, exploratory and descriptive study to better understand how error treatment during communicative synchronous computer mediated communication (S-CMC) tasks in EFL classroom happens. 42 learners participated in S-CMC tasks, and their chatscripts were analyzed according to the error treatment sequence. Particularly, the analysis focused on the frequency distribution of the different error types, the availability of corrective feedback, uptake and repair, and the effects of corrective feedback. The findings support the idea, which has been demonstrated by preceding studies, that when language learning is solely experiential and focused on communicative success, some linguistic features may not develop to targetlike accuracy. In addition, this study shows that S-CMC may offer us great chances for error treatment in that learners' synchronous interactions are recorded. It emphasizes the role of language teachers, especially in a communicative EFL setting, and it suggests the need for the study to examine the post-treatment of errors in S-CMC tasks.

Recent research has extensively investigated error treatment in interactions that occur in the language classroom (Ellis & Loewen, 2001; Lyster, 1998a, 1998b; Mackey, Gass, & McDonough, 2000; Morris, 2005; Sheen, 2004; Williams, 1999). The error treatment sequence is usually coded as consisting of three parts: learner initial error, feedback, and learner uptake (Lyster, 1998b; Lyster & Ranta, 1997; Oliver, 1995, 1998, 2000).

In the process of giving feedback, the role of 'corrective feedback' has been the center of researches (Havranek, 2002; Lyster & Ranta, 1997; Sheen, 2004). The term 'corrective feedback' (CF) is used as an umbrella term to cover implicit and explicit negative feedback occurring in both natural conversational and instructional settings (Sheen, 2004). More recent research investigating the role of negative feedback and the relative effects of different types of corrective feedback in the context of language teaching (e.g., Doughty, 1994; Doughty & Varela, 1998; Han, 2001; Loewen, 2002; Lyster, 1998; Lyster & Ranta, 1997; Roberts, 1995; Seedhouse, 1997; Williams, 2001) has sometimes been more explanatory and experimental. Specific issues addressed in these classroom-based studies are as follows: at what point in classroom interaction teachers provide correction; types of errors teacher provides feedback on; types of CF teachers use; who provides CF; relationship between different types of learner errors and teachers' error correction; and the relationship between CF and learner response.

Of the studies dealing with error treatment and corrective feedback, there have been interests regarding the existence of corrective feedback in language classroom especially among learners except those of a teacher. For example, Morris (2005) argues that corrective feedback can give us important pedagogical and theoretical implications for classroom SLA only if classroom interaction makes corrective feedback available to learners, in a form that is usable and used by learners. In his remark, 'availability' can be the premise for corrective feedback in the process of error treatment. Although corrective feedback might have lots of benefits and roles in SLA, it must meet several criteria in advance: it has to exist, be useful, used by learner and necessary for acquisition to occur (Grimshaw & Pinker, 1989; Pinker, 1989). Beck and Eubank (1991) argued similarly about the 'universality' of corrective feedback. They say that the impact of interaction and feedback in SLA must be examined in different social and instructional contexts.

Regarding the error treatment in different context, Chaudron (1988) reports that the extent to which errors are corrected or ignored is contingent on the setting (e.g., ESL vs EFL) and teachers' pedagogical focus (e.g., grammar-

based vs. communication-based). Sheen (2004) indicates that variations arising in second/foreign language settings are related to differences in pedagogical focus. She explains that the more grammar is highlighted, the more frequent the error correction will be. She has investigated the corrective feedback and learner uptake which happen in error treatment across different instructional settings. Ellis et al. (2001) also emphasize the importance of taking the instructional context into account in this study area. Just as these studies show, to investigate the process of error treatment in different instructional setting has been one important issue for researchers. This study, following the needs of study, tries to investigate the process of error treatment during synchronous computer mediated communication (S-CMC) tasks in communicative EFL classroom. The setting for this study might reflect several important factors such as S-CMC environment, learners' proficiency level, communicative setting, and so on. The results will give us the insights and understanding of error treatment process in S-CMC tasks of communicative EFL classroom.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Errors in Different Contexts

Learners' errors have been analyzed in different language settings. According to the characteristics of the teaching context and the subjects, the distribution of error types may be diverse. A few studies dealing with the error types in different contexts are discussed here.

Swain and Carroll (1987) reported that the average number of errors observed in Grade 6 French immersion classes is 77.5 per 106 minutes. More frequent types of errors such as gender (22.1%), article (17.2%), and verbs (13.5%) represented categories unavoidable in classroom discourse. Netten (1991) showed that 37-66.9% of all learners' utterances were incorrect in Grade 1, 2, 3 French immersion classrooms. The differences in error rate existed among three classrooms and between low and high achieving learners.

Lyster and Ranta (1997) found that errors occurred in 34% of total learner turns at Grade 4 and 5. As seen in Netten (1991), errors rates varied among all 4 French immersion classrooms observed from 43% to 25%. In Japanese immersion classes, Mori (2000) presented the difference in the error rate between upper (i.e., Grades 3, 4, and 5) and lower (i.e., Kindergarten and Grade 2) grades. He reports that the error rate is higher in the lower grades (61%) that in the upper grades (43%). Based on these findings, approximately one third of learner utterances include an error in the immersion classroom.

As for the distribution of different error types, grammatical errors were found to be most frequently made by immersion learners, for example, 42% in French immersion Grades 8 and 9 in Chaudron (1986), 85.1% in French immersion Grade 6 in Swain and Carroll (1987), and 50% in Grade 4 and 5 levels of French immersion in Lyster (1998b). Mori (2000) also demonstrated that grammatical errors were most frequently observed (45%) in the upper grades in the Japanese immersion classroom. However, in the lower grades, the number of lexical errors consisted of more than two thirds of all the errors (74%).

The above research results show that the distribution of errors might vary at different contexts.

Corrective Feedback and Contexts

There can be several factors which affect the existence and patterns of corrective feedback. Several studies show the contextual factors that we should consider in understanding of corrective feedback.

Oliver (2000) examined the age factor in corrective feedback. In comparison of child and adult interactions, she found that children were more likely to use feedback than adult learners.

Mackey et al. (2003) examined the extent to which adult and child dyads differed in the amount of implicit negative feedback provided during task-based interaction. In their study, native speakers provided significantly more feedback than non-native speakers in adult dyads. There were no significant age differences in the amount of feedback.

Fidalgo-Eick (2001) investigated the corrective feedback in S-CMC environment. She explores differences in a Spanish chat room during the completion of tasks under two conditions: learner-to-learner (NNS/NNS) communication among non-native speakers, and learner-to-native-speaker (NNS/NS) communication. NNS-NNS dyads provided corrective feedback in less than one percent of the turns. The NS-NNS dyads provided slightly higher amounts of corrective feedback with 1.39% of all turns.

Morris (2005) examined the error treatment in child S-CMC tasks. He found that the instructional setting like immersion program which encourages the sole use of target language and peer interaction helped learners' interactions.

Though there have been studies examining the contextual factors and learner factors such as age, native/nonnative, there is no study specifically investigating the pattern of corrective feedback during S-CMC in communicative EFL classroom. The current study attempts to investigate this.

METHODOLOGY

The present study is classroom-based, exploratory and descriptive rather than experimental. Since it is a descriptive study, it must be viewed as a preliminary investigation of the error treatment in S-CMC tasks of instructional foreign language learning, and its results cannot necessarily be generalized.

Research Questions

The principal research question of this study is an analysis of the patterns of error treatment during CMC tasks in a communicative EFL classroom. This research question was investigated as follows:

1) What is the distribution of different error types?
2) Do learners in communicative EFL classroom give corrective feedback to errors in S-CMC tasks?
3) Do the learners demonstrate evidence of positive uptake immediately

following different types of corrective feedback?
4) Do the learners correct the indicated error in task repetition?

Participants

Data collection for this study was carried out at the C University in Korea in the fall of 2004. 42 Korean learners used the Daum[1] messenger or MSN messenger for the S-CMC activities. While learners are participating in chat discussions, corrective feedback could be given by fellow learners. All chat conversations held by learners are recorded, and these logs in class homepage give a transcript of learners' interactions just as seen in Figure 1.

FIGURE 1
Class Homepage

Task

Learners were given the jigsaw task of repairing bus tires. This task is from the study of Smith (2003), which examined the interaction of learners in S-CMC tasks. 'Jigsaw task' is chosen because it is known to trigger the most

[1] Daum Messenger is provided from the internet portal site 'daum.net' of Korea. Since the class homepage is given in 'daum café', the messenger of the same portal site is easily accessed.

negotiation of meaning among the several task types categorized by Pica et al. (1994). After the training session of text-chat, learners did the first jigsaw task, and they repeated the same task one week after that. The task repetition took a role of post-test to see the effects of corrective feedback. For this data analysis, these two times' jigsaw task chatscripts were used.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Error Types

The results showed 686 errors, coded as syntactic, lexical, or L1 use. Table 1 reveals the distribution of error types. Syntactic errors occupied the majority (508), lexical the next (168), and L1 use the least of all (8). The learners of this pilot study were mostly from the high-beginner to the low intermediate level, and errors were frequently found. Since the learners were asked to do English chatting, there were not many L1 uses. Yet, the syntactic errors such as subject-verb agreement, verb order, and plural forms were very common errors.

TABLE 1
Number and Percentage of Errors

Error Type	Frequency of Errors	Percentage
Syntactic	508	74%
Lexical	168	25%
L1 use	8	1.2%
Total	684	100%

The examples of each error type were as follows:

(1) Syntactic errors:

Are the boys who is crossing the street is the ones who pushed the other boys before they get on the bus?

I have people is getting on bus.

let keep it doing.

(2) Lexical errors:
and picture E says that a bad boy heat a girl!!
Plz Come down....

(3) L1 use:
That is 새치기..

The relatively high rate of errors could have resulted from both two reasons. It could result from the learners' English low proficiency level (learners' English proficiency were assessed in the pre-writing), and the 'synchronous' chatting where the interlocutors should send messages immediately. In a sense, this characteristic may offer us a great environment for language learning, since learners could see their errors which were shown in their synchronous output.

Corrective Feedback per Error Type

To the surprise, the rate of learner corrective feedback was extremely low. Corrective feedback was given to only 9 errors among the 684 errors. Table 2 shows the distribution of corrective feedback according to the different error types. Table 2 shows the rate at which each error type got corrective feedback: 0.3% for syntactic, 4.1% for lexical errors, and no feedback for L1 use. Of the total 9 corrective feedback, the rate at which lexical errors were corrected, occupied the majority.

TABLE 2
Rate of Feedback per Error Type

Error Types	Rate of feedback	Percentage
Syntactic	2/508	0.3%
Lexical	7/168	4.1%
L1 use	0/8	0%
Total	9/684	1.3%

This result needs to be analyzed more in detail by looking at the examples. The qualitative analysis could reveal what the statistical number itself may not explain, and it might help us to understand the reason why the rate of corrective feedback was so low.

First, the researcher found that the corrective feedback was given mostly when there was breakdown in communication. As it can be seen in table 1, there were hundreds of errors in this jigsaw task, but as long as the communication flows, learners would choose not to block it by correcting errors. In the next examples, although the interlocutors uttered errors, the partners did not indicate them as long as they could communicate. The responses were given very positively.

(4) A: we explain each pictures and we compare correct order.
B: I got it. thank you so much for your explaination....

(5) A: Boy is in the passing bus are pointing the boys on the bus in trouble.
B: that's it.

On the other hand, when there were some errors that could make some communication breakdown like the below examples, corrective feedback could be given by the partner.

(6) A: perhaps bad guy is a sling. (lexical error)
B: what is sling?

(7) A: Let me expect my picture. (lexical error)
B: explain?

(8) A: Next picture F is several people wait. (syntactic error)
B: Would you explain again?

(9) A: And student tade a bus in turn.
B: tade?

The above examples reveal that the corrective feedbacks appear in communication problems. Of course, we cannot conclude then corrective feedback follows only when the communication is blocked out. The feedback of the below examples are given not in such a blocked environment.

(10) A: the bus guys are coming to the bus stop.
B: for bus stop?

Nevertheless, when we consider the hundreds of examples that learners skipped and many errors which did not stop the communication, the researcher would like to advocate that the data shows us that one of the main traits that arise corrective feedback could be the communication breakdown rather than the error type itself. Examples (4) and (5) reveal that the interlocutors do not give corrective feedback to the apparent errors as far as he/she gets the meaning. Another evidence for this is shown in the corrective feedback distribution in two tasks. All the 9 corrective feedback were distributed only during the first jigsaw task, but not during the repeated task. In the repeated task, learners may not have the difficulties of communication since they repeat the same one, and it seems that this easiness of communication got rid of the learners' corrective feedback toward so many errors. The previous researches (Blake, 2000; Smith, 2003) indicated that 'lexical error' triggered negotiation of meaning the most. In this study, the researcher supports the idea that the reason why 'lexical errors' may elicit the most corrective feedback including negotiation is related to the weight of 'communication block' (Williams, 1999). This is also consistent with Chun (1994) who found that when miscommunication occurred, interactional moves were immediately forthcoming.

The Types of Corrective Feedback

The feedback moves were categorized according to three feedback types: explicit correction, recasts, and negotiation of form. Negotiation of form was

also divided into 4 categories such as clarification requests, metalinguistic feedback, elicitation, and repetition. Table 3 shows a comparison of the distribution of feedback types across different error types.

TABLE 3
Distribution of Errors Getting Feedback Across Feedback Types

Feedback Types		Corrective Feedback
Explicit correction		0
Recast		1
Negotiation of form	Clarification requests	2
	Metalinguistic feedback	0
	Elicitation	2
	Repetition	4

Just as seen in previous researches, learners tend not to give explicit correction. When considering Metalinguistic feedback could be a strong form of feedback, we could also confirm that the learners prefer implicit feedback. About its interpretation, the researcher would like to advocate the 'politeness strategy', especially in Korea EFL environment. Before discussing this principle, the close analysis of those examples shows us some characteristics.

(11) A: I troduce my picture to you...
B: introduce? (Recast)
A: Explain.. ^^;
B: I understand you, ^^

(12) A: And student tade a bus in turn.
B: tade? (Repetition)
A: take...
B: keep on. ^^

Following the 'repair', the interlocutor who gave corrective feedback tries to show that he/she is not in the upper position of the partner by mentioning some sympathizing remarks. The interlocutors are in the same social position

as students, and to give some explicit correction or too much strong corrective feedback might hurt the partner's 'face'. Particularly in Korea EFL environment where the learners are sensitive to their 'face', this phenomenon could be explained with the 'politeness strategy'.

The Rate of Repair

Regarding the rate of repair, of the nine feedback moves, five led to learner repair while the other four led to needs repair. Since the number of feedback is not that many, the percentage was not shown to avoid the over-generalization by the number.

TABLE 4
Uptake per Error Types

Error Type	The frequency of repair
Syntactic	1/2
Lexical	4/7
L1 use	0
Total	9

The examples of repair and needs repair are as follows:

(13) Repair:
A: making fool of the people in the bus.
B: making fool? what mean?
A: sorry. make a fool of. (repair)
B: you mean people fool one?
A: C is making a fool of the people. (repair)

(14) Needs repair:
A: Next picture F is several people wait
B: Would you explain again?
A: Did you understand? (needs repair)
B: Oh, I see.

It seems that, at least in this study, error types and rate of uptake do not seem to have close relationships. In regards to this issue, several other researches have also shown that there was not a strong or salient relation between these two, but we could not conclude here with this study only.

The Effect of Corrective Feedback

Whether the learner feedback lead to the successful acquisition or not was an important issue as was seen in the literature review. In this study, though the number of corrective feedbacks is not many, the relation between the corrective feedback and the acquisition is discussed with the task repetition data. Learners repeated the same task one week after the first task, and this task repetition data could give us some clues about the feedback and its correction in task repetition.

Among the errors indicated by corrective feedback, some did not appear in task repetition, some were shown in the corrected form, and some remained the non-targetlike form. The analysis is shown in Table 5.

TABLE 5
Errors and Task Repetition

Error	Task Repetition	Form
picture F is several people wait	did not appear	
expect	did not appear	
to the bus stop	did not appear	
sling	did not appear	
a punk on tire	did not appear	
troduce	troduce	non-targetlike form
tade	did not appear	
making fool of	make fool of	non-targetlike form
a puncture in a tire	did not appear	

In this study, the effect of feedback was not clearly shown. Though the data of the current study rarely show the effect of feedback, it is hazardous to conclude the effect of feedback. Rather, it would be safe to say that we

cannot absolutely trust the effect of corrective feedback. As can be seen in the above examples, learners repeated the same errors which were indicated by the interlocutor.

CONCLUSION AND PEDAGOGICAL IMPLICATIONS

The present study aimed to examine the patterns of error treatment during S-CMC tasks in the communicative EFL classroom. In particular, the analysis centered on the frequency distribution of the different error types, the availability of corrective feedback, uptake and repair, and the effects of corrective feedback.

The findings presented above correspond with those of some earlier studies demonstrating that the existence of corrective feedback is related to the contextual situation. In addition, the findings show that the success of corrective feedback in classroom foreign language learning can be influenced by situational and instructional factors.

Havranek (2002) argues that corrective feedback is most likely to be successful if the learner is able to provide the correct form when he/she is alert to the error. That is, he says that the learner must be ready for the correction in his learner language.

With respect to the error types, the students' low proficiency level and the characteristics of synchronous chatting may lead to the frequent errors categorized by syntactic, lexical errors, and L1 use. Of the 684 errors, the most frequent error type was syntactic errors accounting for 74%. The second most frequent error type was lexical error, and the use of L1 was found only 8 times (1.2%). A number of errors recorded in S-CMC tasks can give us the insight that synchronous text-chat reflects learners' errors quite well in two reasons. The reasons are that this is the immediate response between the two and their recorded interactions and errors could be invaluable data for language learning.

Identification of corrective feedback gave a result that only 9 errors of 684

got corrective feedback from the interlocutor. Corrective feedbacks were given only for the 7 lexical errors and 2 syntactic errors, and not for the L1 use. Further analysis of the data led to some insight into this phenomenon. The finding from the data is that no corrective feedback was given for the sentences which have lots of fatal syntactic and lexical errors, as long as the interlocutor understood what he/she intended to say, On the other hand, even for the seemingly trivial error, if that makes communication breakdown, interlocutor's corrective feedback is given in various forms. Another finding which was that there was no corrective feedback during the task repetition but only during the first task could support this assertion.

This is not a surprising result because Fidalgo-Eick (2001) has also shown a similar result in S-CMC tasks. In her study, there were 13 tokens found in the data offered from a NS to a NNS among 934 turns, with only 1 token in the NNS/NNS interaction among 768 turns. One logical reason for unavailability of corrective feedback could be found in studies of VanPatten (1990, 1996) and Williams (1999). VanPatten suggests that lower-level learners may not be able to focus on form to the same degree as the more proficient learners, because they may have enough to do to maintain communication. Another possible reason may be the communicative setting which does not emphasize the focus on form (Williams, 1999). In Ellis et al. (2001), they also said that the focus on form was not motivated by a felt need of learners, but by the instruction which paid attention to the form. In the purely communicative classroom, the corrective feedback might not be available.

When corrective feedback was categorized according to several criteria, explicit correction nor metalinguistic feedback could be found in all interactions. In this study, the learners seem to be careful to indicate other people's error directly because they are in the same social position, and they might not want to break this equal and intimate condition. The researcher's interpretation is more supported by the learner's reaction after the corrective feedback. In the examples, the learner tried to give immediate remarks showing that he/she is not in the upper position but in the same understanding like 'I understand you ^^', or 'keep on, ^^'. The interlocutors seem to want to

keep their relations and save the 'face'.

In regard to the rate of repair and the effect of corrective feedback, it is difficult to make a conclusion with the data of this study, because the number of occurring feedback itself is quite small. Thus, the researcher did not use the percentage analysis in these two issues, but still, the results of the current study gave us the results. Within this study, at least, there were no close relationship between the error types and rate of uptake, which was also shown in some other studies. Regarding the effect of corrective feedback, although we might not give a strong insistence about it, some repeatedly occurring errors that were corrected by the interlocutor's corrective feedback, reveal that the corrective feedback itself may not be the strong tool for the acquisition.

These findings of the current study give us several pedagogical implications for task-based CMC interactions in Korean adult EFL classroom.

Firstly, the language teachers in EFL classroom might need to encourage learners to give corrective feedback to one another. In the natural communication environment, the corrective feedback might not occur so often if there is no communication breakdown, but for the pedagogical purpose, teachers might have to make the environment for the corrective feedback.

Secondly, apart from the corrective feedback or task repetition, we may need a stronger device to avoid fossilization. The learner repeated the same errors in the task repetition session, even after he/she got the corrective feedback from the partner and did uptakes. Rather than getting the slight or implicit feedback, a more certain session is recommended such as noticing session, post-error treatment session of self- or peer-correction. Still, the treatment of errors is a hot issue in English language learning and teaching, and the researchers argue that a stronger error treatment is needed besides the naturally occurring error treatment.

Thirdly, text-based CMC could be used to analyze one's synchronous output errors effectively. As seen in the data, a number of errors were found in learners' interactions, and this data should be used valuably in EFL classroom.

Finally, this study discusses the findings from theoretical and pedagogical points of view for better understanding of how error treatment during communicative S-CMC tasks in EFL classroom happens. This study supports the idea, which preceding researches have shown, that when language learning is solely experiential and focused on communicative success, some linguistic features do not develop to targetlike accuracy (Harley, 1992; Harley & Swain, 1984; Spada & Lightbown, 1989).

S-CMC appears to be a potentially useful tool for language pedagogy as well as research onto language use and acquisition. Through S-CMC tasks, we may get great chances for error treatment since the learners' synchronous interactions are remained. Yet, to solely rely on the interactions and feedbacks of learners themselves may not be enough for learners' language development in terms of accuracy just as the unavailability of corrective feedback is shown in this communicative classroom environment. For the future research, studies on error treatment after the S-CMC interactions are needed, and there should be more varied and creative way of utilizing S-CMC interactions for EFL classrooms. Further, we may capture and readily access this interaction for both research and pedagogical purposes.

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