

Type of error and teacher treatment in ESL classrooms

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When and how teachers should treat errors has been a controversial issue. This study was conducted to explore in what situation teachers tend to treat learners' oral errors. Four cases of ESL classroom observations were carried out. The errors made by the students and treated by the teachers was counted and classified into the three dimensions: form/structure, meaning/semantics, and pragmatics (Larsen-Freeman, 1991). It was found that error treatment varied in lesson types, and that there was an overall tendency that errors in form were produced and treated most frequently. Moreover, type of classroom task seems to have affected type of error and teacher treatment. The role-playing activities seem to have provided meaningful contexts for the students so that they made errors in all the three dimensions. It is argued that identifying and diagnosing errors based on the three dimensions might have a potential for effective error treatment, especially in the task which guides learners to interact in a meaningful context. Further studies for the effectiveness of error treatment through the three dimensions would be needed.

Grammar instruction Error correction The three grammatical dimensions

1. Introduction

Error treatment has been a very controversial issue in language teaching (Allwright & Bailey, 1991). The way errors are treated differs in approaches and methods of teaching. Learners' age, proficiency level, and goals are some of the examples that determine how a teacher should treat errors, too (Brown, 1994). From a teacher's and student's perspectives, there also appear to exist numerous factors involved in this regard. Some teachers might think that correcting errors would lead students to pay more attention to form so that students can gain accuracy to a greater extent in their interlanguage. Others may believe that error treatment should be avoided because of their fear that it will certainly inhibit students from communicating freely. On the other hand, some students might well be concerned about their linguistic performance in terms of correctness. They may have a preference for feedback from their teachers over no treatment. Other students may place priority on fluency so that teachers' frequent interruption would discourage them to get across what they mean in target language (TL). Therefore, when and how errors should be treated seems to be a challenging question.

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2. Historical overview on error correction

A history of grammar teaching in language instruction seems to reveal the complexity of error treatment. In the U.S.A., teaching grammar was seen as the main content for language teaching and as a basis for curriculum or material development until around 1967, when the audiolingual approach had been widely adopted (Celce-Murcia, 1991). Even since we came to put more emphasis on communicative teaching, grammar has played an important role in working as a major component in communicative competence (Brown, 1994).

In fact, as a wide variety of language teaching approaches and methods has been introduced, some are out of date and others are still useful in part or have been modified to meet contemporary needs for teaching. Celce-Murcia (1991) classified the methodological approaches as to the role of grammar teaching in the last 25 years into four types: (a) audiolingual approach, (b) cognitive code approach, (c) comprehension approach, and (d) communicative approach. In each of the four approaches, error correction as well as grammar teaching is viewed in different ways.

In the audiolingual approach, rules are presented inductively based on the assumption that language is learned through habit formation and overlearning, that is, by means of rote learning such as drills. Errors are considered to be the results of interference from the mother tongue. Making errors is considered to be bad habits, so it is widely thought that teachers should correct, especially the errors that learners may have a difficulty preventing from occurring.

On the other hand, in the cognitive code approach, it is believed that language is learned through hypothesis formation and rule acquisition. Whether rules are presented either inductively or deductively depends on the learners' preference. Errors are viewed not only as the productions interfered by L1 but also as an inevitable process in the learners' normal language development or internal complexities of the target language. In contrast to the audiolingual approach, this approach tolerates learners' errors.

In the comprehension approach, comprehension matters rather than production. The second or foreign language learning is regarded as the similar process to the first language acquisition. Grammar teaching plays a less important role in this

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approach. For example, it is merely used as a monitor for learners to check the forms they produced. Moreover, error correction is thought to be unnecessary and counterproductive. This idea might reflect the attitude toward the errors, which are considered to be gradually self-corrected as learners are more exposed to appropriate input and move on to more complex content of grammar.

Finally, in the communicative approach, teachers are expected to facilitate language use and communication. Grammar teaching has been implemented to such an extent that learners are not inhibited from expressing themselves freely. Whereas priority is placed on communicative use of language, error treatment can be incorporated into the teacher's feedback. However, there still exist ambivalent issues about whether, when and how teachers should correct errors.

As mentioned above, error correction has been treated differently according to the approaches. In addition, teachers have to consider learners' variables. Celce-Murcia (1991) points out six variables that grammar teaching has to depend on: (1) age, (2) proficiency level, (3) educational background, (4) language skills (speaking, listening, reading, writing), (5) register, and (6) needs and goals. Based on the six variables, ESL/EFL instructors would make a decision on the degree to which form is focused with a group of students. For example, it would be safe to say that age is an important variable in that whether grammar should be taught implicitly or explicitly might depend on the learners' age.

3. Controversial issues on whether errors should be treated or not

Ruin (1996) states that error correction certainly helps learners to find out differences between their own interlanguage and their target language. How teachers should treat errors, however, is a difficult and sensitive issue (James, 1998; Brown, 2000) and there have existed both opponents' and proponents' views of error correction.

Dulay, Burt, and Krashen (1982) maintain that, due to the universal order of acquisition theory through learners' developmental stages, teaching inclusive of error correction cannot change the order of acquisition of L2 form. Thus, according to their

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argument, error correction can be viewed as a waste of time.

Taking a strong position against oral grammar correction, Truscott (1999) argues that error correction should be avoided. His claim is that error correction provided by teachers tends to be ambiguous and inconsistent so that learners have trouble in reacting to their teachers' feedback reliably. It might well be possible that learners are more confused after inconsistent error treatments by their teachers. Truscott also provides some evidence for ineffectiveness of error correction. For example, learners tend to overuse a particular form in the situation where the forms have been corrected in contexts that require their use (Lightbown, 1987; Pica, 1983; Weinert, 1987). Thus, tests that examine only the use of the corrected forms in obligatory contexts might overestimate learners' success in the acquisition of target forms. Furthermore, no clear relation between the ability to solve grammar problems and the ability to speak grammatically has been shown in previous studies (Frantzen, 1995; Kadia, 1988; Schumann, 1978).

In response to Truscott's argument, Lyster, Lightbown, and Spada (1999) express strong disagreement with his thought on oral grammar correction. They argue that teachers are expected to correct errors by integrating corrective feedback into meaningful interaction. They introduce a wide range of feedback types and provide evidence for effectiveness and feasibility of corrective feedback. For instance, recasting has proven to be less ambiguous when teachers shorten learners' utterance to locate the error and then put stress on it (Roberts, 1995; Lyster, 1998).

Given that there has been some evidence that sufficient exposure to comprehensible input alone does not lead L2 learners to attain native-like accuracy according to some researchers (Swain, 1985; Swain & Lapkin, 1995), it seems that learners need to discover how L2 forms differ from their interlanguage with the help of error correction. James (1998) maintains that task difficulty determines whether or not teachers should intervene in students' utterances. If the degree of task difficulty goes beyond students' proficiency level to the extent they cannot correct their own errors, 'the teacher will need to offer corrective assistance' (p. 247).

Moreover, the study by Cathcart and Olsen (1976) reveals that the students

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expected the teachers to correct their oral errors. From this perspective, teachers appear to have good reason for correcting learners' errors. Then, attention is drawn back to the big issue of when and how oral errors should be treated.

Larsen-Freeman (1991) introduces the notion of three dimensions which are expected to help a teacher diagnose learners' errors with regard to the following three aspects: form/structure, meaning/semantics, and pragmatics. These three dimensions reflect on her argument that 'linguistic accuracy is as much a part of communicative competence as being able to get one's meaning across or to communicate in a sociolinguistically appropriate manner' (p. 280). The specific examples of the three dimensions are shown in Table 1.

Three dimensions		Form/Structure	Meaning/Semantics	Pragmatics
Grammar feature		Morphemes, Phonemic/graphemic patterns, Syntactic patterns	Lexical meaning, Grammatical meaning	Social context, Linguistic discours context, Presuppositions about context
Ex.	Possessive	s or ' , /z/= /s/= /əz/	possession, description, amount, relationship, part/whole, origin/agent	s versus possessive determiner, 's versus of the, 's versus noun compounds
	Phrasal verb	Verb+Particle(or)Verb+ Particle+Preposition, Transitive/Intransitive, Separable/Inseparable. Stress and Juncture, Patterns	Literal, Figurative, Multiple Meanings	Informal Discourse, Principle of Dominance

Table 1: *The three dimensions tabulated on the basis of Larsen-Freeman (1991)*

In the form/structure dimension, overt forms indicate how a particular grammar structure is constructed. Morphemes as well as phonemic and syntactic patterns are taken into account to represent 'the dimension of form.' For example, the form of possessive requires learners to use the following form, apostrophe +s or apostrophe, depending on what noun comes before the form. In the meaning/semantic dimension, what semantic contribution a particular grammar structure makes whenever it is used is concerned. In line with this, lexical or grammatical meanings are treated as 'the dimension of meaning.' For example, the meaning of the phrasal verb *run into* means

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“to meet by chance.” Lastly, language can be used in close relation to social context, linguistic discourse context, and presuppositions about context. Appropriate ways of using language are taken into consideration to represent ‘the dimension of pragmatics.’ For example, a level of formality seems to determine which verb English speakers prefer to use, *postpone* or *put off*. It seems that phrasal verbs are more commonly used in informal spoken discourse rather than more formal written discourse (Larsen-Freeman, 1991).

It is also proposed that teaching grammar should lead learners to use linguistic forms accurately, meaningfully, and appropriately. It seems that the attempt to view learners’ oral errors through the lens of the three dimensions would be the first step to provide insight for more effective error correction in classrooms. That is, as Larsen-Freeman argues, the more clearly teachers can identify and diagnose learners’ errors, relying on the three dimensions, the more effectively teachers would have a chance to treat each case of errors.

Beretta (1989) conducted the study from a similar point of view. His analysis was based on the transcripts of 21 lessons taught in the 3-year-long Bangalore/Madras Communicational Teaching Project (CTP), which had a principle of teaching that ‘form could be best learned when the learner’s attention was focused on meaning’ (p. 283). The extent to which the teachers focused on form or on meaning was mainly examined. It was revealed that about 65 percent of form errors were treated whereas about 88 percent of content errors were treated, which seems to be ‘consonant with the CTP focus on meaning rather than form’ (p. 300). Moreover, the finding appears to be ascribed to the fact that task types calling for production were ruled out and only those focusing on reception were assigned in the later years of the project. Thus, it would be plausible to assume that lesson type would influence error treatment.

To my knowledge, few studies have investigated error treatment from the perspective of when and how to correct errors.

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4. Research questions

In the current study, grammar is defined from the perspective of Celce-Murcia and Larsen-Freeman (1999). That is, grammar ‘accounts for both the structure of the target language and its communicative use’ (p. 2). The topic of error treatment is explored, particularly, through the lens of the three dimensions Larsen-Freeman (1991) proposes, to examine any differences in error treatment across types of classroom instruction. The research questions are as follows:

1. In what situation do errors tend to be treated in ESL classrooms in terms of the Larsen-Freeman’s three dimensions: form, meaning, and pragmatics?
2. Are there any differences in error treatment across types of classroom instruction?

5. Descriptive information about the settings of the observations

Classroom observations were conducted at the English Language Program (ELP), which is provided for those who intend to study English as a second language at the University of Pennsylvania during the 2002-fall semester. Each year, 1,800 students from all over the world come to the ELP. They study English for a wide variety of purposes: general English; business English; English for academic preparation; English for professions such as law, architecture, dental medicine, and nursing; and teacher training. The majority of students in the intensive program (IP), which is one of six major areas in the ELP, are engaged in preparing for work in various professional fields and/or academic studies in American universities. According to their instruction policy (University of Pennsylvania, 2004), based on the belief that the classroom must provide input and opportunities for interaction and student output, the input should be meaningful and come from multiple sources and through multiple media. It should also be at and above the student’s current level of competence. In addition, it should provide information about the different aspects of language needed for communicative competence: phonology, grammar, pragmatics, discourse, writing styles and conventions, semantics, cultural customs and values, and communicative and learning strategies.

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Four lessons from the IP were observed, two of which were live observations and the other two of which were videotapes of the lessons. The settings of the observations are summarized in the Table 2.

Table 2: *Class description*

The class No. 1 and No. 2 were observed lively. I sat at the back of each of the two

Class No .	No .1	No .2	No .3	No .4
the class name	Academic Grammar	American Society	Listening & Speaking	Real World English
the number of students	7	11	9	8
level of students	intermediate	intermediate	high elementary	low intermediate
profile of students* ¹	1F, 5J, 1K	5K, 2J, 1O	3j, 5A, 1O	1J, 1C, 4K, 2O
instructional materials	Quiz, Textbook	Bulck ack* ²	Textbook	Textbook & Handout
the objectives of the lesson	grammar instruction of articles & exercises of comparison	Integration of the four language skills & use of modals through role play or pair work	listening & speaking with regard to past perfect	instruction of how to use various expressions for invitation through role play, and pronunciation with regard to 'can' and 'can't'

* 1F= French speakers, J= Japanese speakers, K= Korean speakers, A= other Asian language speakers, O= other language speakers

* 2 an original textbook that consists of different teaching materials such as articles and charts

classrooms without interrupting the whole classroom activity. The class No. 3 and No. 4 had been video-recorded alive during real lessons at the university, designed for authentic observation materials. I watched them at the library in the university. Each class consisted of different number of students. About 60 percent of the students spoke, as their mother tongue, East Asian languages such as Japanese, Korean, and Chinese. The students' proficiency level of English ranged from high elementary to intermediate, which appears to show that there was a small difference among student's proficiency level. Each lesson lasted 100 minutes and had a certain grammar target.

Grammar points were implemented into the lessons differently according to class type. The class No. 1, 'Academic Grammar' focused on the two grammar points: how to distinguish the use of articles; *a*, *an*, and *the*, and how to make use of *comparisons*. After the explicit instruction of articles, quizzes were incorporated into the pair work that led the students to collaborate in the matching of an article and a noun that follows

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it in some sentences. Then, they took turns to report back to the teacher. The exercises of comparisons on the textbook were assigned to the students. After completing them, they also reported back.

The class No. 2, 'American Society' led the students to interact with each other through pair work and role-playing activity rather than to be instructed explicitly by the teacher. Making one pair after another, the students were asked to introduce themselves in turn. Then, role-playing activities came next. A target form was *should*, which can be used to make a suggestion. Each pair of the students was given a direction telling them to solve a problem in a different setting. For example, a doctor needs to diagnose a patient's disease in order to prescribe appropriate medicine. The directions were from an original textbook called 'Bulkpack.' After they planned and practiced the role-playing they were assigned, each pair presented their performance of the role-playing in front of the other students.

The class No. 3, 'Listening & Speaking' dealt with a grammar target, *past perfect*. Using the textbook, the teacher explained how it is formed and functions in a sentence. Listening exercises into which it was incorporated came next. Then, the teacher made the students work on the textbook exercises in pairs and create conditional sentences. The students were encouraged to present the sentence they made.

The class No. 4, 'Real World English' covered various expressions for inviting someone and how to pronounce *can* and *can't*. Using the textbook, the teacher introduced various forms that can be used to request formally or informally. A distinctive use of *would* and *will* was one of the examples. After the instruction, each pair of the students was given a direction telling them to make a dialogue in which one student invited the other. After they planned and practiced, they presented their performance of the role-playing based on the dialogue they created. The presentation was followed by the pronunciation exercises. The teacher pronounced both *can* and *can't* with a focus on stress, and made the students try to distinguish which was pronounced.

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The student's utterance that did not conform to the three dimensions shown above in each class were identified, counted, and classified into the three kinds of errors: errors in form, meaning, and pragmatics. Simultaneously, the number of the ones the teachers treated was counted to investigate the rate of error treatment in each dimension. Due to the difficulty of keeping track of students' utterances, any errors in a group work, except for the ones uttered to the whole class during presentations, were not included. Nor were the utterances which had such strong accents that I could not understand what they said were considered.

Moreover, the number of utterances by the students to the whole class was counted in order to examine the degree of students' active participation in each class type. That is, the ratio of the number to that of all the students in each class was obtained and expected to provide clear pictures of each class with regard to the students' utterances. The data is called student-initiated utterances. Asking questions or giving comments voluntarily belongs to them. Also, the ratio of the number of utterances the teachers elicited directly from the students to that of all the students in each class was considered. This data is called teacher-initiated utterances. Compared to student-initiated utterances, they were not considered to represent active participation in the observations because the students themselves were asked or told to utter, not initiating utterances. For instance, the students' responses to the teachers' questions fall into the teacher-initiated utterances. It must be noted that except for the ones uttered to the whole class during presentations, utterances during group or pair works such as role-playing were excluded because they were difficult to keep track of. All the data were collected and classified accordingly on the spot during each observation by the observer.

It was expected that the students' active participation would partly result in more errors made by them than their less active participation. The underlying reason was that without the teachers' helpful elicitation, they would tend to produce erroneous English output by making use of imperfect grammar knowledge. In addition, types of activities or tasks might influence the students' performance in terms of error types as Beretta (1989) shows that the principle of instruction had an impact on error types and

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teacher treatment.

6. Results

The data of the student-initiated and teacher-initiated utterances are shown in Table 3. With a combined examination with Table 2, Table 3 provides clear pictures of each class with regard to the degree of the students' active participation.

Table 3: *The student-initiated and teacher-initiated utterances in each class*

Class type	Academic Grammar			American Society			Listening & Speaking			Real World English			Total		
Number of student	7			11			9			8			35		
Type of utterance	SI	TI	Total	SI	TI	Total	SI	TI	Total	SI	TI	Total	SI	TI	Total
Number of utterances	12 (29.5%)	35 (74.5%)	47	1 (11.1%)	8 (88.9%)	9	2 (8.7%)	21 (91.3%)	23	26 (44.8%)	32 (55.2%)	58	41 (29.9%)	96 (70.1%)	137
N of utterances per student	1.7	5.0	6.7	0.1	0.7	0.8	0.2	2.3	2.6	3.3	4.0	7.3	1.2	2.7	3.9

SI= student-initiated utterance, TI= teacher-initiated utterance

In total, about 30 percent of the overall number of utterances (n=137) was student-initiated utterances (n=41) whereas about 70 percent was teacher-initiated utterances (n=96). In addition, except for during pair or group works, each student initiated an utterance 1.2 times and was asked or told to utter 2.7 times by the teachers.

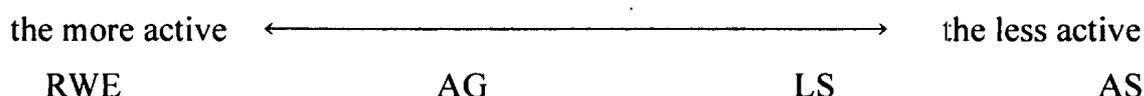
The four classes can be classified into two groups. 'Academic Grammar (AG)' and 'Real World English (RWE)' belong to the group in which more active participation was observed {n=47(SI=12, TI=35), n=58(SI=26, TI=32), respectively}. Especially, RWE's student-initiated utterances were seen the most frequently {Number per student (nps) =3.3} among all the class types, which can be led to interpret that RWE was the most active class.

On the other hand, the other group consists of 'American Society (AS)' and 'Listening & Speaking (LS),' in which less active participation was observed {n=9(SI=1, TI=8), n=23(SI=2, TI=21), respectively}. Also, student-initiated utterances in both classes were only a few (nps=0.1, nps=0.2, respectively). Particularly, AS's total number of utterances per student was extremely small {nps=0.8(SI=0.1, TI=0.8)},

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which can be led to interpret that AS was the least active class. Moreover, teacher-initiated utterances were seen more than seven times as frequently as student-initiated ones in both classes. The degree of the students' active participation is visualized in Figure 1.

Figure 1: *The degree of the students' active participation*



In addition, the data of error types and teacher treatment were classified and tabulated in Table 4.

Table 4: *The data of error types and teacher treatment in each class*

Class Type	AG (N=7)			AS (N=11)			LS (N=9)			RWE (N=8)			Total (N=35)		
	E	T	TR	E	T	TR	E	T	TR	E	T	TR	E	T	TR
Form	2	1	50.0%	11	2	18.2%	4	3	75.0%	15	12	80.0%	32	18	56.3%
Meaning	4	3	75.0%	6	0	0.0%	0	0	0.0%	6	4	66.7%	16	7	43.8%
Pragmatics	0	0	0.0%	4	0	0.0%	0	0	0.0%	3	3	100.0%	7	3	42.9%
total	6	4	66.7%	21	2	9.5%	4	3	75.0%	24	19	79.2%	55	28	50.9%

E = the number of errors T = the number of treated errors TR = treatment rate

In total, 55 errors were observed, and about half (50.9%) of the errors were treated. Errors in form were most frequently produced (n=32), and the teachers treated errors in form more frequently (56.3%) than errors in the other two dimensions. Errors in meaning were the second frequently produced (n=16) and treated (a treatment rate=43.8%). They were not made in LS, nor were they treated in AS. Errors in pragmatics were seen and treated the least frequently (n=7, a treatment rate=42.9%), and they were produced only in AG (n=4) and RWE (n=3), and treated at the rate of

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0% and 100% respectively.

Across lesson types, RWE, in which the students participated the most actively, produced errors most frequently ($n=24$) and treated them at the highest rate (79.2%). In contrast, AS, which accounted for the least active participation, treated errors at the lowest rate (9.5%) whereas the class produced the second largest number of errors ($n=21$). Also, in AG and LS, relatively low frequency of errors ($n=6$ and $n=4$, respectively) and relatively high frequency of error treatment (66.7% and 75.0%, respectively) were observed.

Individual attention can be drawn to interpret the data more clearly. In Academic Grammar, errors in meaning were treated at the highest rate (75.0%). Whereas the total number of utterances was the second largest ($n=47$) among all the class types as in Table 3, the total number of errors was the second smallest ($n=6$). It might be attributed to the fact that the class focused on grammar instruction in an explicit way. That is, it seems that the awareness of grammatical correctness might have worked to reduce errors in form in the students' utterances, given that teacher-initiated utterances ($n=35$) were produced about three times as frequently as student-initiated utterances ($n=12$).

Surprisingly, the teacher of American Society treated only 9.5 % of the errors. As in Figure 1, the students' participation was the smallest. However, the total number of errors was the second largest ($n=21$). Since each pair of the students had an opportunity to give a small presentation to the whole class through the task of role-playing, which seemed difficult for the students in terms of topics such as giving medical advice, it appears possible to think that the students struggled to get meaning across to achieve their goals through the role-playing. It is claimed that language learners tend to pay attention to meaning rather than form during role-playing. The task itself might have caused the students to make errors in form ($n=11$) about twice more frequently than each of the other error types (Meaning: $n=6$; Pragmatics: $n=4$). Since the total number of errors ($n=21$) came from this task, the least treatment seemed to result from the teacher's decision not to intervene in their performance by treating errors. In fact, the teacher treated errors in form only twice (Treatment rate=18.2%) whereas she gave no treatment to the other error types. Both cases of treatment happened after the pairs had

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done their presentation.

Listening & Speaking produced the smallest number of errors (n=4) despite the fact that the class consisted of high elementary learners, that is, the lowest level of the four classes. The reason would be ascribed to the student's second least active participation. They initiated utterance only twice, and most of their teacher-initiated utterances (n=21) consisted of one or two words. In addition, the students' errors were only form-related. It seems that the students might have had difficulty in handling the target form, *past perfect* to such an extent that they could not get across what they meant by using it or produce correct form of verbs and past participles.

As Table 3 shows, in Real World English, participation was the most active in terms of both student- and teacher-initiated utterances. As Table 4 shows, the errors were treated in all the three dimensions (Form=80.0%, Meaning=66.7%, Pragmatics=100%), whereas not in the other classes. It was only the teacher of that class who treated errors in pragmatics, as in this example:

S1: Would you mind coming to my house?

S2: Uh...OK.

T: (talking to S1) I think you are too polite. I think you should use 'why don't you' or 'Will you' instead.

The teacher assigned a pair of students to perform role-playing through which a certain speech act, *invitation*, was performed. It would be possible to think that the task of role-playing pushed the students into contextualized situations so that they tended to make errors in pragmatics.

7. Discussion

Despite the small number of observations and limitations of the way of collecting data, there are some implications for further studies. As above mentioned, error treatment varied in types of lessons and there was an overall tendency that errors in

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form were produced and treated most frequently. Bearing in mind the study by Beretta (1989) mentioned earlier, which reveals that about 65 percent of form errors were corrected whereas about 88 percent of content errors were treated, one could think that the different types of lessons might have caused the teachers in Beretta's study and the ones in the current study to treat errors in different ways. Since only four cases of observations were conducted in the current study, larger number of observations of different types of lessons would be needed to validate the finding.

It is difficult to say that the degree of students' active participation contributes to frequency of errors. In Real World English, the most active participation was seen and errors were produced the most frequently. On the other hand, although American Society was classified into the least active participation, it produced errors the second most frequently. It would be partly due to the speculation that the task of role-playing was challenging for the students. Despite the small number of observations conducted, it would be possible to assume that task or activity types might have played a greater role in causing the students to make errors than the students' active participation. Further studies would be needed in this respect as well.

Furthermore, task or activity types appear to have affected divergence of error types as well. As in Table 4, the tasks of role-playing caused the students in both American Society and Real World English to make all the three dimensions of errors, whereas the other activities did not. Especially, in RWE, where the students participated in class activities most actively, the role-playing of invitation seems to have provided meaningful contexts for the students so that the teacher treated errors in all the three dimensions. In other words, in contrast to the role-playing task in AS, the role-playing of invitation led the students to deal with more realistic situations, in which each student of the pairs was expected to invite their partner to their house. Therefore, the possible interpretation regarding RWE is that when treating errors, the teacher might have tried to draw much of the students' attention to appropriateness of their language performance.

Larsen-Freeman (1991) proposes that identifying and diagnosing errors in terms of the three dimensions would help teachers determine if an error is form, meaning, or

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pragmatics-related. If they diagnose it accurately, 'the remedy may be more effective' (p. 293). The current study dealt with the observations of error treatment without paying attention to how the teachers viewed errors and treated them, for example, by means of recasts or clarification checks. Further studies would be needed to clarify the effects of error treatment based on the three dimensions by means of empirical methods, especially in the task which leads learners to interact in a meaningful context.

Lastly, methodological flaws cannot be ignored in the current study. It was only the observer who collected the data and classified them into each of the three dimensions during each observation. Moreover, the classification of errors into each of the dimensions is very difficult. Especially the meaning and the pragmatics have a subtle boundary (Celce-Murcia & Larsen-Freeman, 1999). Thus, reliability of the study is questionable. More than one observer who is skilled at the classification would be necessary in order to gain a certain level of reliability. Also, as mentioned above, the utterances during pair or group works simultaneously performed were excluded from the data due to the difficulty in keeping track of each utterance. If the utterances had been included, the numbers of errors would have increased to such an extent that the overall tendency was different from that of the current study.

8. Conclusion

This study attempted to gain a clearer perspective on error treatment in terms of in what situation errors tend to be treated in ESL classroom. Although how and when to treat errors has been a controversial issue, the mini observations of error treatment through the lens of the three dimensions that Larsen-Freeman (1991) proposed seem to have provided some insights for language pedagogy. One of the main findings is that error treatment varied in lesson types. The teachers seemed to be seen giving feedback to the students in various ways when their feedback was viewed within the scope of the three dimensions. Another finding is that type of classroom task or activity might have affected the type of error and teacher treatment. Particularly, the task of role-playing, which put the learners into meaningful contexts, caused the students to make errors in all the three dimensions. The three dimensions seem to provide a frame of

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reference in this point. As Larsen-Freeman maintains, it is argued that teachers might have a potential for providing more effective feedback, especially in the task which leads learners to interact in a meaningful context if the identification and diagnosis of errors in terms of the three dimensions are accurate. Since the current study did not cover the effectiveness of error treatment, further empirical studies would be needed to verify the use of reference to the three dimensions by teachers for pedagogical implications.

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