ERRORS AND ORAL ERROR'S TREATMENT IN THE FOREIGN LANGUAGE CLASSROOM: A REVIEW

ERRORES Y TRATAMIENTO DE ERRORES ORALES EN EL SALÓN DE LENGUA EXTRANJERA: UNA REVISIÓN

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ABSTRACT	RESUMEN
There is controversy about the perception of errors as part of the language learning process and in the literature it is observed a wide range of terms related to error treatment. It might make difficult for teachers and researchers to find information about error analysis when they search in scientific journals and electronic databases. The aims of the current study were to describe the perception of errors and their treatment in the foreign language classroom, and to provide the reader with an up-to-date review of terminology regarding error treatment. A documental review was conducted by consulting scientific journals and books to observe the evolution of the issue. As a result, a concise review is presented to provide the reader with a glance of the theoretical treatment to oral errors correction for over six decades. The need for more research in order to recommend specific feedback to different types of errors according to particular contexts is concluded.	Existe controversia sobre la percepción de los errores como parte del proceso de aprendizaje de una lengua y en la literatura se observa un amplio rango de términos relacionados con el tratamiento de errores. Esto dificulta a profesores e investigadores encontrar información cuando se hacen búsquedas en revistas científicas y en bases de datos. Los objetivos fueron describir la percepción de los errores y su tratamiento en el aula de lenguas extranjeras y proveer al lector de una revisión actualizada de la terminología relacionada con el tratamiento de errores. Se hizo una revisión documental consultando revistas científicas y libros para observar la evolución. El resultado fue una revisión concisa para dar al lector una mirada al tratamiento teórico de la corrección de los errores orales por más de seis décadas y actualización terminológica. Se concluye la necesidad de más estudios que permitan recomendar tipos específicos de tratamientos de errores orales acordes a diferentes contextos, especialmente en Venezuela.
Keywords: errors, language classroom, error treatment.	**Descriptores:** errores, aula de lenguas, tratamiento de errores.

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INTRODUCTION

Feedback in the classroom plays a remarkable role in the language learning process. It is useful to briefly review the conceptions of errors because the way they have been seen by teachers has determined how they have been treated in the classroom. "Error correction can easily be described on a continuum ranging from the idea that it can be harmful and ineffective to being very essential and beneficial for some grammatical structures" (Véliz, 2008, p. 286).

If we give a quick glance to language teaching since the early 60's of the twentieth century, it is possible to observe that some phenomena taking place in the language learning process such as errors were treated in different ways. At that time behaviorist theories of learning strongly influenced the field of language teaching and errors were considered as the result of the persistence of existing mother tongue habits in the new language (Erdogan, 2005); therefore, errors were seen as an undesirable output which the students should avoid to all cost and teachers should explicitly correct at once.

As new learning theories and language teaching approaches began to emerge, more emphasis was placed on communication and the process of learning was seen as a more complex and active one that goes beyond repetition and habits formation. Communication oriented approaches started to face error as part of the language process and, opposite to behaviorists' claims, as a sign of language learning progress. In this context, teachers were moved to treat error differently and new strategies for oral errors correction began to appear.

In general terms, an error can be defined as a deviation from the norm of the target language (Ellis, 1994); to this point authors might not disagree. However, the controversy appears when we talk about the perception of errors as part of the language learning process. Behaviorist approaches and their practitioners considered error as a symptom of ineffective teaching or as evidence of failure (Maicusi, Maicusi & Carrillo, 1999). The structural linguists took from the behaviorist psychology the conception of language as a set of mechanistic habits and put it into practice in their audio-lingual classroom where errors were carefully avoided right from the beginning and banned from every learning stage (Huang, 2002). In this sense, teachers should solve the 'problem' (i.e., the student's

error) by giving direct or explicit correction immediately and should use teaching strategies addressed to memorization of the correct target forms.

As there are different kinds of errors classified according to specific taxonomies, there are also different options for error treatment in naturalistic contexts in first language acquisition and in second and foreign language classroom settings. In this sense, researchers have focused on the study of error treatment in the language classroom in the last three decades and different terms have been used to refer to errors and their treatment. The problem arising from the terminology diversity is that some teachers and researchers might miss important information because they do not use the appropriate keywords related to the issue when they search in journals and databases. The aims of the present documental review were to describe the perception of errors in the foreign language classroom through the years, and to provide the reader with an up-to-date review of terminology regarding error treatment in the foreign language classroom.
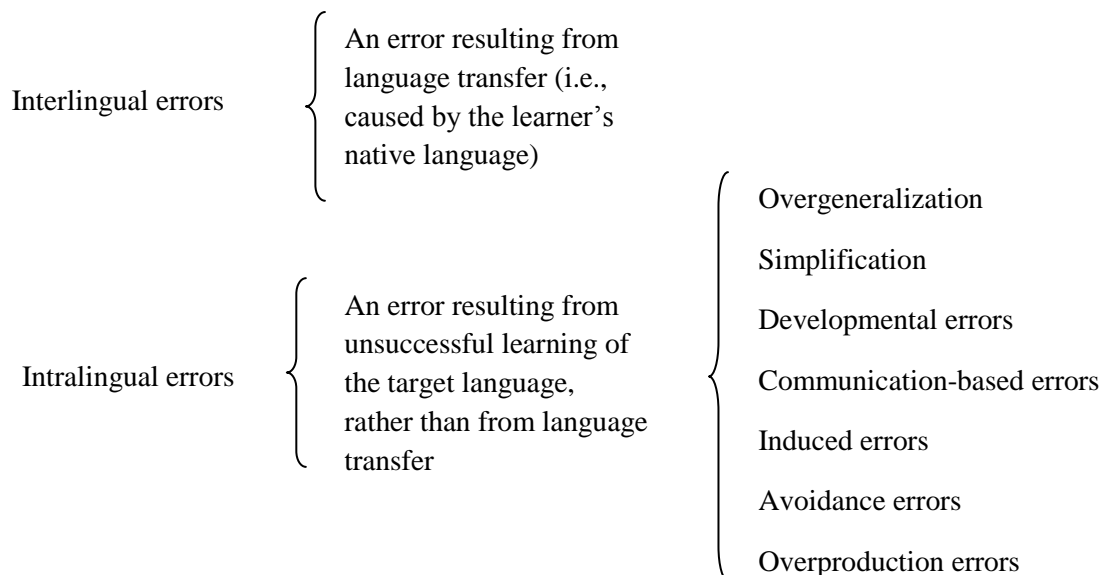
Errors taxonomies and study

Several authors have developed taxonomies for errors and errors study. For instance, according to their systematicity they were found to be pre-systematic, systematic and post-systematic errors (Corder, 1974 in Ellis, 1994). This classification seemed to be more effective than the surface strategy taxonomy proposed later by Dulay, Burt and Krashen (1982) for the description of students' errors. That taxonomy included four main categories: omissions, additions, misinformation, and misorderings, but did not become very popular for the description of students' errors because researchers do not find a surface strategy really valuable if it does not represent mental processes (Ellis, 1994).

Another classification sets errors as lexical, phonological, syntactic, interpretive and pragmatic. Besides, with the Error Analysis Movement, errors were divided as intralingual and interlingual (Richards, Platt & Platt, 1992), Chart 1 summarizes this particular classification.

Chart 1.

Error classification according to error analysis movement[†].

Interlingual errors — An error resulting from language transfer (i.e., caused by the learner's native language)

Intralingual errors — An error resulting from unsuccessful learning of the target language, rather than from language transfer —

- Overgeneralization
- Simplification
- Developmental errors
- Communication-based errors
- Induced errors
- Avoidance errors
- Overproduction errors

Erdogan (2005) states that when linguists started to study errors as indicators of learners' progress in the process of language learning they helped teachers from a theoretical and methodological perspective by giving them useful information for pedagogical decision making because error analysis enables teachers to find out the sources of errors and take pedagogical precautions related to them. Thus, the analysis of learners' language has become an essential need to overcome some questions and to propose solutions regarding different issues on language learning and acquisition.

Language teaching cannot stand away from the findings of error analysis. The existence of errors has been subject for all language-teaching theories as they represent an important aspect of second language learning (Erdogan, 2005). Language teachers and researchers cannot ignore that "negative evidence may play a role in assisting learners to attend to and incorporate those aspects of language not acquired through positive evidence alone" (Oliver, 1995, p. 461). Then, it is a teacher's concern to find the balance according to his/her students' needs.

Errors have been studied for comprehension and production, but researchers'

[†]Based on Richards et al, (1992).

attention has been mostly addressed to the latter due to the difficulty to test comprehension accurately enough to determine the cause of failure (Corder, 1974 in Ellis, 1994). Errors have also been studied for oral and written production, being the first one the interest of this review.

In terms of the focus, error study and analysis can be performed from two perspectives: theoretical and applied. On the one hand, the former concentrates on what is going on in the language learners' minds, tries to decode the strategies of learners such as overgeneralization and simplification, and goes to a conclusion regarding the universals of language learning process whether there is an internal syllabus for learning a second language. On the other hand, the applied analysis deals with the organization of remedial courses, and the proposal of appropriate materials and teaching strategies based on the findings of theoretical error analysis. Moreover, according to the kind of study and analysis, it can be (following Shrestha, 1979): linguistic (e.g., Contrastive Analysis Approach and Error Analysis Approach) and non-linguistic (e.g., Sociological Approach and Psychological Approach).

The first attempts to formally study errors as relevant issue in language learning led researchers to the Contrastive Analysis (CA). It was the systematic study and comparison of two languages in order to identify structural similarities and differences between them. Thus, it dealt with error *a priori* on the basis of mother tongue and target language comparison or contrast (i.e., trying to predict the error).

CA's linguistic base was the structuralism and its psycholinguistic cornerstone was behavoiurists' rationales. That analysis was performed through four main steps: formal description of the languages to be compared, selection of the areas of the language to be compared, comparisons in order to find similarities and differences and, finally, prediction of possible errors that would appear when learning the language.

With regards to the Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis (CAH), it relied on two main assumptions from verbal learning theory: (1) learning is the process of making responses automatically and (2) acquiring a new response to a particular stimulus or context requires the extinction of the old response (Aitken, 1977). It had an important influence for the creation of language teaching method such as the audiolingual approach; however, its popularity did not last as much as it could have been expected. Among the reasons for the

CAH's failure it is possible to highlight its association to behaviorism after Chomsky's ideas severely challenged Skinner's (in other words, after cognitivists hardly had challenged conductism and its claims). Nevertheless, these two versions of CA were the basis for the Error Analysis (EA) movement in language learning and teaching because they dealt with the detection of the sources of errors in language learners.

In the decade of the seventies in the twentieth century, EA appeared as the first method to study learners' language and several researchers focused on the issue of errors and replaced CA and its assumptions. EA saw the error as an indicator of learning difficulties and assumed that the frequency of a specific error is a sample of the difficulty learners present in learning that specific form. EA lost popularity as a result of the weaknesses including methodological problems involving all stages of analysis and limitations in its scope (Ellis, 1994). Other approaches for error study have arisen as language learning conceptions were changing (e.g, discourse analysis; which considers the error in the context in which it takes place).

Errors treatment in language teaching history

Through years, researchers, linguists and teachers have devoted time and effort to propose language teaching methodologies to improve the language learning process and to facilitate learners the mastery of the target language. The different approaches and methods for language teaching have their own conception and perception of error in the language classroom. Hence, teachers' attitude towards errors has been influenced by the theory of language and language teaching and learning underlying those methods. The following paragraphs summarize what the main approaches in language teaching history have proposed in relation to errors in the language classroom[‡]:

Grammar Translation Method: Little or no attention was paid to oral communication errors because reading and writing were the main objectives. As translation was the goal in the language course, error correction was mainly addressed to written

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[‡] It is not pretended to present a detailed chronology of the history of Language teaching like the one by Howatt and Widdowson (2004) but a general view of error treatment through the years to the present time.

production where native-like sentences were expected. This trend dominated the field of language teaching for about a century (1840s-1940s), but it has not completely disappeared from the teaching contexts where some features of the approach are still observed.

With the Reform Movement in the late nineteenth century, linguists started to look for some methodological basis to support language teaching methods. The changes produced by researchers from this movement included a shift in the priorities for language teaching and learning. Professional associations and societies were formed. Those societies included the International Phonetic Association (IPA) which seriously influenced the scope of language teaching. As Howatt and Widdowson (2004) state, the Reform Movement was a remarkable display of international and inter-disciplinary co-operation in which phoneticians paid as much attention to the classroom as teachers did to the new science of phonetics. The Reform Movement and the changes it promoted led to what linguists have referred to as Natural Methods for language teaching and ultimately led to the development of what came to be known as the Direct Method (Richards & Rodgers, 2001).

The Direct Method: this method, which started under the name of Natural Method, was based on the belief that natural principles should be used in the language classroom. Linguists and researchers proposed that a target language could be learned without translation or the use of learner's native tongue. Those natural language learning principles were the cornerstone for the Direct Method: a popular method in Europe (especially in private schools). In relation to error treatment, the Direct Method followed some guidelines that included explicit correction. However, as no use of the mother tongue was allowed, it was complicated for the students to take advantage of the correction and generate the expected uptake.

Oral Approach – Situational Language Teaching: among the most widely known methods relying on the behaviorist theory of language and language learning is the Oral Approach, also referred to as Situational Language Teaching. This vision of language teaching was a step ahead the Direct Method because it has systematic basis and cared about vocabulary and grammar control in the language courses. This approach was popular and strongly accepted by British linguists and teachers because it represented an advance in terms of language teaching methodology; in fact, even worldwide-used language books in the late 90s were still using some of the classic principles of Situational Language Teaching

(Richards & Rodgers, 2001). Errors were avoided to all cost. Teachers modeled the target forms and no mother tongue use was allowed. The language learning theory underlying the classroom activities stated that learning is a habit formation process and errors were supposed to be eliminated as soon as they were produced by students. In this sense, explicit correction was expected and it should be provided in the target language because mother tongue use was considered inappropriate.

Audiolingual approach: it arose in the United States of America as an alternative to the Direct Method. Unlike the British Oral Approach, there was little attempt to treat language content systematically and there was not standardization of vocabulary and grammar (Richards & Rodgers, 2001). The theory of language underlying this method was structural linguistics (a partial reaction to traditional grammar), therefore the main expression of language was speech. Consistent with behaviorist trends, learning was seen as a habit formation process; thus negative reinforcement should be provided when the student's response was not target like. In other words, errors should be avoided and when they appeared they should be immediately eliminated because accuracy was a primary goal.

Communicative Language Teaching: the aim changed from language accuracy to communicative competence. The theory of language supporting this method was language as communication and not as a set of structures to be memorized. Halliday's functional perspective of language was also an influence for the integration of Communicative Language Teaching. As Richards and Rodgers (2001) state, "at the level of language theory, Communicative Language Teaching has a rich, if somewhat eclectic, theoretical base" (p. 71). Learners started to play a more active role in the language learning process which was beyond memorization and reproduction of language forms. Errors were seen as indicators that learners were developing their communicative competence. In this context, errors were tolerated as long as they did not impede communication because the focus was on the message rather than its formed utterances.

The Natural Approach: It is a communication based method proposed by Krashen and Terrel (1983) based on naturalistic principles for language learning. According to those authors, acquisition occurs just when people understand messages in the target language. In other words, the view of language implied that it was a mean for conveying meaning and messages. In a Natural Approach setting, students should center on meaning instead of

form, and affective filters should be controlled by the teachers as much as possible in order to enhance learning. Therefore, errors were seen as part of the process when the silent period disappeared and no direct error correction was expected from teachers.

Communicative Approach: In this approach language's learning goal is communication which at the same time is considered a process. Inasmuch as communication is a process, the knowledge of forms, meaning and functions is not enough for students to master the language; they also need to be able to negotiate meaning (Larsen-Freeman, 1986). Errors are tolerated because they are understood as part of the natural development of communication skills. Fluency and accuracy are both seen as indicators of students' success in the target language. Therefore, no explicit correction is provided in the classroom.

Other methods like Suggestopedia, Silent Method and Total Physical Response were not included in this revision of error treatment in the history of language teaching methodology because they have been criticized by some authors for being teaching strategies and procedures rather than real language teaching approaches with sound theoretical basis.

In sum, attitude towards errors (including error treatment) have shifted as learning and teaching conceptions and theories have changed too. It has come a long way, from a perspective to which negative evidence was needed to avoid 'bad habits' formation to other where feedback plays an important role in the process of learning because, as stated by Bacarcel (2006), students need to join positive and negative evidence in order to restructure what they produce.

Language teachers need to understand that balance in error correction treatment is needed for two main reasons: (1) if much attention is paid to correct malformations in the student's utterances, it might affect students' attempts to communicate in the target language, and (2) teacher's willingness to let errors go uncorrected serves to reinforce the error of the learner (Brown, 1987).

Terminology in the fields of errors and error treatment

Diverse trends have taken place in the discussion about errors treatment, also the terminology in the field has changed through time. In the beginning of errors' study, Burt

(1975) had spoken about 'global' and 'local' errors. The former were errors that hinder communication because they do not let the hearer to get the intended message; the latter only affected a part of the sentence and did not prevent the message to be understood.

Later, Chaudron (1977) established the difference between two terms that had been interchangeably used: 'error' and 'mistake' which had been considered as equals until Chaudron explained that they were not the same. 'Error' was then explained as related to competence whereas 'mistake' was seen as related to performance. Besides, 'attempts' were differentiated from errors because they are failures produced when a student tries to use a structure he or she does not know and takes it from another language.

A clear differentiation of error and mistake is undeniably important for the teacher to decide about the appropriate feedback to provide. There are two simple methods for error and mistake differentiation proposed by Ellis (1997). In the first place, the teacher can observe the consistency of the ill-formed utterance (in the case of oral errors which are the concern of the present review); if the wrong form is always used, it is considered an error, but if the student sometimes uses the wrong form and some others the right one it can be seen as a mistake. A more direct form to assess whether it is either an error or a mistake is to ask the learner to correct the wrong utterance; when he or she is unable to produce the right form, the deviation from the target language may be labeled as an error; otherwise it should be seen as a mistake. The criticism that might be addressed to the second method is that it implies giving feedback, because the learner is explicitly told that there was something wrong in the utterance while 'when' and 'how' errors might be corrected is still under discussion in the literature.

Balcarcel (2006) claims that there are several terms standing for error correction or error treatment. Some of those are: negative input, negative evidence, negative feedback, and corrective feedback. In the literature, different authors refer to error treatment by using any of those terms interchangeably. Some linguists (e.g., Lin and Hedgcock, 1996) have used the term 'feedback' to describe the linguistic and metalinguistic information that target language speakers provide to learners about the grammatical accuracy of their spoken interlanguage and that learners may use to modify their interlanguage grammar. It is important to clarify that interlanguage must be understood, according to Richards and

Rodgers (2001), as the type of language produced by second -and foreign- language learners who are in the process of learning a language.

Other researchers have classified the treatment given to errors and mistakes in the language classroom (i.e., teachers' responses). Some of them studied those responses as 'error correction' (e.g., Tedick & Gortari, 1998), a type of repair in which errors are overtly fixed (Hall, 2007). In this context appeared the term 'corrective feedback' which can be broadly defined as information following a non-target like form produced by the students. Its objective is to help learners to move towards a target like form (Dasse-Askildson, 2008). Also, in the literature it is possible to observe authors talking about corrective feedback with terms like 'negative evidence' (Dekeyser, 1993; Oliver, 1995; Long & Robinson, 1998), 'interactional feedback' (Mackey, Gass & McDonough, 2000) and 'negative feedback' (Perdomo, 2008), sometimes interchangeably.

As researchers' interest was growing, more terms and taxonomies appeared. Long and Robinson (1998) presented a classification of input that learners receive indicating their progress or failure in the language learning process. They talk about positive (original input and models) and negative evidence (feedback provided after the wrong utterance). Positive evidence (also referred to as positive feedback by Carroll and Swain, 1993) is any input providing information about the acceptability or well-formedness of an utterance or response.

As it was stated before, there are three terms used interchangeably in the literature to refer to error correction: negative evidence, negative feedback and corrective feedback; even when the first one is used in the field of language acquisition, the second is used by cognitive psychology and the third is observed in the field of language teaching (Schachter, 1991). Lightbown and Spada (1999) refer to error correction also as corrective feedback and define it as any indication to the learners that the use of the target language has been inaccurate.

This kind of feedback includes the variety of answers learners could get. It may be either explicit or implicit and it might include metalinguistic information. Negative evidence can be preemptive (i.e., the explanation of grammar rules) and reactive. In relation to the latter, it can be either explicit (overt error correction) or implicit (communication breakdowns and recast) (Long & Robinson, 1998). Then, combinations like 'implicit

negative feedback' and 'explicit negative feedback' started to become popular in the literature (e.g., Long & Robinson, 1998; Rodríguez & Perdomo, 2002; Perdomo, 2008, among others).

Explicit negative feedback refers to the explicit provision of the correct form; it would be any feedback that overtly states that a learner's output was not part of the language to-be-learned (Carroll & Swain, 1993). Alves and Vilane (2011) define explicit correction as a way the teacher may provide the well-formed-utterance after the student has made an error, but indicating the production failures. Lyster and Ranta (1997) say that it implies to correct the error by clearly indicating that what the student said was incorrect.

Long and Robinson (1998) highlight overt error correction as the unique form of explicit negative feedback while Gass (1999) classified two types of explicit negative feedback: direct and indirect. The direct explicit negative feedback, on the one hand, is that in which learners are told that what they said was wrong and are provided with the appropriate target form. On the other hand, the indirect explicit negative feedback is that in which the teacher indirectly indicates the students that their utterance was wrong by asking for repetition or clarification and then they are provided by the right form into a question for them to notice their failure.

Gass (1999) also classified implicit negative feedback as inexplicit direct and inexplicit indirect. The first one represents a situation in which after the ill-formed utterance, the students are said that they were wrong, and then the teacher either repeats it or just says nothing (i.e., not provision of the target like form). The second (inexplicit indirect negative feedback) is similar to the explicit indirect negative feedback in the immediate reaction of the teachers towards the error, but students do not receive the expected form. In those cases explicitness is related to the provision of the well formed utterance by the teacher.

The following excerpts illustrate the four forms of feedback proposed by Gass (1999):

Negative Feedback	Example
Explicit direct	S: 'She don't come to class in the morning'
	T: That's incorrect. You should say 'She doesn't come to class in the morning'.
Explicit indirect	S: 'She don't come to class in the morning'
	T: Excuse me? Do you mean 'She doesn't come to class in the morning'?
Inexplicit direct	S: 'She don't come to class in the morning'
	T: That's incorrect: 'She don't come to class in the morning'
Inexplicit indirect	S: 'She don't come to class in the morning'
	T: Pardon me?

It is possible to find in the literature the term 'interactional feedback'; that is, feedback generated implicitly or explicitly through various negotiation and modification strategies (e.g., recasts, elicitations, clarification requests) that occur in the course of interaction to deal with communication problems. Interactional feedback is that in which the teacher provides the correct form of the target language without explicitly indicating that an error was made. This feedback type is also referred to as 'implicit correction' and 'implicit negative feedback', negative evidence which is provided avoiding the interruption of the flow of communication.

Feedback moves can be classified, according to Lyster (2002), in three types: explicit correction, recasts and prompts. Later, Lyster and Mori (2006) posited that recasts and prompts are interactional feedback, as opposed to corrective feedback, because they "are used by teachers in ways that sustain classroom interaction and maintain its coherence, but without consistently fulfilling a corrective function" (p. 272). The problem with this feedback type may be, as Gass (2003) indicates, that learner possibly will not understand that a correction is being intended and might only think that the speaker did not hear what he or she has just said.

Loewen and Nabei (2007) present a classification for corrective feedback. They state that there are two main kinds: other-repair (provide) and self-repair (prompt). In the

first group they name implicit correction and recast; in the second one they include, from the most explicit to the most implicit one, metalinguistic feedback, elicitation, repetition and clarification request.

There are other terms related to negative feedback study; for instance, 'uptake', which has been studied in order to assess feedback effect. Uptake refers to the types of students' responses as immediately following the feedback, including responses with repair of the nontarget items as well as utterances still in need of repair (Lyster & Ranta, 1997). Dos Santos and Moraes (2004) define uptake as a reformulation made by the student after the feedback.

Intake is another important definition to master when studying negative feedback. Reinder's (2012) says that Intake is detected input that goes beyond what is held in working memory for immediate recognition and comprehension. Reinder also claims that definitions of intake come into three broad categories: (1) intake as a product, (2) as a process, and (3) as a combination of the other two. In other words, it is not that simple to define it. Among the authors that have considered intake as a product we may mention Corder (1967), Krashen (1978), Faerch and Kasper (1980), Sharwood (1993) and Carrol (2001). On the contrary, Boulouffe (1987) and Hatch (1983) are examples of authors considering intake as a process. Finally, among those considering intake as both, process and product, one may name Kumaravadivelu (1994).

In the list of definitions directly related to negative feedback we find 'repair'. It is defined as a corrective activity of troubles in conversation, during interaction (Yasui, 2010). Kasper (1985) explains that the basic repair structure consists of three steps: the production of the trouble-source, the initiation of the repair, and its completion. Besides, Kasper classifies repair as self-initiated and self-completed, other-initiated and self-completed, self-initiated and other-completed, and other-initiated and other-completed.

CONCLUSIONS

The first aim in the present documental review was to provide readers a description of the perception of errors in the foreign language classroom through the years. Nowadays, it is likely to say that errors are an unavoidable part in the language learning process and

teachers are expected to deal with them properly in order to enhance the learning process. However, after a careful review it is possible to conclude how difficult it was to get to the stage in which such statement is not a source of controversy. As language study evolved, the conception of the phenomena taking place during that process has also changed pushing teachers to search for the adequate methods and strategies to use the classroom to promote learning.

A second objective was to offer the reader an up dated review of terminology regarding error treatment in the foreign language classroom, with the purpose of helping teachers to get better results when searching papers related to errors and errors correction in the EFL classroom as well as making it easier to understand error treatment. It is evident that terminology related to the issue has considerably changed in the last years which might make difficult for teachers to find up dated information if they do not include current descriptors during their searches; however, the present review might be helpful in such task.

Oral errors treatment in the language learning process is an issue that must be constantly researched. Even when in the last decades the interest on the topic has increased, more empirical research is needed in order to fill some blanks still remaining (e.g., negative feedback that might be recommended in specific settings). English language teaching in Venezuela provides an interesting set to research as few papers have been published about teacher's and students' reactions to oral errors in EFL classrooms in public education institutes.

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