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Foreign Language Learners' Views on Corrective Feedback in Oral Production

**An Analysis of Secondary School Students' Preferences and
Perceptions.**

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ABSTRACT

This study examines secondary school students' preferences for corrective feedback with reference to oral production activities in EFL (English as a Foreign Language) lessons. Framed in the debate on the role of direct instruction, research in the field of corrective feedback has grown considerably in recent years. However, the majority of studies were conducted in the context of second language acquisition and in most cases were based on quantitative methods.

The aim of this quantitative-qualitative study is therefore to gain a deeper insight into FL learner's view of several aspects of error correction, including types of errors to be treated, delivering agents of correction, methodologies, timing, and frequency of error correction and to investigate the role of anxiety both in the learner's choice of preferred corrective practices and in the relationship between error correction and willingness to communicate, whose implications can lead us to improved and more conscious teaching actions.

The research involved 150 EFL learners attending secondary schools in Italy (Pordenone). Data were collected through questionnaires and interviews. Two groups were created on the basis of preliminary language anxiety questionnaire, in order to compare answers on feedback. The main arguments dealt with in the chapters are direct instruction and corrective feedback, anxiety, willingness to communicate and motivation.

The most relevant results of the study show that, firstly, EFL learners feel the necessity of feedback to improve their language knowledge. Secondly, their preferences for error correction seem to depend more on individual features than on general anxiety level. Finally, affective support and self-repair, in the context of a teacher-guided process, are considered fundamental for an effective and motivating corrective action.

Key words:

Corrective Feedback, Anxiety, Willingness to Communicate, Motivation

INTRODUCTION

One of the major issues students encounter every time they are involved in oral production activities during foreign language classes is corrective feedback. In recent years several studies have been carried out on the subject with a focus on the research of the most effective corrective techniques, even though the majority of them in the field of second language acquisition (Lightbown and Spada, 1990, Russel and Spada, 2006, in Loewen et al. 2009:92; Ammar, 2008, Sheen, 2008; Nassaji, 2009, cited in Ramirez and Jones, 2013:2; Lyster and Izquierdo, 2009, Loewen et al., 2009, Park, 2010, Adams, 2011, Ramirez and Jones 2013). Only a few have been conducted with regard to the foreign language (Schulz, 1996 and 2001; Bang, 1999, in Loewen et al. 2009:93; Ishida, 2004, in Ramirez and Jones, 2013:2; Brown, 2009) and inquiries on the subject are wished for by researchers (such as Brown, 2009, and Loewen et al., 2009).

Learner beliefs are an important variable in language acquisition, as stated by Dörnyei (2005, in Loewen et al. 2009:91), since they often influence students' behaviour in class, their attitude towards language and even their choice of language learning techniques. Understanding learner's beliefs on learning and their experience in language classes seems therefore a fundamental starting point to promote learning and to offer teachers an occasion for discussing and comparing opinions and expectations in the classroom.

In addition to these considerations and to the therefore necessity of further inquiry on the field, my personal experience both as a learner and EFL teacher and the frequent exchange of opinions with students who needed extra reinforcement classes, and especially with a girl affected by dyslexia, arouse in me the desire of a deeper understanding of students' experience, feelings and needs in relation to feedback. What do students think about corrective feedback during oral production? How and when should it be carried out? Who should perform it? This study wants to explore feedback in

all its aspects from students' point of view and to highlight their preferences and needs.

A further point under investigation in the present work is the role of language anxiety in students' perception of effective feedback. Anxiety, as argued by MacIntyre and Gardner (1994), can be present at different stages of learning with effects on cognitive processing and, as a consequence, on achievement, and has therefore a strong influence on language attitude and acquisition. Aim of this study is also to explore on the one side, whether during oral production activities feedback itself, or teacher's corrective methods and behaviours, can play a causal role in provoking anxiety and in affecting the student's willingness to communicate in the classroom; on the other side whether student's preferences for correction vary depending on the students' language anxiety levels.

All these issues have been explored by investigating secondary school students' preferences for corrective feedback during oral production in the context of English as a Foreign Language in Italy. For the purpose questionnaires with both open-ended and closed questions were administered to 150 students from various secondary schools in the area of Pordenone in order to collect qualitative and quantitative data on their beliefs on the need for instructed grammar and corrective feedback and on the types of feedback and methods to be used in corrective actions. Students were divided into two groups on the basis of a preliminary language anxiety questionnaire (taken from MacIntyre and Gardner, 1994) to observe whether student's anxiety level could be a factor influencing their preferences for correction and feedback and thus to explore the relationship between anxiety and perceived effectiveness of corrective actions. Moreover interviews were collected in order to gain a deeper view on the most crucial aspects.

1 LITERATURE REVIEW

The following Literature Review section intends to frame the main points of this study both defining some concepts and reviewing the most important research projects conducted in the field.

1.1 The interest in student's beliefs

Student's beliefs are today widely recognized as an important individual difference variable in language learning and teaching, as stated by Dörnyei (2005, in Brown, 2009). Since the early work of Horwitz (1981; 1988; in Brown, 2009:47 and Loewen et alii, 2009:92), who created the BALLI questionnaire “Beliefs About Language Learning Inventory”, the interest in learner's beliefs and perceptions has grown considerably in recent years. In 2003 Kalaja and Barcelos (in Brown, 2009:47) published a volume, “Beliefs about SLA: New Research Approaches”, which explores the definition of beliefs about L2 acquisition and effective ways to study them. As reported by Loewen et al. (2009:91) “L2 learner beliefs correlate with strategy use, motivation, proficiency (...), learner anxiety and autonomous learning” and, according to Williams and Burden (1997, in Brown, 2009:46) learner's perceptions can strongly influence achievement. Student's beliefs and perceptions can also be misleading and represent obstacle learning, when resulting in unrealistic expectations. In her study, Schulz (1996) compared students' and teachers' views on error correction and on the role of grammar. Substantial discrepancies resulted between the students' and the teachers' views, being the students much more positive towards grammar instruction and error correction than teachers were. She argued that when student's and teacher's expectations do not meet, they can have negative effects on the student's satisfaction and even result in abandoning L2 study. Not simple opinions, but perceptions are determining. In facts she writes (1996:349):

While opinions alone do not necessarily reflect the actual cognitive processes that go on in language acquisition, perceptions *do* influence reality. Indeed, some would argue that perception is reality for the individual learner. Students whose instructional expectations are not met may consciously or subconsciously question the credibility of the teacher and/or the instructional approach in cases where corrective feedback is not provided. Such lack of pedagogical face validity could affect learners' motivation, which in turn affects the amount of time and effort they are willing to invest in the learning process and the types of activities they are willing to engage in to gain mastery.

In line with Schulz, Brown (2009) maintains that, to avoid students' unrealistic expectations, and the sense of failure and unrealized goals resulting thereof, teachers should take the time to investigate and understand their students' perspectives on teaching and learning, discussing “differences in expectations and perceptions”. This of course does not imply that teaching techniques should obtain students' approval, but, at the same time, the gap between teachers' and students' views should be bridged. As appears from the cited works, one of the major aspect on which teachers and students disagree is feedback and direct instruction.

1.2 The debate on direct instruction

In the course of time foreign (FL) and second (L2) language teaching has undergone several changes and has been influenced by different trends resulting in different approaches to language instruction. In this context one of the crucial points still under debate is the effectiveness of direct instruction and corrective feedback. Loewen et al. (2009) frame the debate in terms of meaning-focussed instruction versus form-focussed instruction, where the first one considers the process of second language learning similar to first language (L1) acquisition, being therefore a natural process of acquisition in which explicit focus on grammar and corrective actions are unnecessary; while the second one sees the need for correction and for learner's noticing and practising linguistic forms as absolutely invaluable. Form-focussed instruction is then subdivided into two different approaches: *focus on forms* and *focus on form*. Quoting Klapper and Rees (2003) and Ellis (2001), Loewen (2009:92) writes:

Focus on forms is characterized by “division of the language according to lexis, structures, notions or functions, which are selected and sequenced for students to learn in a uniform and incremental way” (...), and by the general absence of a communicative context. In contrast, *focus on form* constitutes attention to linguistic structures within the context of meaning-focused, communicative activities (...). It may involve the negotiation of meaning as well as the planned or incidental targeting of problematic linguistic items, often in the form of error correction.

The debate is still open on determining whether direct instruction and corrective feedback are effective with regard to language acquisition. However, several researchers favourably recognize some form of instructed grammar and feedback as beneficial to student's language development. Ramirez and Jones (2013:3-4) observe that while the studies conducted by Rodrigo, Krashen and Gibbons, (2004), and Horst, (2005) highlighted that learning can occur “through student activity and productive task in the absence of direct instruction, Doughty (1991), Carduner (2007) and Pellicer-Sánchez and Schmitt (2010) provided evidence that direct instruction and corrective feedback are effective instruments for language acquisition. In their study Ramirez and Jones compared the effectiveness of two different teaching approaches, a teacher-guided approach in which direct grammar instruction and corrective feedback were provided, and a student-centred approach focussed on productive language tasks. Two units of students of Spanish as a second language were exposed to the approaches and the results from pre-test to post test scores showed in both cases an increase in language development, though in the case of the teacher-guided approach the amount of acquisition (vocabulary and grammar) resulted considerably higher. Other researchers, such as Sheen (2008) noticed the important role played by feedback in the learner's internalisation of correct input, and Loewen et al. (2009) highlighted that both L2 and FL learners value grammar instruction, and that in particular FL students are more convinced of the need for grammar instruction and error correction. Ellis, Basturkmen and Loewen (2001) in their study on learner uptake in communicative ESL lessons report improvement in students' proficiency after receiving feedback (both implicit and explicit), and state that focus on form “can occur without

disturbing the communicative flow of a classroom and that the classroom context can affect the amount of uptake” (p. 281). On these bases the present study aims at discovering student's view with reference to the perceived need for grammar instruction and corrective actions.

1.3 Feedback and Errors

Feedback is an aspect underlying any kind of communicative exchange. In Chaudron's (1988) view feedback is a natural process occurring in conversation, a way through which speakers can “derive from their listeners information on the reception and comprehension of their message”. It reveals itself therefore to be a far wider notion than *error correction*, which is to say a mere correction of incorrect forms in a student's utterance. However, as he noticed, while in most social interaction - which is to say in natural conversational contexts - participants equally exchange and negotiate information and meaning through more or less explicit behaviour (comprehension checks or questioning looks, or by use of other signals), inside the classroom “the teacher having superior knowledge and status results in an imbalance in expectations as to who provides feedback and when it is provided”. Feedback in the classroom is defined by Lightbown and Spada (1999, in Park, 2010:8) as “any indication to the learners that their use of the target language is incorrect”. Feedback occurs therefore when the student's utterances result inconsistent with the standard forms of the target language.

In accordance with Corder's definition (Corder, 1967, in Park, 2010:6), such inconsistency can then be distinguished into error and mistake¹. The term *error* is referred to systematic errors of the learner, while *mistake* is considered the occasional production of incorrect forms due to several reasons, as occasionally memory lapses or others. In this view feedback seems to be necessary in order to prevent the so-called process of *fossilization*, as reported by Higgs and Clifford (1982) and

1 In this study the terms error and mistake will be used indifferently since in daily practice there is not always a clear distinction between the two.

by Omaggio (1984, both in Dekeyser, 1993:502). The causes of fossilization are unknown, however in this process systematic errors are continuously repeated by learners, who seem to remain indifferent to any treatment. What is therefore the role of corrective feedback?

1.3.1 THE FUNCTIONS OF FEEDBACK

As pointed out in the previous section, feedback does not correspond to the restricted action of correcting errors, it represents instead a wider concept, resulting in different areas of intervention. Feedback not only provides learners information on language rules and standard forms, but it is also chance for them to modify their behaviour. Feedback provides positive or negative evidence depending on the type of corrective actions undertaken. “Positive evidence consists of examples of what is possible in a language” (Loewen, 2011:136). This is to say that all input is potentially positive evidence of target language forms, and that feedback providing input, such as recasts, can be considered as giving positive evidence. As previously explained, researchers agree upon the necessity of positive evidence in language learning, however there is no agreement on whether it is sufficient or if negative evidence must be provided as well. Negative evidence consists of information about non-target-like forms, given through explicit feedback. According to White (1991, in Loewen, 2011:124) this would help students to notice their wrong formulation of sentences.

Annett (1969, in Chaudron, 1988:134) identified three different functions of feedback: *reinforcement*, *information* and *motivation*. In the process of hypothesis making and testing, feedback, by giving appropriate information, helps students confirm or disconfirm them and, as a consequence, to modify the rules they have internalized. For this process to be successful, however, several conditions have to be met. First of all the learner must be put in a condition to notice the gap between his/her incorrect form and the form required by the target language, which, as noted by

Chaudron (1988), can not be given for granted. Role of the teacher is therefore to create this condition so that the learner is prepared to notice the gap and ready to compare his/her own representation of the rule with the new rule encountered in the input. Jamet (2008:92), referring to Vygotsky's studies on the Zone of Proximal Development, argued that a child supported by an adult in a problem-solving task, can solve more complex tasks than he could normally do alone. In this view *mediation*, both in its cognitive and social dimension, is a crucial factor, in which the teacher plays a key role. Support can then be provided by the teacher by use or reinforcement moves, as positive expressions confirming the student's attempts to produce modified output. This reinforcement behaviour can enhance the learner's confidence during the process of his/her own grammar revision and help confirm hypotheses.

Finally, a positive, warm environment must be created so that the learner who produced the wrong utterance can feel affectively supported in the effort of internalising a new rule and repairing the errors. For Krashen (in Chaudron, 1988) the process of natural acquisition functions only when the learner is in an affectively positive environment and is receptive. Corrections must therefore not be perceived as failures. Affective support can reveal itself to be fundamental as well in contributing to the creation of a non-threatening environment, both with reference to the possible arousal of debilitating anxiety and to the aspects pertaining self-image and competitiveness (Allwright and Bailey, 1991). Conversely, a sense of security and support can increase motivation and lead to a successful learning. With reference to Vigil and Oller (1976), Chaudron (1988:134) writes:

The effect of feedback consists not only of the positive or negative information about the target language forms but of the further continuum of positive, neutral or negative affective support present in conversation (Annett's motivational function) which can interact with cognitive information factors and influence learner's efforts to attempt revision of their production.

A further aspect that both promotes a positive climate and reduces speaking anxiety, allowing

students to better construct their responses, is adequate *wait-time*, or the pause after a question during which learners can elaborate their responses, which corresponds to MacIntyre's (1994) processing phase. As he demonstrated, anxiety can arise at any time during the learning process - which can be divided into input, processing and output phases - and time revealed itself to be a crucial variable influencing performance (MacIntyre, 1995). This is true for facilitating anxiety, but especially in the case of debilitating anxiety, in which extra effort and extra time can compensate for poor performance (please refer to the paragraph on anxiety further on). As reported by Chaudron (1988:128-129), the variable of time has been studied by several researchers, like Holley and King (1971), White and Lightbown (1984), and Long et al. (1984), whose studies confirm the relationship between wait-time and improved performance; when a longer time was given to process information after a question, learners had the chance to better construct responses and to be more accurate, and this resulted in an increase in student responses after initial hesitation.

All this considered, a teacher providing not only cognitive information, but an opportunity of reinforcement and especially offering positive affective support, in a relaxed and collaborative environment in which learners are recognised as active participants in the correction and allowed to attempt self-repair, favours learners' motivation making them receptive both to feedback and to language development.

1.3.2 THE PROCESS OF CORRECTIVE FEEDBACK

In this context it becomes clear that feedback is a complex matter and that several points are under discussion to understand what makes correction effective. The process of feedback has been analysed by Long (1977, in Allwright and Bailey 1991:101), who identified five consequential phases in the decision-making process prior to the teacher feedback move, as we can see in the model below (Figure 1). In these phases, the teacher, after noticing the student's error, has to decide:

- whether to treat the error, or to ignore it;
- when to treat the error: immediately, after the student has finished the sentence or in a later moment;
- what kind of information must be given (presence, location or identity of the error);
- who has to treat the error (the teacher him/herself, or other students).

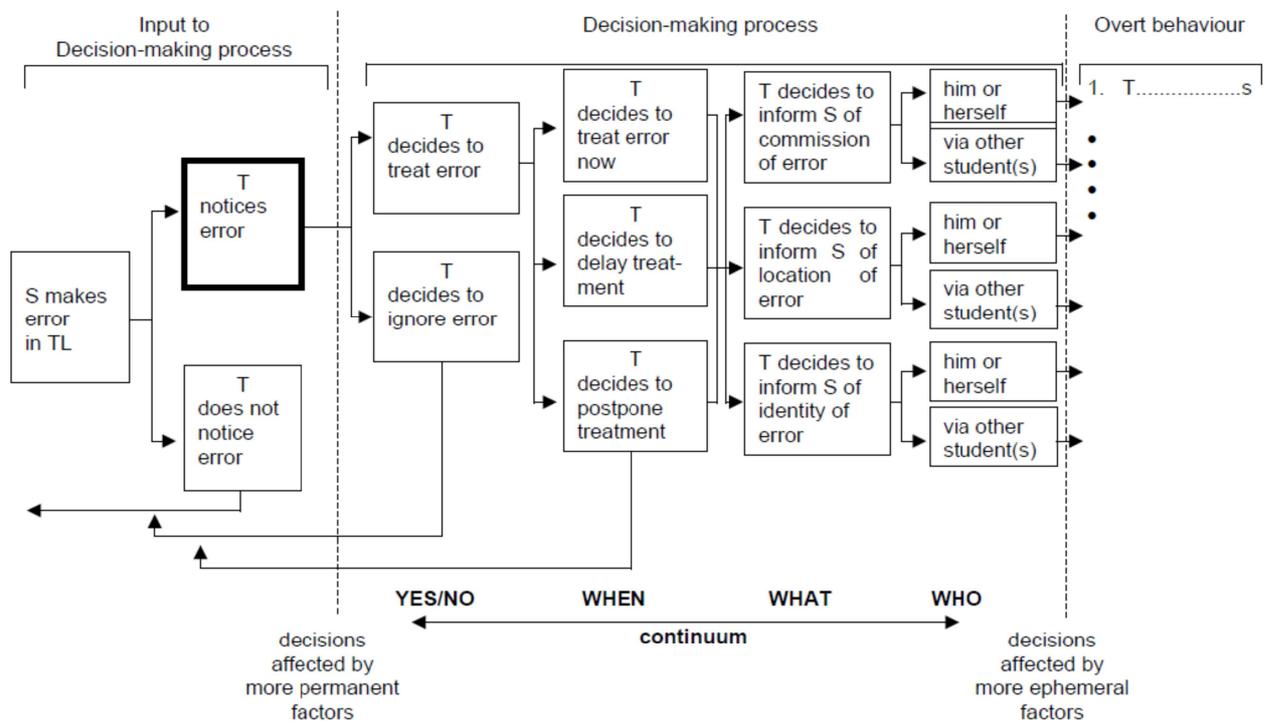


Figure 4 Long's model of the decision-making process prior to the teacher feedback move (1977: 289)

Figure 1: Long's model of the decision-making process prior to the teacher feedback move. From Allwright and Bailey (1991:101).

Each of these points raise several questions on how correction should be carried out, however, no distinction is made here on the types of errors to be treated (Any error? At any time?) and on how feedback can be delivered (More or less explicit? Prompting or giving the correct input?). Finally, the only two actors or participants in the corrective process are 1) the teacher, and 2) the other students. Long does not take into consideration the possibility of self-correction by the student who made the error.

These aspects were included by Chaudron (1988) in his extensive review of studies on feedback. He identified five questions he used to structure his work and a similar analysis was then conducted by Allwright and Bailey (1991). The questions are:

1. Should learner's errors be corrected?
2. Who should correct learner's errors?
3. When should learner's errors be corrected?
4. Which learner's errors should be corrected?
5. How should learner's errors be corrected?

Each question has been long debated among researchers and positions are still controversial. The first question, on the need of correction has been discussed in Paragraph 1.2, which shows that the debate on the need for, and the effectiveness of, direct instruction and feedback is still open, and positions among researchers differ substantially, even though cited studies would confirm they are beneficial (for reference see paragraph 1.2). Questions 2 to 5 are treated in the following review.

Who should correct learner's errors?

With reference to the agents delivering correction, the choice is between *teachers, peers, learners* themselves, and the book or other types of *study aids*. As reported at the beginning of this section, interaction inside the classroom is highly different from conversation in a natural context. In the first case, the teacher is strongly perceived as the person who should provide feedback, in force of her/his role. Wren's study (cited by Chaudron, 1988) showed that feedback on errors resulted in an increased ability in learner's detection of errors and self-correction. And this poses us two further question: 1) Has feedback the only function of correcting errors or even to promote and develop learner's autonomy and skills, and specifically the self-correction ability? and 2) Are students able

to detect errors, which is an obligatory step towards self-correction? These questions are highly debated, especially in the case of implicit feedback, such as recasts, which offer learners positive evidence without clearly indicating the error or the presence of an error. Mackey and Philip (1998, cited by Sheen, 2008:839) showed that learners' developmental readiness is a key factor affecting whether recasts work for acquisition; in their study learners exposed to recasts improved their ability to form question to a greater extent than those in the interaction group. However, no difference resulted in proficiency. This means that in the case of recasts, feedback is effective only when learners are developmentally ready to internalise the new rule or structure. This does not imply, however, that self correction is not possible. With the help of prompts, under the guide of the teacher, learners can be led to self-generated repairs by using their ability to retrieve existing knowledge, and develop their autonomy in the revision of hypotheses (Lyster and Ranta, 1997). In this situation the teacher is more a mediator, performing a supportive function, who allows the learner to achieve correct target language forms.

A further aspect to be considered is the role of peers in feedback. Even though peers are usually not recognized as potential providers of feedback, since the role is normally demanded of teachers, with reference to the studies by Gaskill (1980), Schwartz (1980), and Brock et al. (1986), Chaudron (1988:177) draws the conclusion that “learners will most readily incorporate corrective feedback in meaningful collaborative tasks, where appropriate use of the target language will mean success rather than failure to meet the goals of the activity”. In other words a student's *engagement* in a *cooperative* task together *with other students* can make feedback effective. And this means three things: peers can become a *resource* and not be seen exclusively as competitors, which Allwright and Bailey (1991) pointed out as a major risk compromising receptivity and thus learning, since competitiveness can both be an anxiety-provoking factor and can affect one's self image; collaborative tasks are to be promoted since they require the participation – which means active

production – of every member of the group, and last, but not least, a meaningful task means involvement, in other words motivation to learn and improve, therefore it makes the learner receptive to feedback.

Finally, the use of a book or study materials as means of correction, mentioned by Malamah-Thomas (1987), in the case of oral activities would imply a postponed correction, supposing that the learners notice the errors, or that the teacher intervenes, except in the specific situation of structured activities aiming at producing language on the basis of a given model, which can be then used for confrontation with the learner's utterances.

When should learner's errors be corrected?

Immediate, delayed or postponed correction? The main aspect underlying this question concerns the choice between interrupting the learner's speech immediately after an error has occurred, or postponing the correction for a longer period of time, to avoid the possibility of inhibiting the learner's willingness to speak. Researchers as Brown (2009), Schulz (1996), Loewen et alii (2009) noticed several discrepancies on this point between teachers' and students' opinions. In general students require more often immediate correction than their teachers think. Teachers are less inclined to provide immediate feedback to avoid interrupting the flow of communication. While form-focussed instruction underlines the importance of providing positive or negative evidence of students' utterances, so that non-target-like forms can be immediately identified allowing learners to notice the gap, communicative approaches highlight that an immediate action could compromise the affective function of feedback, corresponding to Annett's motivational function and to Vigil and Oller's affective feedback. However, Ellis, Basturkmen and Loewen (2001) stated that focus on form and corrective feedback in communicative lessons do not affect communication, and do not interfere with focus on meaning. In accordance with Long (1977), Allwright and Bailey (1991:103)

argued that “feedback becomes less effective as the time between the performance of the skill and the feedback increases”. The debate is still open and the present study wants to enrich the panorama by getting students' views on the matter.

Which learner's errors should be corrected?

Five types of errors are usually taken into consideration: phonological, grammatical, lexical, content and discourse. According to Chaudron's studies, (1988) grammatical errors are the kind of errors receiving a higher rate of correction, followed by phonological errors, while little attention is given, respectively, to lexical, discourse, and content errors. Hendrickson (1978, in Chaudron, 1988:140), noted that the errors that are useful to learners are “errors that impair communication significantly; errors that have highly stigmatizing effects on the listener or reader; and errors that occur frequently in student's speech and writing”. He identified transversal categories of errors, not on a type-basis, but considering their significance in the learners' language development or in communication. Teachers, when choosing whether to react to students' errors should therefore take into consideration not only the type of error, but also their frequency and seriousness in terms of comprehension of the message.

How should learner's errors be corrected?

The first aspect underlying this question involves the choice of a method – or *corrective move* - to deliver correction. The second aspects pertains to the characteristics of feedback, independently from the feedback type. The range of feedback moves can be seen as a continuum from the most implicit forms of interventions, as reformulation of a learner's utterance, to the most explicit, or overt signals that an error has been made. Chaudron (1977, in Allwright and Bailey, 1991: 221) listed over thirty types of corrective reactions to oral errors and created a model representing the flow of discourse between teacher and student (Figure 2). More complex than Long's model (see

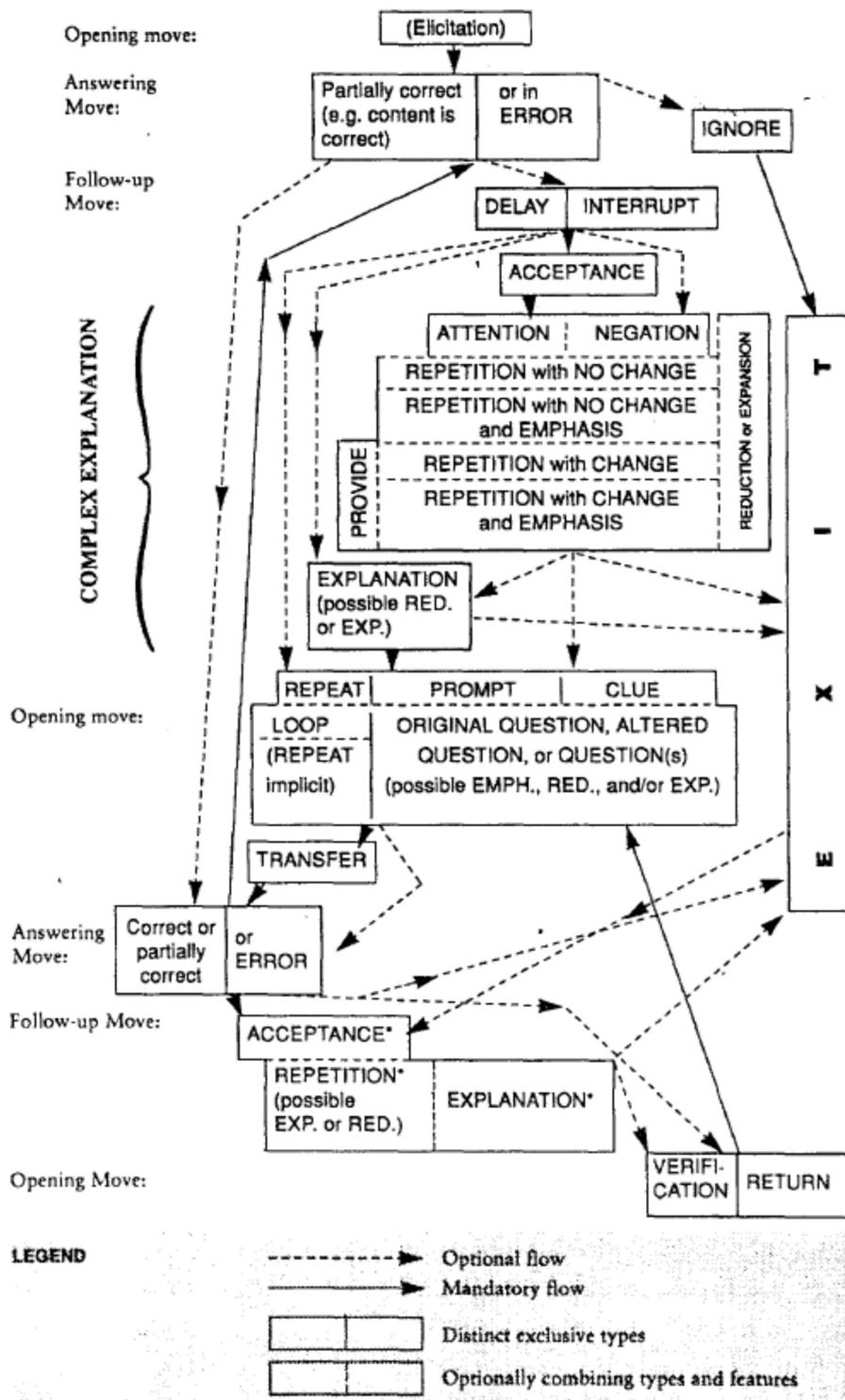


Figure 2: Chaudron's (1977:37) Flow chart model of corrective discourse (in Allwright and Bailey, 1991:106)

paragraph 1.3.2), this chart shows the various possibilities teachers can adopt when communicating and giving feedback to learners. As we can see, it reflects the main structure of corrective process, including whether to treat errors or to ignore them, what errors must be treated, when and how to provide correction. Corrective moves are various, can be more or less explicit and can provide an input reflecting target-like forms or prompt learners to provide correct forms and to self-repair. Lyster and Mori (2004) grouped them into three categories: *explicit correction*, as clear indication of a student's error, *recasts*, implicit reformulation of a student's utterance, and *prompts*, including several actions offering an opportunity for self-repair. However corrective moves can be summarised as follows: explicit feedback providing indication of the error, of the presence of an error, or of the type/location of the error, elicitation, overt correction and metalinguistic feedback; implicit feedback including silent interruption, repetition of a part of a student's utterance, repetition of a question, recasts. Adams, Nuevo and Egi (2011) provided a taxonomy of corrective feedback, showing how feedback types can combine the explicit-implicit dimension with the provision of an input or the prompt of a modified output (Figure 3).

Recasts are the most frequent type of corrective feedback (Sheen, 2004, Lyster and Izquierdo, 2009, Ellis, Basturkmen and Loewen, 2001), since they are recognized by teachers as good methods of intervention to draw the learner's attention on form, while still maintaining the flow of communication. Sheen (2004:294) observes they are perceived as “non threatening, unobtrusive” and reports a high rate of successful uptake for students receiving recasts, even though admitting a further need of inquiry to establish in which teaching environment this technique is more adequate and fruitful. Similar data have been reported by Ellis, Basturkmen and Loewen (2001) in their study on learner uptake. They showed how recasts resulted in successful uptake, although in a lower rate compared to other types of feedback, as inform, repeat or prompt, though these were less frequent. They also reported identical rates of success for implicit or explicit feedback. Lyster and Izquierdo

(2009:453-454)) argued that in their study exposing adult second language learners of French to recasts and prompts, both types of feedback were successful, and lead to improved accuracy and reaction-time scores over time. In their view success was due to different reasons. In facts, while learners receiving recasts “benefited from the repeated exposure to positive exemplars as well as from opportunities to infer negative evidence”, learners receiving prompts “benefited from the repeated exposure to negative evidence as well as from opportunities to produce modified output”.

Taxonomy of Corrective Feedback

Input/Output dimension	Feedback	Example of NS feedback to a NNS error (John goed to school)	Explicit/Implicit dimension
Input-providing	Explicit correction	No, it's not goed – went.	More explicit
	Recast	John went to school.	More implicit
Output-prompting	Metalinguistic feedback	–ed is for past tense of regular verbs, and “go” is an irregular verb.	More explicit
	Elicitation	John....?	
	Repetition	John goed to school?	
	Clarification request	Pardon?	More implicit

Figure 3: Taxonomy of Corrective Feedback. From Adams, Nuevo and Egi (2011:44)

This has several implications: first, results demonstrate that both positive and negative feedback are

beneficial to language development. Second, that every type of feedback is related to specific results with reference to learners skills development; the exposure to the target language input can improve students' inference ability, while the possibility to modify their output can develop autonomy and self-correction ability. Last, it can be argued that more than one type of feedback can, or should, be adopted by teachers in their teaching practice, and chosen according to the aim to be reached and to the learners' mastery.

Finally, feedback should have the following characteristics in order to be effective (Cassany, 1993, cited by Torresan, 2011: 231): clarity, significance, conciseness, respect, focus. For Cassany correction must never be ambiguous; it must be adequate to the learner's skills and relevant to content errors, before it is addressed to formal errors. It must be concise and always performed with respect toward the students, which ensures the motivational function. As last point, focus on a specific aspect of the language would be preferable so that learner's attention can be oriented. He underlines the importance of learner's active participation in the process of correction, to promote involvement, self-confidence and motivation, aspects which play a crucial role with reference to language anxiety and willingness to communicate.

1.4 Anxiety as a variable in language education

Why is anxiety - as affective variable - to be taken into consideration in teaching a language?

Researchers like Horwitz, Schumann, MacIntyre, and many others, analysed the characteristics of anxiety and its influence on performance and learning. Students' everyday experiences confirm that affective variables play a significant role in conditioning their behaviour, their fluency in SL/FL communication, their general linguistic performance and their learning.

Krashen theorized the *affective filter*, a process activated by the brain in order to protect the individual from stressful or affectively dangerous situations, preventing the cognitive processing of

information. The functioning of the affective filter is accurately described in Balboni (2006:25):

Nelle situazioni di piacevole sfida... l'organismo rilascia neurotrasmettitori (come la noradrenalina) fondamentali per fissare le "tracce mnestiche", cioè per introiettare e poi ricordare l'input che viene recepito. In caso di stress negativo, di ansia, di paura di non riuscire, invece, l'amigdala, una ghiandola "emozionale" posta al centro del cervello, rileva il pericolo e richiede lo steroide, ma allo stesso tempo l'ippocampo (altra ghiandola chiave per la memorizzazione a lungo termine) valuta che un test o un roleplay non sono pericoli reali e quindi cerca di bloccare l'effetto dello steroide – ma per far ciò smette di occuparsi di indirizzare le nuove informazioni o di recuperare quelle esistenti nella memoria a lungo termine. Ne consegue che le *attività didattiche stressanti sono inutili* non su un piano genericamente psico-pedagogico, ma per ragioni di funzionamento del cervello.

Anxiety is thus widely recognized as a cause of poor language learning and performance. This makes clear the importance of considering the most common sources of anxiety, including all types of anxiety-provoking class activities, and the need of attempting to avoid or prevent, as far as possible, such factors in the language learning environment. Ohata (2005:2) in his introduction to a study on potential sources of anxiety for Japanese learners of English, with reference to the view of Spielmann & Radnofsky (2001), writes: "our first and foremost important task as ESL/EFL teachers is to have a better understanding of the nature of student anxiety in terms of when, where, how, and why students feel anxious, before addressing effective ways of anxiety reduction". This statement suggests that teachers have not to resort to general anxiety reduction strategies based on general anxiety-provoking factors, but they need to analyse the specific context of their class and the needs and situation of every single student. This is far more true in a *curriculum* perspective, which finds its roots in a learner-centred vision of teaching and education. The analysis of the student's needs, the real context of learning, the materials at disposal, the environment, the class as a whole, the student-specific features (personality traits, multiple intelligences, cognitive styles) represent the basis on which a really differentiated learning in a stimulating and affectively secure context can be built and promoted.

1.4.1 ANXIETY FROM A COGNITIVE PERSPECTIVE

Psychology makes a distinction between trait anxiety and state anxiety, the first being a permanent characteristic of one's personality, and the second a transitory emotional experience, which can be positive (facilitating anxiety) or negative (debilitating anxiety). Facilitating anxiety acts as a sort of stimulus which can lead to a better performance, while debilitating anxiety is a demotivating experience which influences the subject with regard both to behaviour and cognition, reducing one's performance and cognitive processing of information.

Horwitz et alii (1986) identify the three main sources of anxiety as *fear of negative evaluation*, *test anxiety* and *communication apprehension*. The fear of negative evaluation concerns the self-image and the perceived need of defending it. Test anxiety is related to the fear of negative evaluation, but also to one's self-confidence, competitiveness, and worry of one's own performance. Communication apprehension depends on the learner's self-confidence, on the (poor) relation with the teacher and/or with other students and on the (negative) atmosphere in the class. However, Horwitz and Young (1991) were unable to establish *how* anxiety influences the language learning processes.

Aiming at demonstrating that anxiety can influence learning and is a cause of individual differences in the learning processes, MacIntyre took into consideration the studies on social anxiety developed between the '70s and the '90s, according to which the common experience of anxiety at some time or in some type of situation is classified as social anxiety (Leary, 1990, cited in MacIntyre, 1995:22). This allowed MacIntyre and Gardner (1989; 1991b) to include language anxiety in the broader dimension of social anxiety, since it is generated by the social and communicative aspects of language learning. Socially based anxieties have *affective components*, such as apprehension, uneasiness, discomfort; *cognitive components*, such as distraction in cognition, decrease in

cognitive processing abilities, negative self evaluation, expectation of failure; and *behavioural components*, like inhibition, attempts to escape the situation, tendency to withdraw in presence of others. On the basis of Eysenk's (1979) theory the effects of anxiety interacts negatively with ability on task performance:

Highly anxious subjects are effectively in a dual-task or divided attention situation, in contrast to the non-anxious subjects who primarily process task relevant information.

A student in a dual-task situation has to manage contemporary both the task he is asked to perform and task-irrelevant information, together with worry about other student's reactions and cognitive self-concern. Such situation requires an increased effort in order to perform the task. As stated by the Yerkes-Dodson Law (Smith, Sarason & Sarason, 1982, in MacIntyre, 1995:92), to the extent that a task is relatively simple, an increased effort allows the subject to compensate for the divided-attention situation and even to improve performance (*facilitating anxiety*), but, as task difficulty grows, the system may not fully compensate for the cognitive interference and the subject's performance worsens (*debilitating anxiety*), as shown in Figure 4.

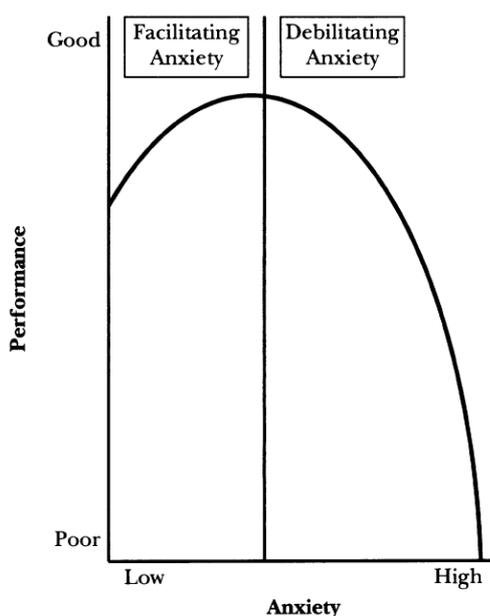


Figure 4: Inverted "U" relation between anxiety and performance. From MacIntyre (1995: 92)

Leary (1990) and Levitt (1980) (cited by MacIntyre, 1995:92) theorized recursive or cyclical relations among (state) anxiety, cognition and behaviour, each aspect influencing the others.

MacIntyre writes:

For example, a demand to answer a question in a second language class may cause a student to become anxious; anxiety leads to worry and rumination. Cognitive performance is diminished because of the divided attention and therefore performance suffers, leading to negative self evaluations and more self-deprecating cognition which further impairs performance and so on. For some students this is a frequent course of events, and anxiety becomes reliably associated with any situation involving the second language. Once established, this association leads students to become anxious even at the prospect of second language learning or communication.

These cyclical relations are well represented in Figure 4 below, which shows how state anxiety arousal – an immediate anxiety experience - can interfere with cognitive abilities and influence the student's behaviour.

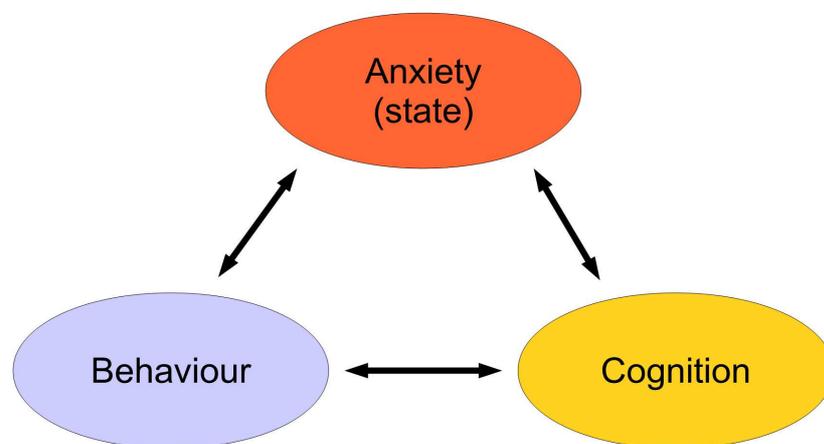


Figure 5: Recursive relations among anxiety, cognition, and behaviour. From MacIntyre (1995: 83)

MacIntyre and Gardner (1994) discovered that anxiety can limit performance on several tasks, including listening, speaking, comprehension, repetition, reading and learning. Language anxiety effects on second language activities can accumulate and lead to differences between anxious and

non-anxious students. Interference seems to be caused by state anxiety arousal that can “occur at any stage of the learning process”. They identified three stages in language learning: the *input stage* in which learners encounter new stimuli, examples of target language forms; the *processing stage* consisting of operations as organizing, storing and assimilating the input received in the previous stage; the *output stage*, during which learners produce language on the basis of the elaboration of the input and processing stages. They argue that although more apparent in the output stage, anxiety can be equally present at any moment in the learning process. Young (1990) found that language anxiety negatively correlates not only with fear of speaking in a foreign/second language, as in communication apprehension. One major source of anxiety is fear of being negatively evaluated by peers and by the instructor. However, she does not relate the fact to error correction itself, since students reported they wanted to have their errors corrected. Instead she argues that anxiety can be “more directly related to *how, how often* and *when* errors are corrected than to the fact that they *are* corrected” (Young, 1990:550), and that the environment created by the teacher can positively affect the feeling of tension “When instructors create a warm social environment by having a good sense of humour and being friendly, relaxed and patient, students report feeling less anxious and tense”. This influences as well the desire of participating in oral activities by reducing the need of self-protection towards peers and instructors.

1.5 Willingness to communicate

With regard to the need of self-protection related to language anxiety, Allwright and Bailey (1991) elaborated the concept of receptivity in opposition to defensiveness: receptivity is typical of students who are open to the teacher as a person, the teacher's way of teaching, communication with others, the language and culture, the course, the materials and the idea of being a successful language learner. Conversely, defensiveness results in closure to all these elements. This implies that a receptive student is more willing to learn, while a defensive student encounters higher

difficulties. Sources of defensive attitude can be non acceptance of one or more of the elements listed above, some forms of anxiety and competitiveness in relation to low self-esteem. All these factors can induce the learner to avoid participation, especially in oral communication, since the latter implies greater exposure in front of the class, affecting learners' willingness to communicate.

MacIntyre, Dörnyei, Clément and Noels (1998) elaborated a pyramid model including a wide range of variables, pertaining to the personal, classroom and social dimensions, that can affect willingness to communicate (WTC). In the model WTC is seen as the last step in the preparation of the student which makes him/her ready to communicate in class or outside the class. Perceptual factors, as well as situation-, time-, or context-specific factors are also considered as variables. Competence, skills, climate, confidence, motivation – in the personal, group or social dimension – are the basic layers of WTC. Horwitz et alii (1986: 131) state that “extremely anxious students are highly motivated to avoid engaging in the classroom activities they fear most, they may seem simply unprepared or indifferent”. It can be argued that 1) willingness to communicate is strictly related to the learner's anxiety level, that 2) a high level of anxiety can make a student assume a defensive attitude towards language and language activities, and 3) students who *seem* unprepared or indifferent may only be afraid of participating in classroom activities.

In this study the possibility is considered that a learner's WTC is influenced by the way corrective feedback is given. Feedback, as previously seen, represents a delicate moment in classroom interaction, since several aspects play a role in the process. On the one side learners have to employ cognitive abilities, such as detection of errors, gap noticing, inference, processing of new rules, production of modified output, internalisation of the new rule. On the other side they have to manage socio-psychological factors, as the perception of successful/unsuccessful self-image, also in relation to the classroom and the teacher, competitiveness, personal achievement, fear of evaluation, the perception of interruption during communication, pressure when no sufficient time is provided.

Since cognitive abilities can be influenced by the arousal of anxiety, while negative perceptions or unsuccessful management of psychological factors can lead to defensiveness and anxiety, and compromise WTC, in this context how and when errors are corrected appear to be crucial to the effectiveness of correction, and furthermore to the learner's receptivity and WTC. Keeping with Horwitz et alii (1986: 131),

As students appear to be acutely sensitive to target language corrections, the selection of error correction techniques should be based on instructional philosophy and on reducing defensive reactions in students. The impact of these (or any) corrective practices on foreign language anxiety and ultimate foreign language achievement must, of course, be studied in the classroom.

A further aim of this study is therefore to investigate how students perceive error correction in relation to anxiety and WTC.

2 RESEARCH PROJECT

2.1 The research questions

Considering all questions raised by the ongoing debates on the role of grammar instruction and feedback and given the lack of literature on these issues and on the relationship between feedback, anxiety and willingness to communicate in the specific context of FL learning in Italy, the present study, which is exploratory in its nature, wants to investigate secondary school students' views and perceptions of several aspects related to feedback.

The main hypothesis underlying the study is that Italian secondary school students perceive the moment of correction as particularly critical, especially in relation to the methods used and to the classroom atmosphere, and that the way feedback is provided can influence the students' willingness to communicate.

To the purpose, the following research questions were therefore formulated:

- 1) What are secondary school students' preferences for corrective feedback in oral production during EFL classes, with regard to who should perform correction, to the types of errors to be treated, and to methodologies, timing and frequency of error correction?
- 2) What is the relationship, if any, between the learners' language anxiety levels and their preferences for error correction?
- 3) Does anxiety or any aspects of corrective feedback influence learners' willingness to communicate?

For each question, respectively, it is hypothesized that:

- 1) Students want to receive corrective feedback during oral production and to be active participants

in the process, preferring feedback types that prompt modified output, provided that they are allowed adequate wait-time.

2) Students' preferences for feedback vary according to their language anxiety level.

3) Learners' willingness to communicate can be affected by the teacher's behaviour when providing correction and by the atmosphere in class.

2.2 Subjects of the study

The participants in the research project are 150 students, aged between 14 and 19, attending secondary schools in Pordenone, Italy, and studying English as a Foreign Language.

The sample was composed of 50 males and 100 females. 52 attended liceo classico, 54 attended liceo scientifico, and 44 istituto tecnico.

10 students attend the first year, 16 students the second year, 45 students the third year, 51 students the fourth year and 28 the fifth year.

The subjects were in part contacted personally: some of them belong to a catholic group I have been following for 10 years as catechist and educator. Some attended private English lessons given by me. This last group of students in particular gave me the main idea underlying this thesis, since they constantly stressed the lack of wait-time when asked to answer a question or to use certain structures, which caused them to produce a wrong utterance (this was especially the case of a dyslexic girl), and the fact that they wanted to reach the correct target forms by themselves, with the help of some hints on behalf of the teacher.

Other students were contacted thanks to the help of four secondary school teachers I personally know, who made themselves available to administer questionnaires to their classes.

2.3 Research methods and data collection procedures

The present research project is based on the collection of both quantitative and qualitative data through the use of several instruments: a questionnaire with both closed and open-ended questions, interviews and diaries. This exploratory research belongs therefore to the paradigm of mixed method research. In the specific context of research on feedback several authors (Park, 2010; Brown, 2009; Loewen et alii, 2009; Allwright and Bailey, 1991) reported the necessity of integrating quantitative data with qualitative data which allow for a greater understanding of the real world experienced by individuals. An insight into their subjective experience can reveal hidden reasons and less obvious aspects, shedding light on the matter. In particular Loewen et alii (2009:102) argue that, in addition to the collection of quantitative data, “more in-depth, qualitative-type interviews and case studies could provide a richer, more detailed picture of learners' beliefs on this topic”. This view is consistent with Denscombe (2008, cited by Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2011:22), who maintains that mixed-method research can

- a) increase the accuracy of data; b) provide a more complete picture of the phenomenon under study than would be yielded by a single approach, thereby overcoming the weaknesses of single approaches;
- c) enable the researcher to develop the analysis and build on the original data; and d) aid sampling.

On these bases, and following the principle of triangulation of data, questionnaires, interviews and diaries were developed to explore the subject in depth.

2.3.1 THE QUESTIONNAIRE

The questionnaire (see Appendix A) consists of two parts (both in Italian): a questionnaire on feedback and a further questionnaire to determine the student's language anxiety level. Both parts were administered together and then the students were divided in two groups, on the basis of the results of the anxiety questionnaire, according to their language anxiety level. This allowed for a comparison of their responses on feedback.

The questionnaire on feedback is composed of 9 questions aimed at analysing student's beliefs and preferences with regard to several aspects of feedback. It includes an initial brief presentation of the questionnaire for the students followed by few questions on school type, attended school year and gender.

The questionnaire on feedback was adapted from Park (2010) and integrated on the basis of the studies included in the literature review; however, it mostly follows the structure used by Chaudron (1986) for his analysis (see Chapter 1.3.2). It consists of two sections as follows:

- questions 1 to 5 investigate: 1) the necessity of feedback; 2) when feedback should be provided (immediate, delayed or postponed correction); 3) what errors should be treated (including type, frequency, seriousness of errors); 4) who should treat errors (teacher, student, peers, all of these); 5) what feedback methods are perceived as effective (included 10 methods, implicit/ explicit and prompting/input providing);
- questions 6 to 9 investigate the causes of anxiety (question 6) and unwillingness to communicate (question 7, 8) in relation to feedback. The aspects listed in question 6 represent the main causes of anxiety deriving from the studies of MacIntyre (1995), Young (1990 and 1991), and Allwright and Bailey (1991). Question 9 is transversal to both the first and the second section of the feedback questionnaire, since it was open to students suggestions on feedback, which could include both technical and psychological aspects.

Questions 1 to 5 answer the first and the second research question². Questions 6 to 9 answer the third research question³. Various types of questions were used:

-
- 2 What are secondary school students' preferences for corrective feedback in oral production during EFL classes, with regard to who should perform correction, to the types of errors to be treated, and to methodologies, timing and frequency of error correction?
 - 3 Does anxiety or any aspects of corrective feedback influence learners' willingness to communicate?

- question 1, 2 and 4 and 7 are multiple choice questions; for the first three questions the reason for the preferred choice is required (only one possible answer);
- question 3 and 5 are grids with a 4-point Likert scale;
- question 6 is a check-list with three possible answers;
- question 8 and 9 are open questions.

The questionnaire to establish the participants' level of language anxiety (question 10) was taken from MacIntyre (1994) and translated into Italian. It consists of 18 items to be evaluated in a 5-point Likert scale of agreement, divided in three parts: the first six items are relevant to the input stage, the second six items to the processing stage, and the last six to the output stage (see Paragraph 1.4.1). The general results of this questionnaire allowed to create a low anxiety group and a high anxiety group and to compare their responses on feedback, in order to answer to the second research question⁴.

2.3.2 THE INTERVIEWS

The interviews were intended as integration and follow-up of the questionnaire on feedback. They were conducted in person and recorded. The participants were students who had previously filled in the questionnaire. They were asked for availability and they can be considered as volunteers. Before proceeding with the interview they had been informed they would be recorded.

Three questions were asked during the interview with the objective of eliciting from the students further aspects on the effectiveness of feedback and on the relationship between feedback and willingness to communicate. The questions are:

4 What is the relationship, if any, between the learners' language anxiety levels and their preferences for error correction?

1. In base alla tua esperienza, quali sono gli aspetti positivi della correzione degli errori orali?
2. Nella tua esperienza, cosa rende poco efficace una correzione?
3. Pensi che certi metodi di correzione o atteggiamenti dell'insegnante possano influire negativamente sul clima in classe o sul desiderio degli studenti di intervenire?
4. Normalmente pensi di avere abbastanza tempo per rispondere alle domande in modo corretto o vorresti che l'insegnante te ne lasciasse di più?

The purpose of the first question is to highlight positive aspects of error correction which could be taken into consideration by teachers when providing feedback and it wants to stress what students perceive as important when receiving correction.

The second question inquires, on the other hand, the negative aspects that make feedback ineffective.

The third question investigates the role of the teacher's behaviour in the process of feedback with reference to willingness to communicate.

The fourth question investigates the necessity and/or availability of wait-time to answer questions producing correct utterances.

The questions are to be intended as a semi-structured interview. In some cases they were followed step-by-step since answers were exhaustive. In other cases further clarification or integration questions were formulated to obtain adequate information.

The interviews contribute to answer the first and the third research question.

2.3.3 THE DIARIES

Six students were asked to keep a diary for the period of one month (about 12 lessons of EFL)

reporting situations or any other case in which they perceived to be anxious during EFL classes, especially when or after receiving feedback. However, the reports in some case were not exhaustive and in other cases were not consistent with the request. For these reasons they were discarded and not taken into consideration in the analysis of data.

I suppose that some students were not mature enough to conduct such an introspective work, while others, although volunteers and informed that their privacy would be respected, did not want to expose themselves, revealing personal feelings.

2.3.4 THE COLLECTION OF DATA

The questionnaires were administered in paper between May and June 2013. Part of them was filled in under my supervision, while another part was administered by four teachers I personally know to their classes.

The interviews were conducted over a period of two months, between June and July 2013.

The diaries were kept by students between April and May 2013. However these will not be used for the analysis of data for the reasons explained above.

The questionnaire was originally created using Google Form. The quantitative and qualitative data collected through the questionnaires were then entered into the original on-line form (one form was created for the low anxiety group and another identical form for the high anxiety group), which allowed to obtain both a spreadsheet and a summary of results with graphics and percentages.

Further graphics and tables were created when necessary for a better and clearer analysis of data.

All qualitative and quantitative data will be analysed in the following chapter.

3 ANALYSIS OF DATA

The following analysis will present: first, the results of the questionnaire on anxiety used to determine the students' anxiety level and to divide them into two groups; second, the data from the questionnaire on feedback; last, the data from the interviews.

3.1 Anxiety questionnaire results

151 students filled in the language anxiety questionnaire. One questionnaire was discarded since it had not been completed in all its parts. Of the remaining 150 questionnaires, 75 had a low score in all three parts of the questionnaire (input/ processing/ output anxiety), and formed the low language anxiety group. Of the remaining 75 questionnaires, 48 had a high score in all three parts of the questionnaire, especially in the output anxiety questions referred to speaking anxiety (questions 13, 14, 15, 16), while 27, though not scoring a high total result, had a very high score in the speaking anxiety part and, considered that the focus of the present research is feedback during oral production, they were therefore assigned to the high anxiety group. The answers of the two groups to the questionnaire on feedback will be compared in the following paragraph (in order to answer the second research question).

3.2 Questionnaire data

The structure of the questionnaire reflects the order of the research questions, which allows the analysis of data to follow this order.

3.2.1 QUESTIONS 1-5

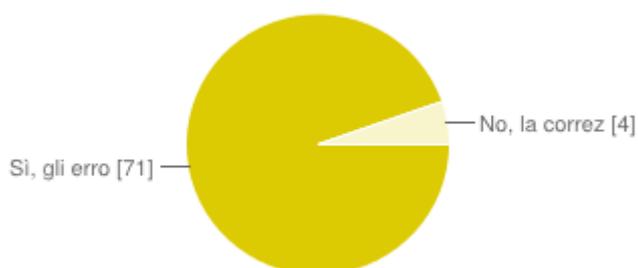
This first part analyzes the data of questions 1-5 of the questionnaire, which investigate the first research question “*What are secondary school students' preferences for corrective feedback in oral production during EFL classes, with regard to who should perform correction, to the types of errors*

to be treated, and to methodologies, timing and frequency of error correction?” is investigated. In the analysis of data answering to the first research question, a constant comparison will be offered between the answers of the low language anxiety (LA) group and those of the high language anxiety (HA) group, to highlight both similarities and differences between the two which will be discussed in Chapter 4.

The first question of the questionnaire was on the perceived necessity of feedback during oral production activities in class. A motivation to the answer was required. The question was:

1) Secondo te, quando parli in inglese in classe, è necessario che gli errori vengano corretti?

Answers of the Low anxiety group.



	LA		HA	
	N.	%	N.	%
Sì, gli errori devono essere corretti.	71	95%	72	96%
No, la correzione non serve.	4	5%	3	4%

Diagram 1: Question 1, answers of the LA group.

Answers of the High anxiety group.

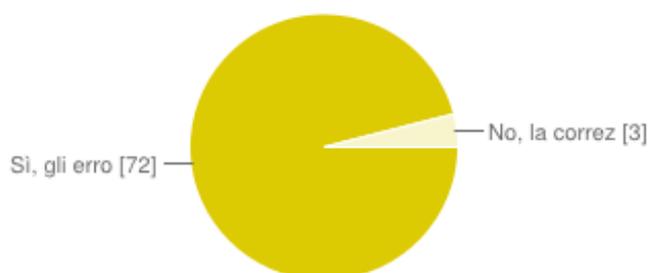


Diagram 2: Question 1, answers of the HA group.

As we can notice, both groups feel the necessity of correction while speaking. The percentages of those who agree is 95% (71 respondents) in the LA group and 96% (72 respondents) in the HA

group. While only 4 students of the LA group, and 3 in the HA group think that correction is not necessary.

All students who reported to be against correction in oral production maintain that it is not necessary because in conversation “L'importante è farsi capire”, which is to say, in their opinion most attention must be given to the delivery of the message and not to the form in which the message is expressed.

Below it is possible to read the main reasons reported by the two groups in favour of error correction. In the graphic, axis x represents the reasons, while y reports the number of answers for each group.

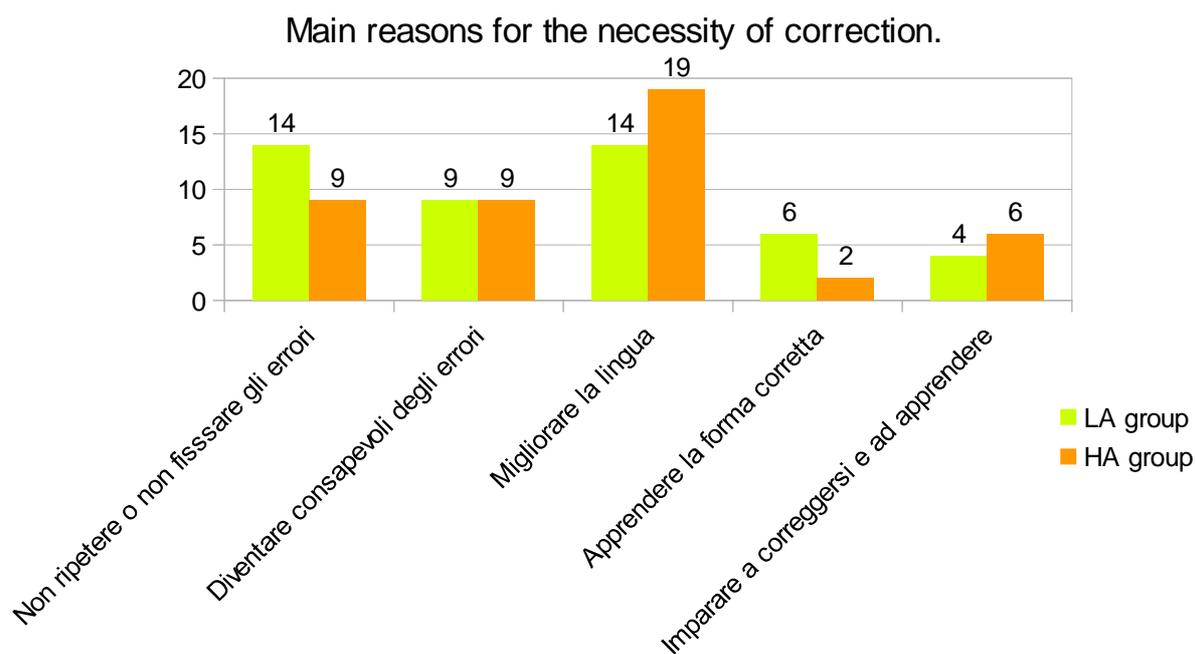


Diagram 3: Main reasons for the necessity of correction.

The five main reasons gathered from the open-ended answers were respectively:

- ✓ Not to repeat or to fixate errors
- ✓ To become aware of errors

- ✓ To improve language
- ✓ To learn correct forms
- ✓ To learn self-correction and ways to learn

The reason reported more frequently by both groups was *Migliorare la lingua*, with a higher preference by the HA group (19 answers vs 14), followed by *Non ripetere o non fissare gli errori*, preferred by the LA group (14 answers vs 9), and *Diventare consapevoli degli errori* (both 9 answers).

Apprendere la forma corretta was chosen by 6 students of the LA group and by 2 of the HA group, while *Imparare a correggersi e ad apprendere* was chosen respectively by 4 and 6 students.

The second question inquires about the time variable, or, in which moment feedback should be given to be effective. The question was:

2) Quando parli in inglese in classe, in che momento preferisci essere corretto affinché la correzione sia efficace?

The choice, for which a reason was required, was among:

- ✓ Immediate feedback (Subito, appena faccio un errore);
- ✓ Delayed, at the end of the sentence (Quando ho finito la frase);
- ✓ Delayed, at the end of the entire speech (Alla fine dell'intero discorso);
- ✓ Postponed, in a special time for the correction of the errors of the whole class (In un momento specifico che l'insegnante dedica alla correzione degli errori più importanti della classe).

The following diagrams show the results for LA (Diagram 4) and HA (Diagram 5) group.

Diagram 4: Question 2, answers of the LA group.

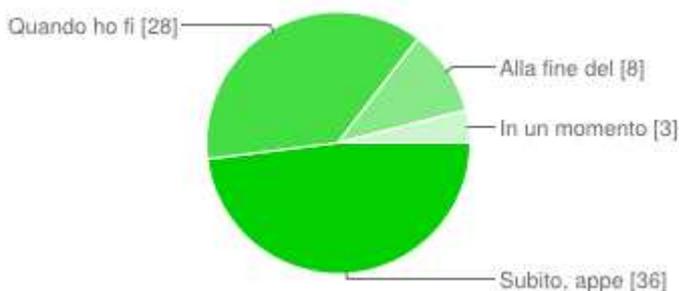
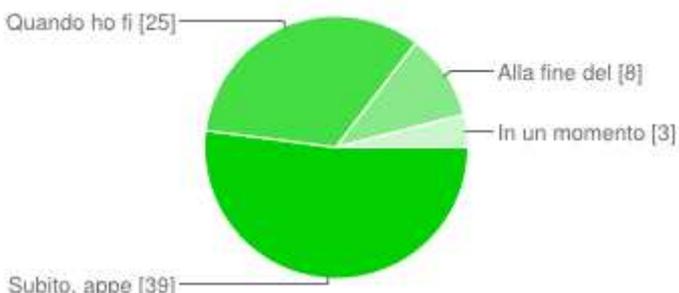


Diagram 5: Question 2, answers of the HA group.



	LA		HA	
	N.	%	N.	%
Subito, appena faccio un errore.	36	48%	39	52%
Quando ho finito la frase.	28	37%	25	33%
Alla fine dell'intero discorso.	8	11%	8	11%
In un momento specifico che l'insegnante dedica alla correzione degli errori più importanti della classe.	3	4%	3	4%

Results are similar for the two groups. On the whole, only 15% of the respondents in each group are in favour of postponing correction at the end of discourse (11%) or in a specific moment (4%) devoted to the correction of the most significant errors of the class. Conversely, 52% of the respondents of the HA group and 48% of the LA group desire immediate correction, and respectively 33% and 37% maintain that correction is more effective if it occurs after the end of the sentence.

The diagram below shows the main reasons reported by the two groups in favour of immediate correction. 12 students of the LA group and 11 of the HA group argue they understand their error better when they are corrected immediately, because the context of the error is clear. Some of them add that if feedback does not occur immediately they would not be able to remember the exact context or the sentence containing the error and therefore feedback would not be so effective.

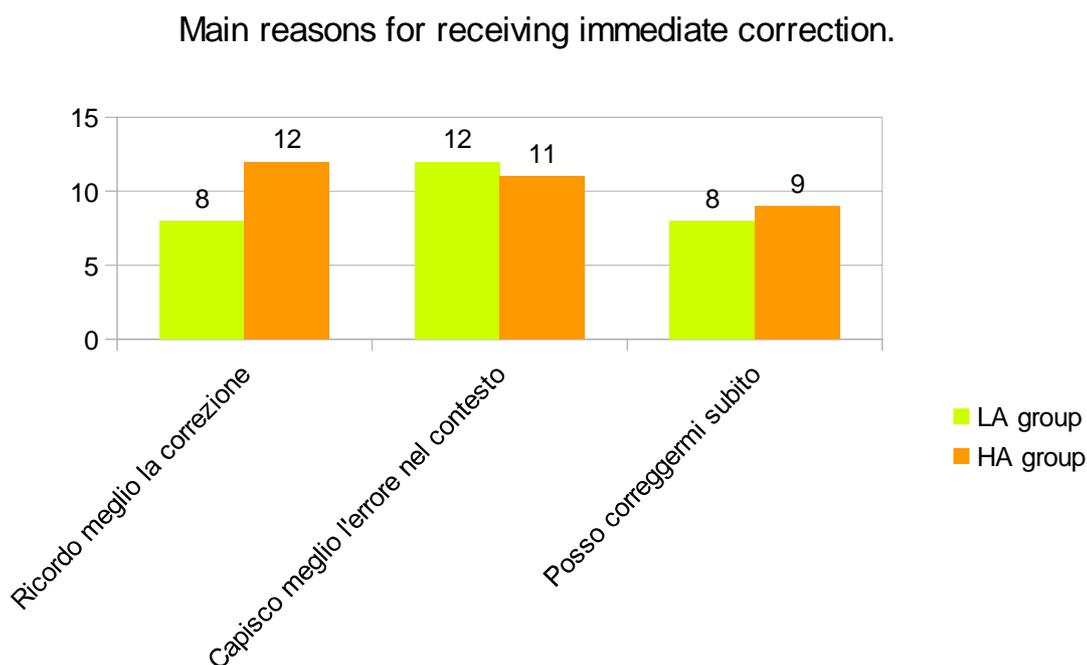


Diagram 6: Main reasons for immediate correction.

The second reason reported by 12 students of the HA group and 8 of the low anxiety group is that they remember correction better when it is immediate. And, last, 9 students of the HA group and 8 of the LA group indicate that immediate correction offers them the possibility of repairing their sentence.

100% of the students who chose delayed correction, at the end of the sentence or at the end of the entire speech, affirm that they prefer delayed correction in order to complete their discourse without being disturbed or interrupted. Some of them hold the view that being interrupted causes the arousal of debilitating pressure, as a girl says: “non mi piace essere interrotta, altrimenti mi metterebbe pressione e non riuscirei più a parlare come prima”, or anxiety “così parlo senza interruzioni e non mi agito”.

In general many of the students who chose one of the first three options talk about the importance of being given the possibility of recasting their own sentence after receiving correction. Lots of them maintain that repeating their own (corrected) sentence more than once would help them

remembering target forms.

The few students who prefer errors to be corrected in a separate moment, argue that in this way they can concentrate on the most frequent errors of the whole class.

Question 3 investigates what errors should be corrected when speaking the foreign language in class. The question is:

3) Quando parli in inglese, pensi che l'insegnante debba correggere:

The errors taken into consideration in these questions belong to four groups:

- ✓ type of errors (in order: grammar, lexicon, pronunciation, word order);adequateness to the context (wrong use of formal/informal expression and wrong use of other expressions);
- ✓ frequency of errors (most frequent personal errors, all errors, the most frequent errors of the class);
- ✓ seriousness of errors (errors impairing communication and errors non impairing communication).

The diagrams below (7 and 8) show the overall results, in percentages, of the low anxiety group and of the high anxiety group. The % values were reported for the four frequency grades of desired correction: *Mai* (never), *Raramente* (rarely), *Spesso* (often) and *Sempre* (always).

As it can be noticed in both diagrams, students want their errors to be corrected. In facts the option *Mai* was chosen only in few cases, with a rate overriding 10% only in the case of less serious errors which do not impair communication, *Gli errori meno gravi che non impediscono la comunicazione*, which reached 12 % in the LA group and 15% in the HA group.

What errors should be corrected (%); LA group.

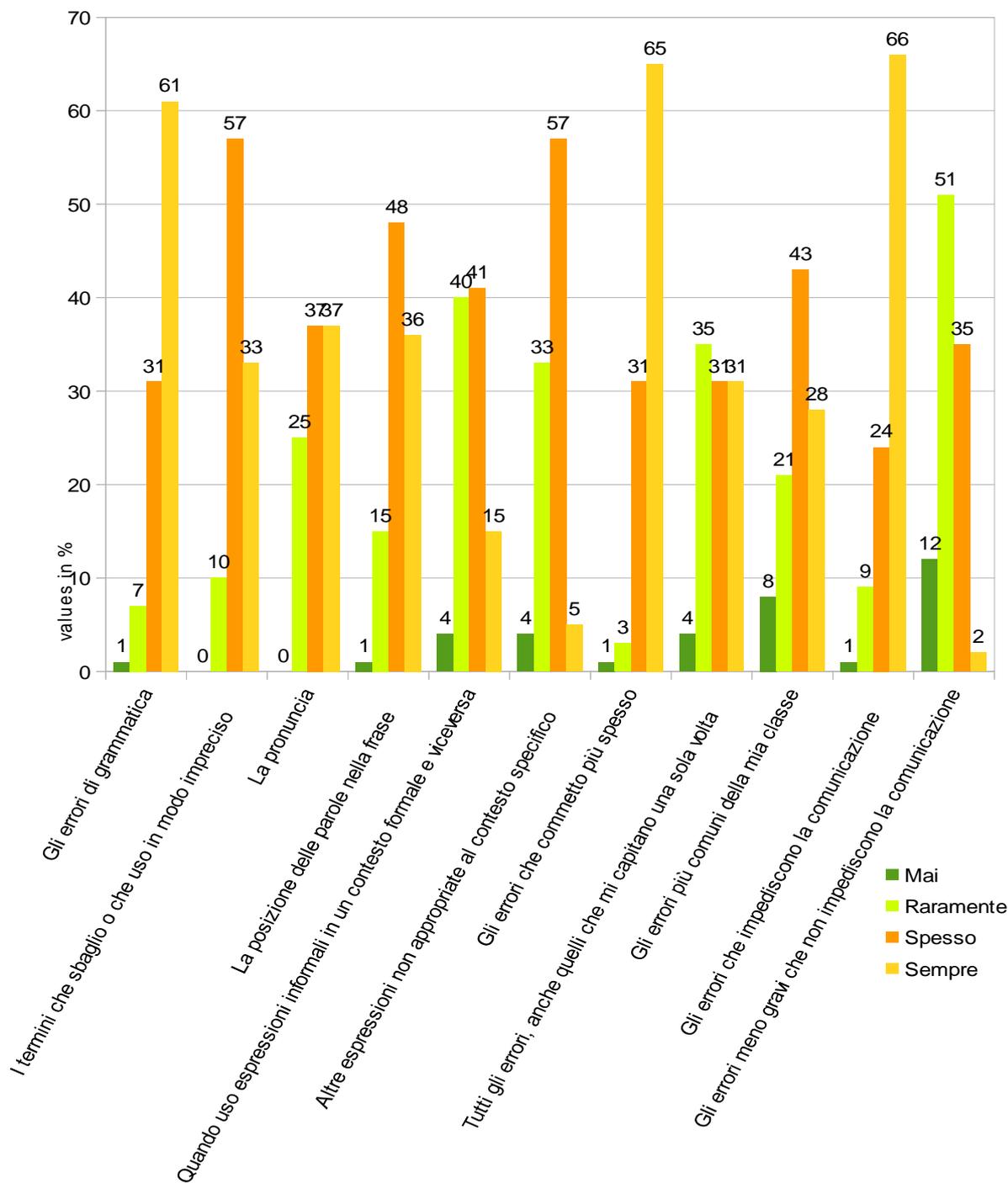


Diagram 7: What errors should be corrected, LA group.

What errors should be corrected (%); HA group.

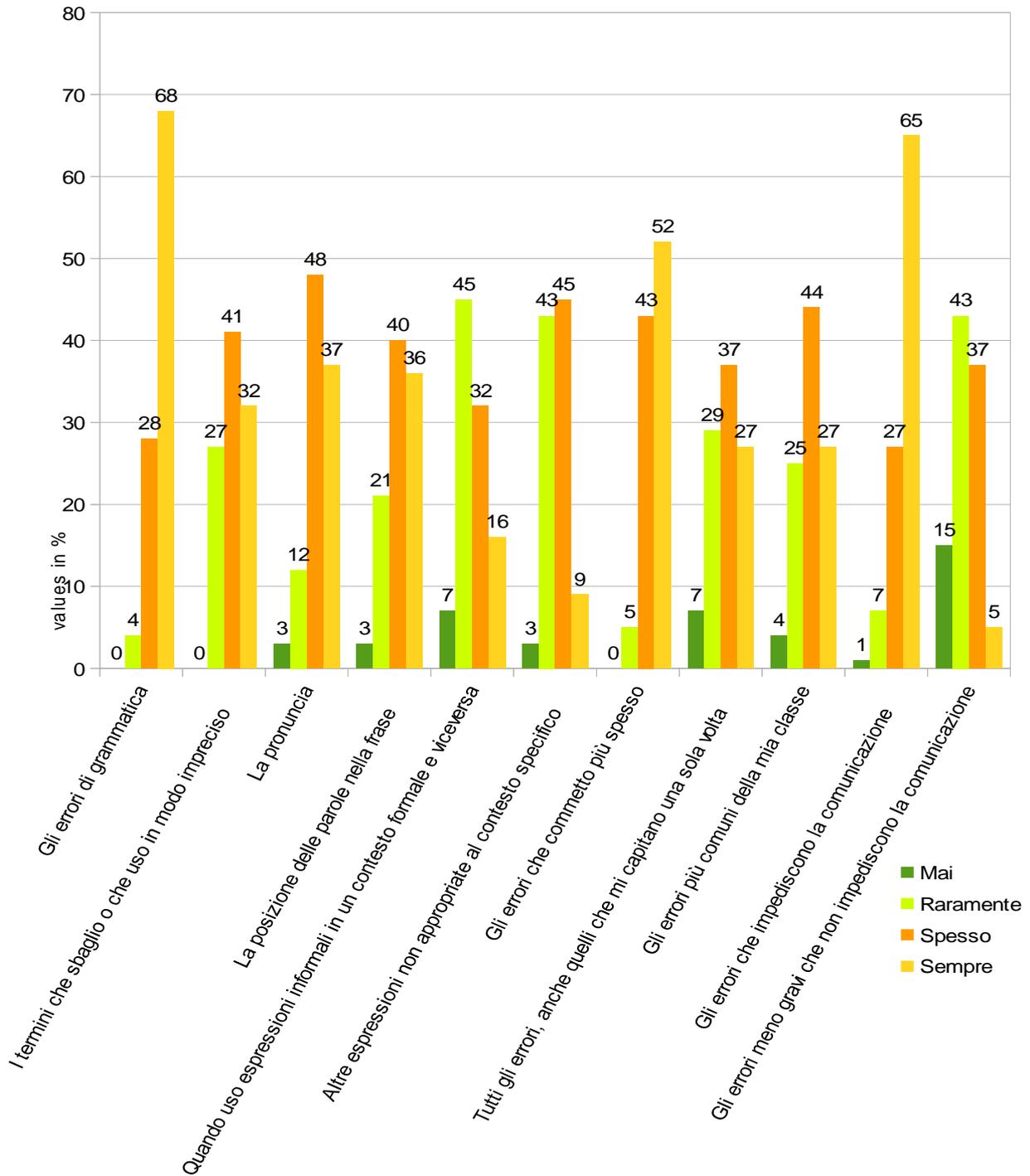


Diagram 8: What errors should be corrected, HA group.

Looking at the four groups of errors, the first group (type) received great attention by the students of both groups as shown in Diagram 9 and 10: grammar received the highest score: 92 % of LA group and 96% of HA group think grammar errors should always or almost always (*Sempre* or *Spesso*) be corrected. This result is followed, in the LA group, by lexicon (90%), word order (84%) and pronunciation (74%), while in the HA group priority is given to pronunciation (85%), word order (76%) and lexicon (73%).

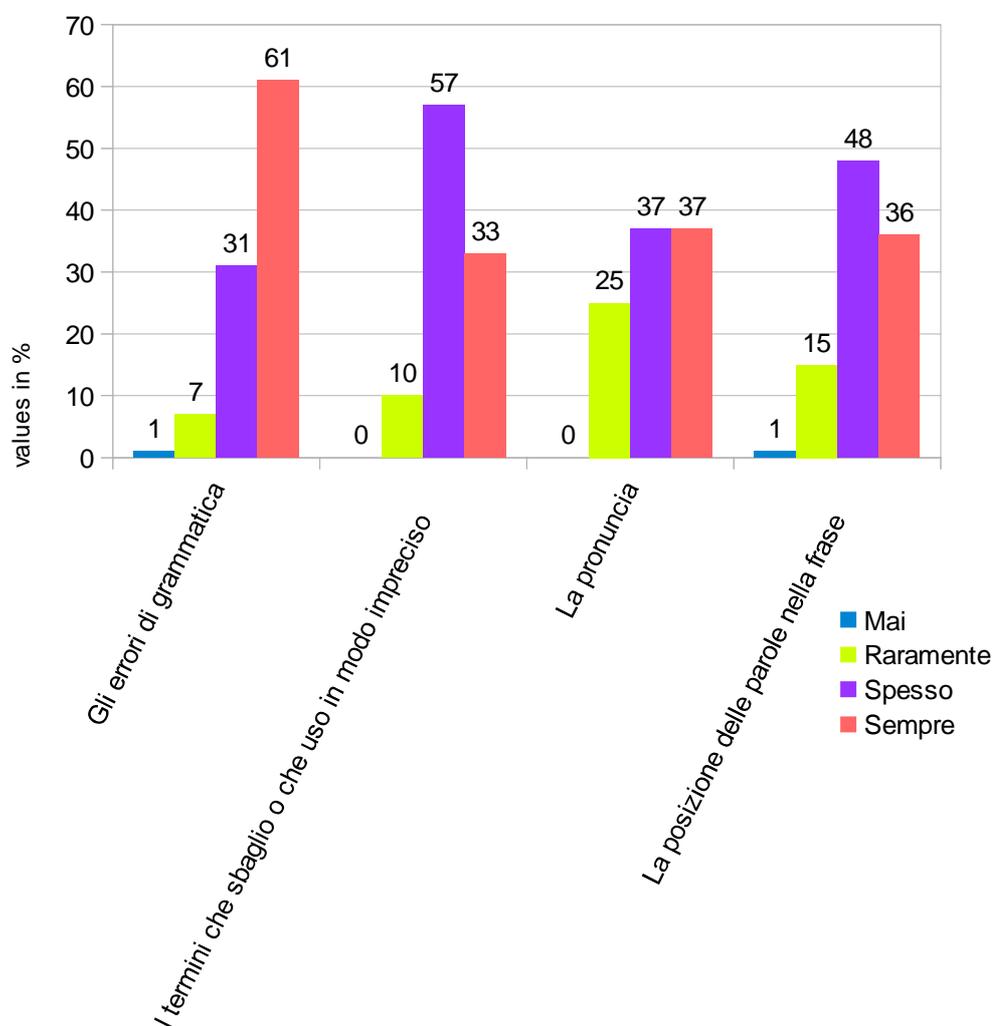


Diagram 9: What errors should be corrected. Types of errors, LA group.

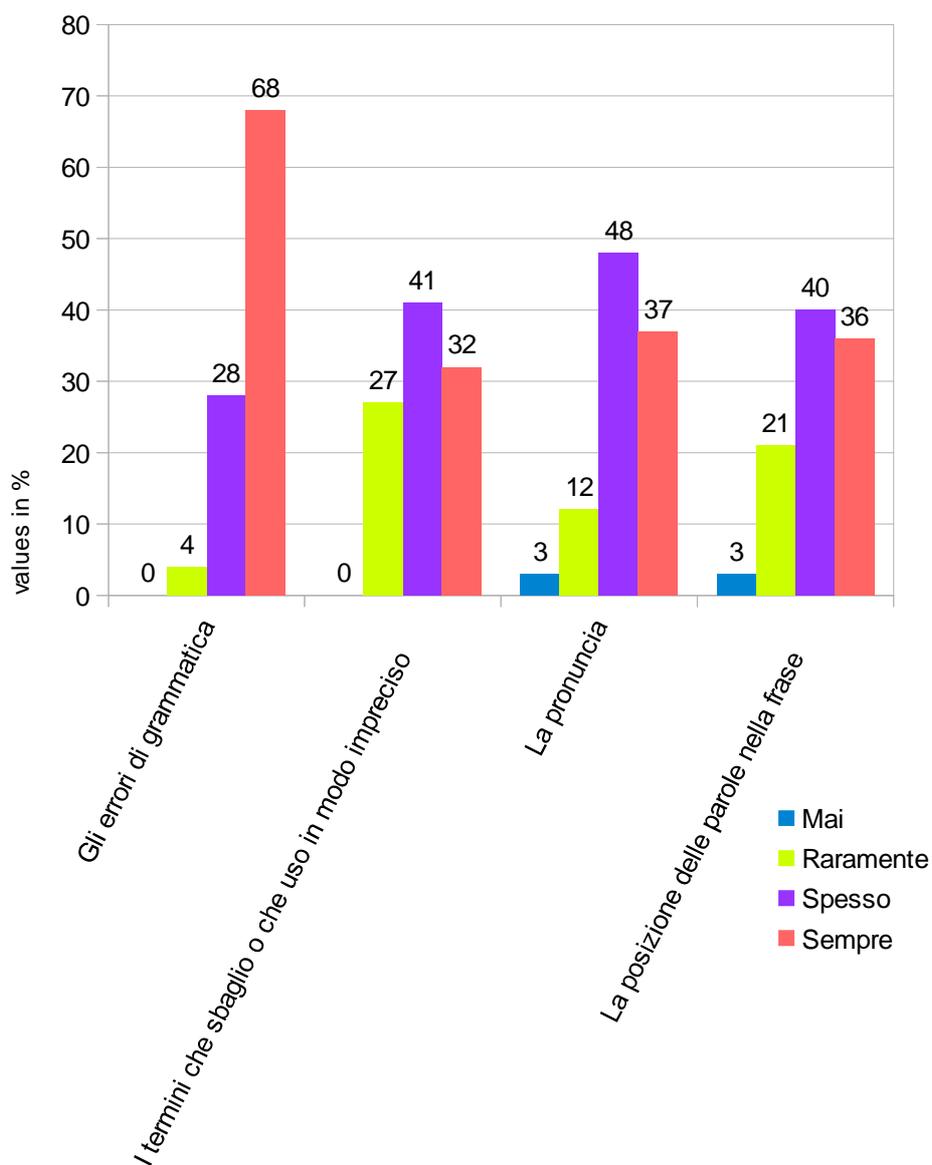


Diagram 10: What errors should be corrected. Types of errors, HA group.

The second group of errors (adequateness to the context) is perceived as the most critical by both groups, but especially by the HA group. 52% of the HA group and 44% of the LA group feel that the wrong use of formal/informal expression (*Quando uso espressioni informali in un contesto formale e viceversa*) never (*Mai*) or rarely (*Raramente*) requires correction, and similar results can be found in the following issue on the wrong use of other expressions, *Altre espressioni non*

appropriate al contesto specifico: here correction is only rarely required by 46% of the HA group and 37% of the LA group.

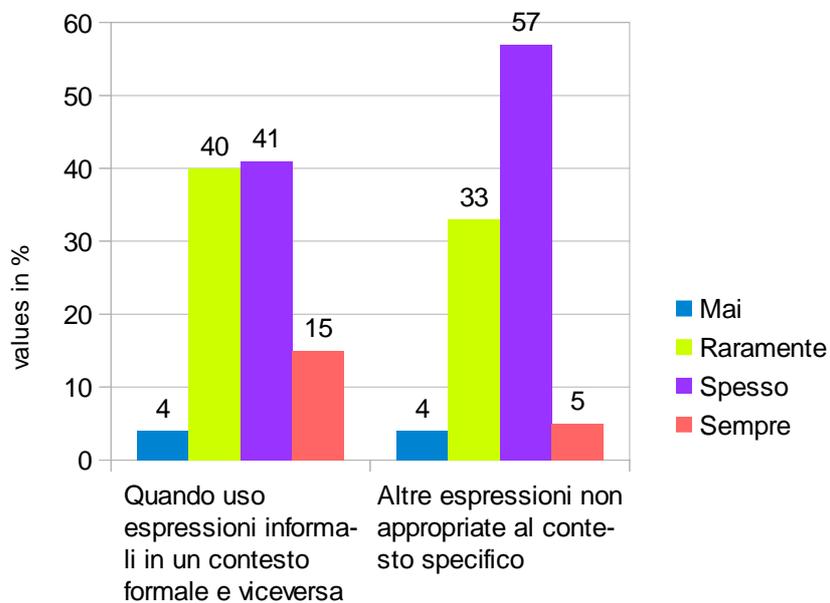


Diagram 11: What errors should be corrected. Adequateness to the context, LA group.

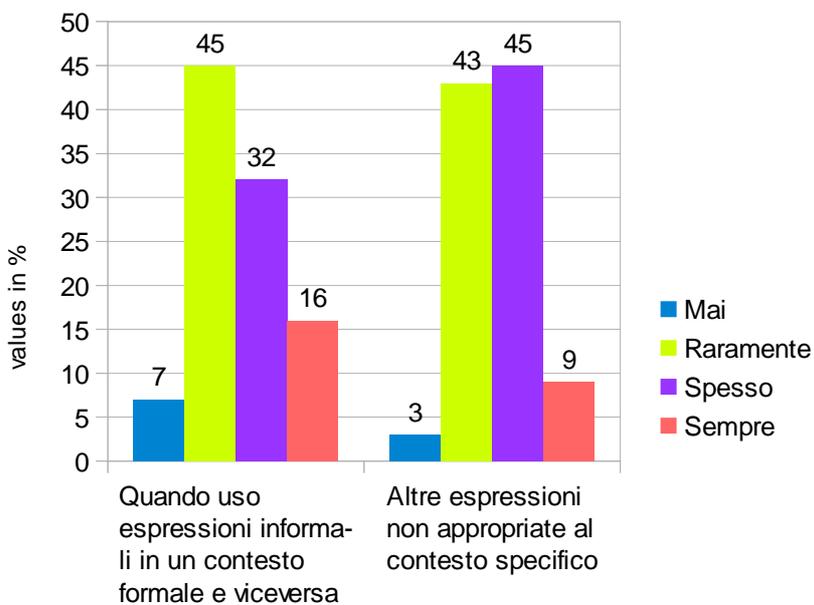


Diagram 12: What errors should be corrected. Adequateness to the context, HA group.

In the third group (frequency), 96% of the students of the LA group and 95% of the students of the HA group assert that correction is always necessary, or very often, for the most frequent personal errors. The result is followed by the most common errors of the class, for which correction is required always or very often by 71% of the respondents of each group, and, last, by personal infrequent errors (62% of the LA group and 64% of the HA group).

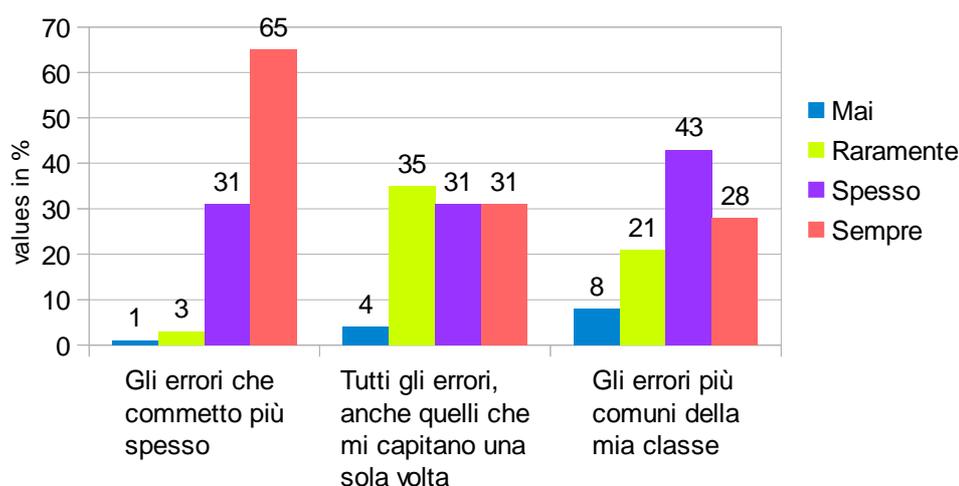


Diagram 13: What errors should be corrected. Frequency of errors, LA group.

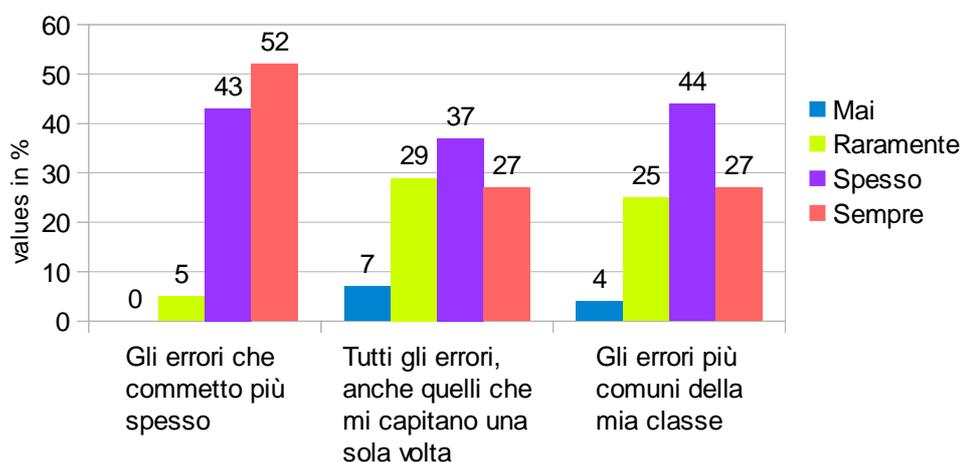


Diagram 14: What errors should be corrected. Frequency of errors, HA group.

Finally, in the last group of errors (seriousness), *Gli errori che impediscono la comunicazione* must always be corrected for 66% of the LA group and 65% of the HA group, and must be corrected frequently for 24% of the LA group and for 27% of the HA group, percentages which added

together reach 90% and 92% respectively. Conversely, *Gli errori meno gravi che non impediscono la comunicazione* are not perceived as requiring correction by 63% of the students belonging to the LA group and by 58% of the students of the HA group.

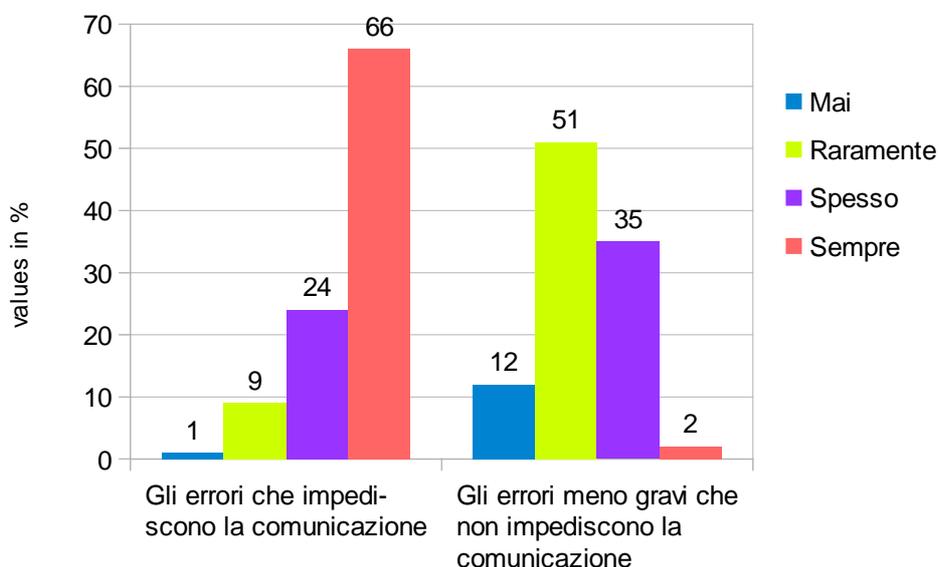


Diagram 15: What errors should be corrected. Seriousness of errors, LA group.

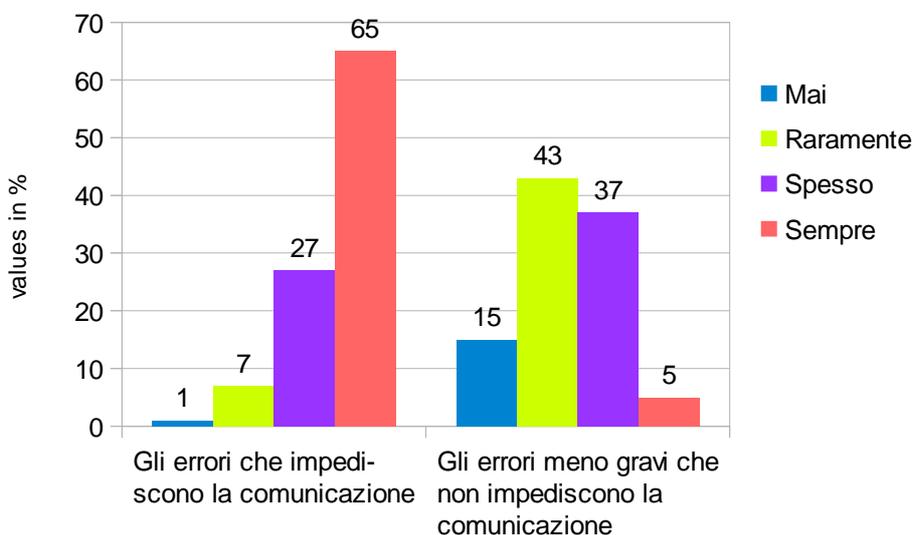


Diagram 16: What errors should be corrected. Seriousness of errors, HA group.

To summarise the results, the four errors for which feedback is more often (*Spesso* or *Sempre*) required by the LA group are, in order: more frequent errors (96%), grammar errors (92%), errors impairing communication (90%) and lexical errors (90%). For the HA group, in order: grammar errors (96%), more frequent errors (95%), errors impairing communication (92%) and pronunciation errors (85%).

On the other side, the four errors for which feedback is never or rarely (*Mai* or *Raramente*) required by the LA group are, in order: less serious errors which do not impair communication (63%), the wrong use of formal/informal expression (44%), infrequent errors (38%) and other expressions which are not adequate to the context (37%). For the HA group, in order: less serious errors which do not impair communication (58%), the wrong use of formal/informal expression (52%), other expressions which are not adequate to the context (46%) and infrequent errors (36%).

Question 4 investigated the agent who should perform correction, in students' beliefs. The question was:

4) Quando parli in inglese è più utile che la correzione venga fatta

Possible choices, which required a reason to be given, were:

- ✓ by the teacher
- ✓ by peers
- ✓ by myself
- ✓ in all these ways
- ✓ nobody should correct me

The diagrams below show the answers of each group.

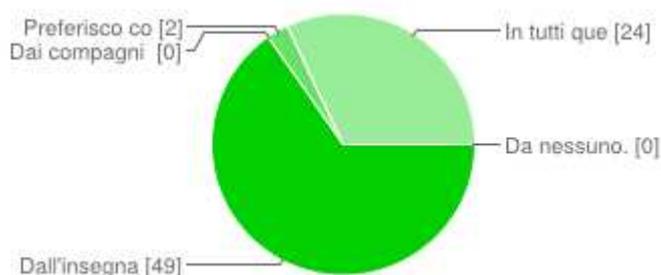


Diagram 17: Question 4, answers of the LA group.

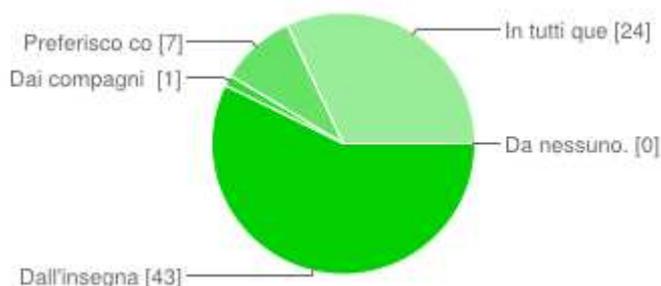


Diagram 18: Question 4, answers of the HA group.

	LA		HA	
	N.	%	N.	%
Dall'insegnante	49	65%	43	57%
Dai compagni (per esempio in un lavoro di gruppo o a coppie).	0	0%	1	1%
Preferisco correggermi da solo pensandoci su.	2	3%	7	9%
In tutti questi modi: a volte dall'insegnante, a volte dai compagni, a volte da solo.	24	32%	24	32%
Da nessuno.	0	0%	0	0%

The responses of the two groups are very similar. The high majority, 65% of the students of the LA group and 57% of the HA group, prefer being corrected by the teacher, whereas peers are not considered as possible agents of feedback. Some students of the HA group (9%) prefer self-correction over teacher-correction, against only 3% of the LA group. However the teacher is not seen as the only possible agent of correction by 32% of the students of each group, who prefer a variety of possibilities, according to the several occasions or situations. Sometimes they prefer receiving feedback by the teacher, sometimes by peers, sometimes through self-correction. The option *Da nessuno* was not chosen.

Qualitative data explain the reasons for which the several options were chosen.

In particular, the teacher:

- is recognized as a more competent speaker of the FL, and his/her corrections as more affordable than those of peers: “è più competente e sa spiegarmi meglio l'errore”, “è lei l'esperta” “è più precisa”;

- can give clearer explanations of the errors: *“spiega meglio qual è l'errore”, “è competente e chiara nel correggere l'errore”*;
- is considered as the only person having both the role and the authority to provide feedback: *“è il suo ruolo” “è il suo compito” “solo l'insegnante ha le competenze per per potermi correggere” “è l'unico che può correggere”*;
- conveys a sense of confidence and security towards the use of the language *“mi dà più sicurezza”, “sono sicura dell'errore e della correzione”*.

In addition to these aspects, some responses reported negative reasons for not choosing peer correction:

- peers' explanations are not dependable: *“i compagni possono sbagliare”, “non do molto peso ai compagni”*;
- peers are not as competent as the teacher's: *“mi fido più dell'insegnante che dei compagni”, “l'insegnante è più qualificato dei compagni”*;
- peers' correction can be embarrassing or even humiliating: *“Se vengo corretta dai compagni mi sento in soggezione”, “Tra compagni ci si accusa e non si riconosce l'autorità dell'altro”, “La correzione brusca di un compagno può mortificare”*.

The only student (HA group) who chose *Preferisco essere corretto dai compagni*, explained that the reason is reciprocal help: *“Così possiamo aiutarci a vicenda”*.

The students who chose *Preferisco correggermi da solo pensandoci su*, explained that they can better memorize the correction more easily remember target forms: *“Me lo ricordo meglio” “Me lo ricordo di più” “Memorizzo di più le forme corrette”, “Mi rimane più impresso”, “La correzione è più efficace”*.

Some added that self correction can be more effective, and that the teacher should be a guide: *“È meglio provare prima da soli” “L’insegnante dovrebbe solo indicarmi l’errore e indirizzarmi a scoprire la forma appropriata”, “Da soli c’è meno stress e conflitto, rimane più impresso e dà la possibilità di valutare le proprie competenze”*.

The reasons provided for the option *In tutti questi modi: a volte dall’insegnante, a volte dai compagni, a volte da solo* can be summarised in the view that a variety of agents and ways of correction is an enriching experience and that the several possibilities should be chosen according to the specific situation, since each of them has positive aspects which can bring to improved learning: *“L’insegnante mi spiega bene, i compagni mi aiutano a non ripetere i loro errori, da solo mi rimane più impressa la correzione”*,

“L’insegnante è più qualificata, i compagni possono insegnarmi espressioni o modi di dire più attuali, o come memorizzare meglio, da sola prendo coscienza dei miei errori.”

“Tante volte ci sono compagni più preparati degli insegnanti, altre volte correggersi da soli significa essere a un livello più avanzato”,

“Così tutti partecipano mettendo in gioco la propria esperienza/ conoscenza”,

“Tutti i modi possono essere produttivi, è bene sperimentare più modi e non aspettare sempre che sia un insegnante a correggere”,

“Tutti sono utili, dipende dai casi, l’insegnante è competente e l’autocorrezione mi fa ricordare l’errore”.

In this view both teachers, peers and the students themselves are seen as resources who can bring their contribution to the class and to learning.

Question 5 investigates what corrective methods are considered more effective by students. A

sample conversation containing an error was provided as a basis, and 10 feedback methods were presented, in order to allow students to evaluate them in a 4-point-scale ranging from *Per nulla efficace* (not effective) to *Molto efficace* (very effective). The question was:

5) Osserva il seguente esempio di conversazione in classe.

Insegnante: What did you eat last night?
 Studente: Last night I **EAT** pizza.

Come valuti i seguenti interventi di correzione da parte dell'insegnante?

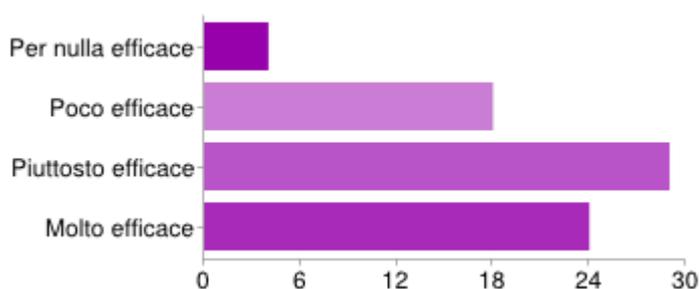
The 10 methods presented range from explicit to implicit feedback and from input providing to output prompting.

a	L'insegnante ti fa capire che hai commesso un errore con un cenno, un gesto, o un'espressione del volto. Poi ti dà il tempo di correggerti da solo .
b	"Potresti ripetere?"
c	"Attento, c'è un errore" (l'insegnante ti dice che hai commesso un errore e attende che tu ti corregga).
d	"Last night I...?" (l'insegnante ripete la prima parte della tua risposta lasciando che sia tu a completarla).
e	"Attento al verbo." (l'insegnante ti indica il <u>tipo</u> di errore che hai fatto e aspetta che sia tu a correggerti).
f	"Hai usato EAT nella forma sbagliata, devi metterlo al past simple" (l'insegnante ti dice <u>quale</u> errore hai commesso).
g	L'insegnante ti fa ragionare sull'errore portandoti gradualmente a raggiungere la forma corretta.
h	"Last night I ATE pizza" (l'insegnante riformula la tua risposta dandoti la versione corretta).
i	"Oh, you ATE pizza! I ate pizza, too" . (l'insegnante ti corregge l'errore senza fartelo notare in modo esplicito)
j	"Quando parliamo al passato che tempo verbale dobbiamo usare?..." (l'insegnante fornisce una spiegazione sull'argomento ma senza indicare esplicitamente il tuo errore).

5a) L'insegnante ti fa capire che hai commesso un errore con un cenno, un gesto, o un'espressione del volto. Poi ti dà il tempo di correggerti da solo.

This feedback move interrupts the students' speech using body language (implicit) and prompts corrected output from the student. Time is allowed to the student in order to correct the utterance.

Diagram 19: Question 5a, answers of LA group



	LA		HA	
	N°	%	N°	%
Per nulla efficace	4	5%	8	11%
Poco efficace	18	24%	18	24%
Piuttosto efficace	29	39%	34	45%
Molto efficace	24	32%	15	20%

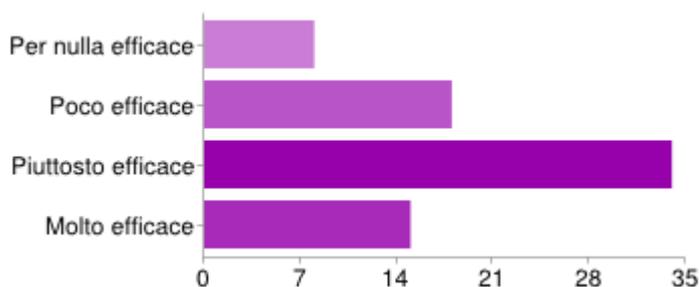


Diagram 20: Question 5a, answers of HA group

Answers reveal that both group consider this indirect, output prompting method quite effective, with a slightly higher preference on behalf of LA group: 71% of the students consider it very effective or effective, against 65% of HA group. 24% of the students of both groups maintain it is ineffective while it is very ineffective according to 5% of LA group and 11% of HA group.

5b) "Potresti ripetere?"

This second feedback move is a question asking the student to repeat his/her sentence, aiming at prompting a correct utterance in an implicit way.

As we can see in the two diagrams below, in general terms this method is considered ineffective by both groups, even though for the LA group (72%) it is more ineffective than for the HA group: 60% of the students evaluated it negatively, while 31% consider it effective and a further 9% very effective against, respectively 20% and 8% of the LA group students.

Diagram 21: Question 5b, answers of LA group

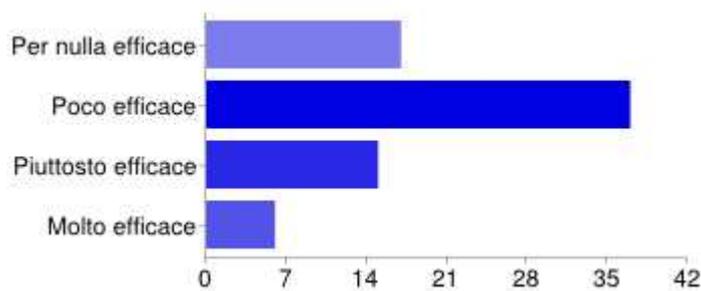
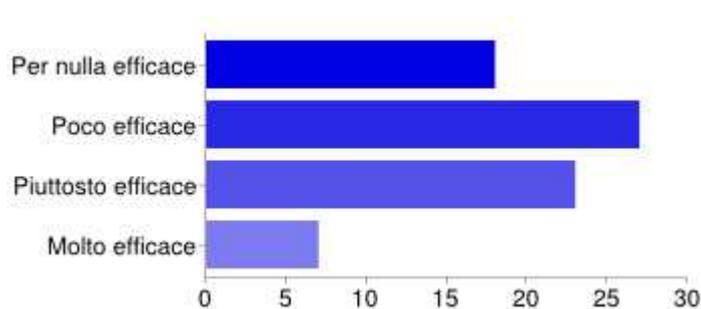


Diagram 22: Question 5b, answers of HA group



	LA		HA	
	N°	%	N°	%
Per nulla efficace	17	23%	18	24%
Poco efficace	37	49%	27	36%
Piuttosto efficace	15	20%	23	31%
Molto efficace	6	8%	7	9%

5c) "Attento, c'è un errore" (l'insegnante ti dice che hai commesso un errore e attende che tu ti corregga).

Through this move the teacher explicitly indicates the *presence* of an error in the student's utterance. Time is allowed for self-correction. Diagrams 23 and 24 show the answers of the two groups.

Diagram 23: Question 5c, answers of LA group

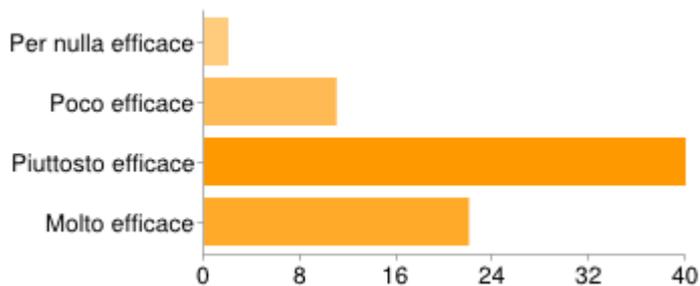
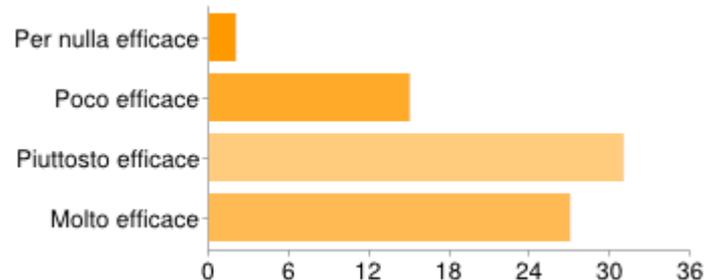


Diagram 24: Question 5c, answers of HA group



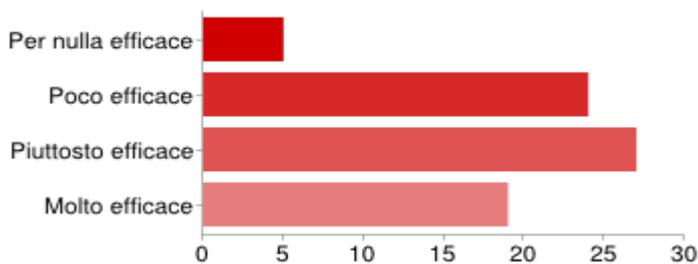
	LA		HA	
	N°	%	N°	%
Per nulla efficace	2	3%	2	3%
Poco efficace	11	15%	15	20%
Piuttosto efficace	40	53%	31	41%
Molto efficace	22	29%	27	36%

This feedback method is considered effective by both groups, although with little difference in results. 29% of the students of LA group evaluated this option as very effective and 53% as effective, against, respectively, 36% and 41% of the HA group. Adding up the scores, figures reveal that 82% of LA group's students and 77% of the HA group consider this method effective, while only 25% of LA group and 20% of HA group see it as ineffective, and only 3% of both groups evaluated it as very ineffective.

5d) "Last night I...?" (l'insegnante ripete la prima parte della tua risposta lasciando che sia tu a completarla).

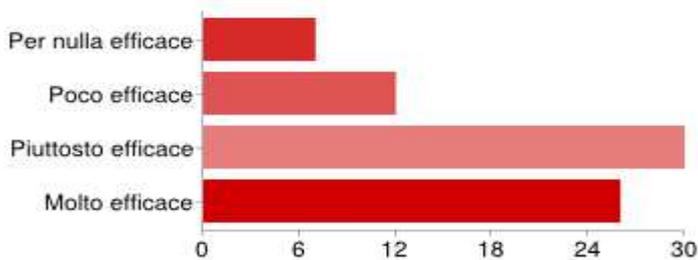
The teacher provides implicit feedback by repeating part of the student's utterance, with the effect of prompting correct production. The diagrams below show students' opinions on its effectiveness.

Diagram 25: Question 5d, answers of LA group



	LA		HA	
	N°	%	N°	%
Per nulla efficace	5	7%	7	9%
Poco efficace	24	32%	12	16%
Piuttosto efficace	27	36%	30	40%
Molto efficace	19	25%	26	35%

Diagram 26: Question 5d, answers of HA group



This implicit method is considered as effective by the majority of students. However, while 75% of the HA group's students evaluated it as effective (40%) or very effective (35%), in the LA group students' opinions are divided. Although the majority of them consider it effective (36%) or very effective (25%), according to 29 students, corresponding to 39%, this method is not effective.

5e) "Attento al verbo." (l'insegnante ti indica il tipo di errore che hai fatto e aspetta che sia tu a correggerti).

Here the *type* of error is explicitly indicated and self-correction is prompted.

Diagram 27: Question 5e, answers of LA group

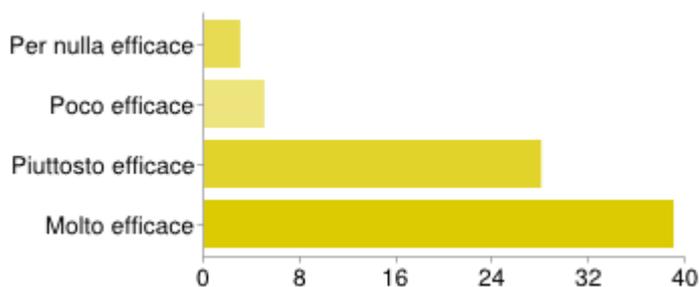
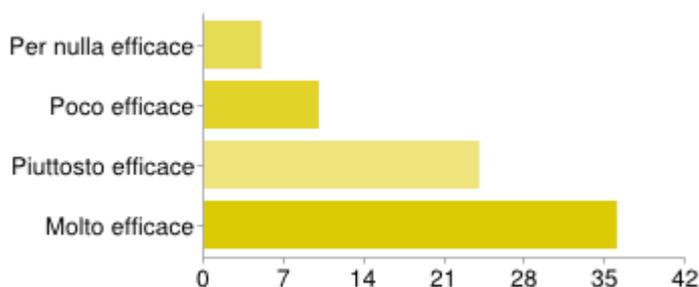


Diagram 28: Question 5e, answers of HA group



	LA		HA	
	N°	%	N°	%
Per nulla efficace	3	4%	5	7%
Poco efficace	5	7%	10	13%
Piuttosto efficace	28	37%	24	32%
Molto efficace	39	52%	36	48%

The diagrams show that for the high majority of students of both groups this method is effective. More than a half of the LA group consider it very effective (52%) and 37% effective, for a total value of 89% of positive responses. Similar results are reached by HA group, where 48% of the students consider this method very effective and 32% effective, on the whole 80% of positive evaluation. Only 4% of LA group and 7% of HA group consider it completely ineffective.

5f) "Hai usato EAT nella forma sbagliata, devi metterlo al past simple" (l'insegnante ti dice quale errore hai commesso).

The teacher explicitly indicates the error and provides metalinguistic hints. The student is required to correct the wrong utterance using the hints given. The two diagrams below highlight the differing position of the two groups. In the opinion of most students of LA group this method is effective. In particular it is quite effective for 40% of them and very effective for 19%, percentages which, added together, reach 59%, while 41% consider it ineffective (24%) or very ineffective (17%).

Diagram 29: Question 5f, answers of LA group

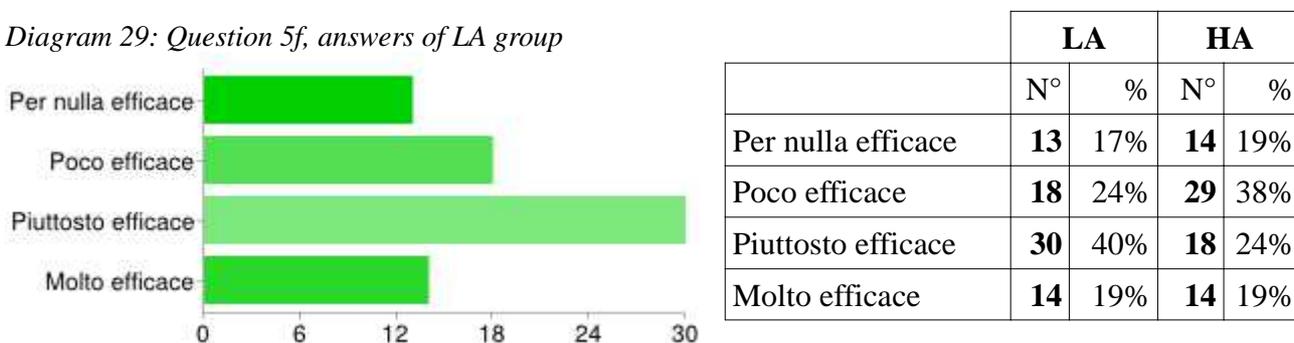
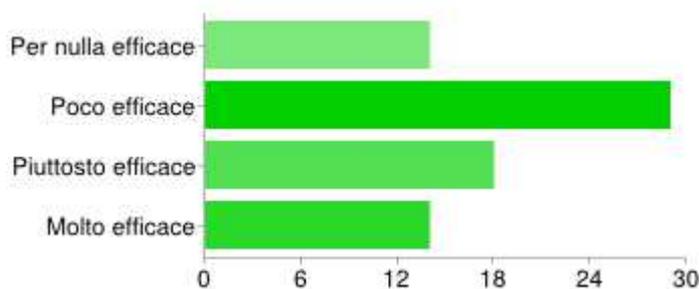


Diagram 30: Question 5f, answers of HA group



Conversely, in the opinion of most students of HA group this method is ineffective: a negative evaluation was given by 57% of the students, 38% of which consider it ineffective and 19% very ineffective, while it is effective according to 24% of them and very effective for 19%. In this case the opinions of the two groups differ substantially.

5g) L'insegnante ti fa ragionare sull'errore portandoti gradualmente a raggiungere la forma corretta.

Thanks to the use of several prompts, the teacher guides the student step-by-step through the correction process in order to support self-correction.

Diagram 31: Question 5g, answers of LA group

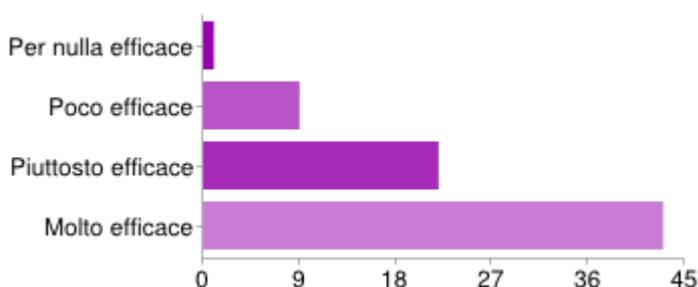
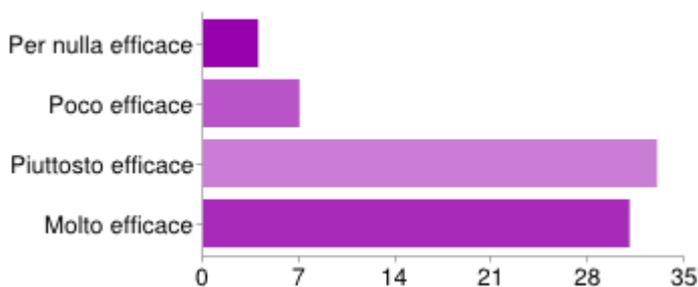


Diagram 32: Question 5g, answers of HA group



	LA		HA	
	N°	%	N°	%
Per nulla efficace	1	1%	4	5%
Poco efficace	9	12%	7	9%
Piuttosto efficace	22	29%	33	44%
Molto efficace	43	58%	31	42%

As shown by the diagrams, both groups favourably evaluated this method. As much as 43 students of LA group (58%) consider it very effective, and a further 29% effective, on the whole 87%, similarly to the HA group, in which 42% consider it very effective and 44% effective, for a total value of 86%. Only 10 students of the LA group and 11 of the HA group consider the method ineffective or very ineffective. Considered the high level of agreement by both groups, a further analysis was conducted on the composition of the groups, in order to discover a possible relationship between the school attended by the students and their choice.

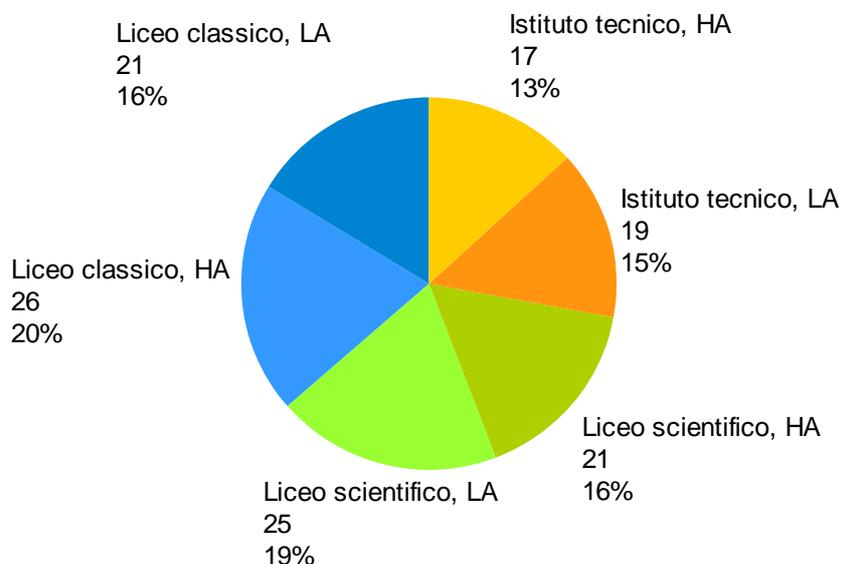


Diagram 33: Question 5g, Composition of the sample (positive answers).

The three areas, blue, orange and green, show the composition of the sample of students who consider the feedback method presented in 5g effective. Each section is divided in two parts showing students' belonging to LA or HA group. As it clearly appears in the diagram, there is no substantial difference between LA and HA groups, having respectively 21 and 26 students attending Liceo Classico, 19 and 17 students attending Istituto tecnico and 25 and 21 students attending Liceo Scientifico. In complex, 36% of the students who answered positively belong to Liceo Classico, 35% to Liceo scientifico and 29% to Istituto tecnico. Therefore no evidence can be found of the relationship between the choice operated by students and their education.

The following two corrective moves, 5h and 5i, pertain to the methodological area of recasts, which provide implicit correction of the students' utterances (input) without prompting new output.

5h) "Last night I ATE pizza" (l'insegnante riformula la tua risposta dandoti la versione corretta).

This feedback move simply recasts the student's wrong utterance providing correction. The error is

not explicitly signalled to the student. The two diagrams below show the perception of the effectiveness of recasts.

Diagram 34: Question 5h, answers of LA group

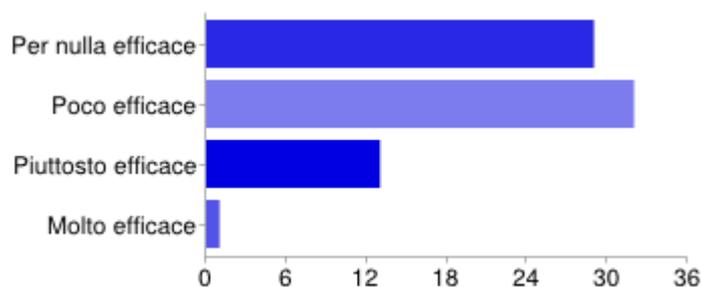
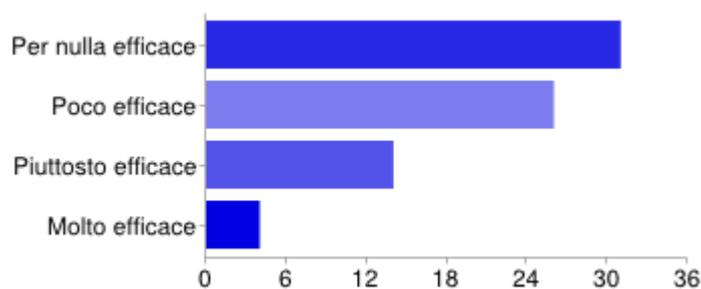


Diagram 35: Question 5h, answers of HA group



	LA		HA	
	N°	%	N°	%
Per nulla efficace	29	39%	31	41%
Poco efficace	32	43%	26	35%
Piuttosto efficace	13	17%	14	19%
Molto efficace	1	1%	4	5%

The overall evaluation of this recast move is negative for the high majority of students of both groups. Only 1 student of the LA group and 4 students of the HA group think that recasts are very effective, and only 17% of LA group and 19% of HA group consider it effective. The remaining part of the students, corresponding to 82% (61 students) of LA group and 76% (58 students) of HA group evaluated recasts as ineffective (43% and 35%, respectively) or very ineffective (39% and 41%, respectively). In the overview of general results this feedback method received the most negative evaluation by the LA group and the second most negative evaluation by the HA group. Similar results were recorded for method 5i (see below), which is a further example of recasts, as indicated above.

5i) "Oh, you ATE pizza! I ate pizza, too" (l'insegnante ti corregge l'errore senza fartelo notare

in modo esplicito).

In this case the student's utterance is recast “I ate pizza, too” with the addition of a variation “Oh, you ATE pizza!”, aiming at keeping conversation going, however including errors' correction. The error is implicitly corrected by the teacher and correction is stressed by intonation. As reported above, the diagrams show that this feedback move was negatively evaluated by both groups.

Diagram 36: Question 5i, answers of LA group

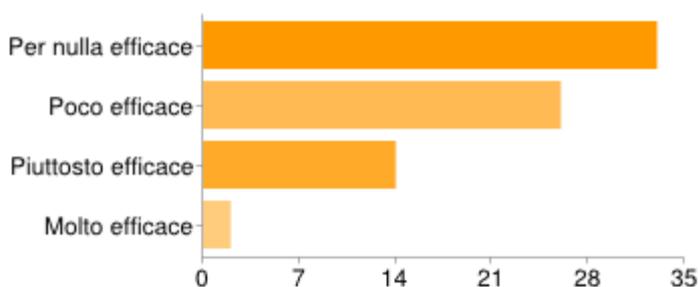
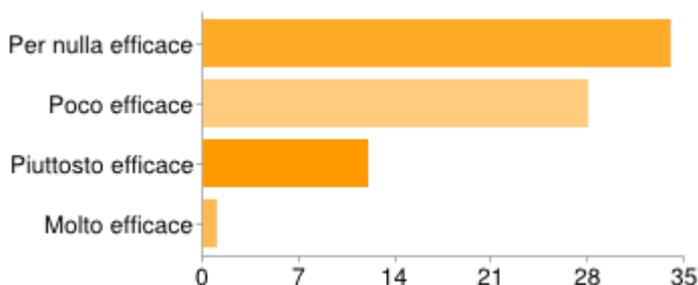


Diagram 37: Question 5i, answers of HA group



	LA		HA	
	N°	%	N°	%
Per nulla efficace	33	44%	34	45%
Poco efficace	26	35%	28	37%
Piuttosto efficace	14	18%	12	17%
Molto efficace	2	3%	1	1%

In both groups the high majority of students chose the option *Per nulla efficace* (44% of LA group and 45% of HA group) or *Poco efficace* (35% LA, 37% HA), reaching therefore a total negative value of 79% (LA) and 82% (HA). Positive evaluation was given by 21% of LA group (18% effective, and 3% very effective), and by 18% of HA group (17% effective and only 1% very effective). It is quite significant that both feedback types providing recasts are perceived as ineffective by around 80% of the students, which means over 120 students out of 150. Results will be discussed however in the following chapter.

The last feedback method presented is implicit metalinguistic feedback, where an explanation is provided without clear indication of the error.

5j) "Quando parliamo al passato che tempo verbale dobbiamo usare?..." (l'insegnante fornisce una spiegazione sull'argomento ma senza indicare esplicitamente il tuo errore).

Diagram 38: Question 5j, answers of LA group

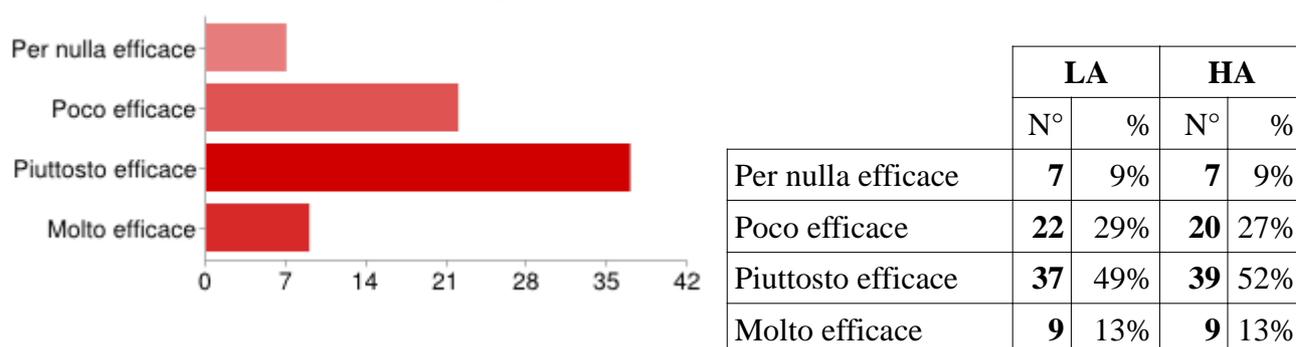
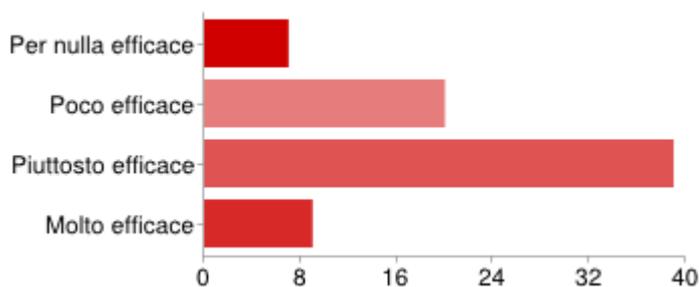


Diagram 39: Question 5j, answers of HA group



The two groups have similar opinions on the use of metalinguistic feedback. For the majority of them this method is effective (49%, LA and 52% HA) or very effective (13% in both groups), corresponding to an overall percentage of 62% (LA) and 65% (HA). A considerable part of students see however this method as ineffective: 29% of LA group and 27% of HA group chose *Poco efficace*, and a further 9% (both) *Per nulla efficace*, so that negative evaluations reach a total value of 38% and 36%, respectively.

To summarise general results on the perceived effectiveness of feedback methods, we can look at the following diagrams, showing the preferences of both groups. Diagrams 40 and 41 show the overall percentages of positive evaluations (*Molto efficace* and *Piuttosto efficace*) of each group.

Effective feedback methods, LA

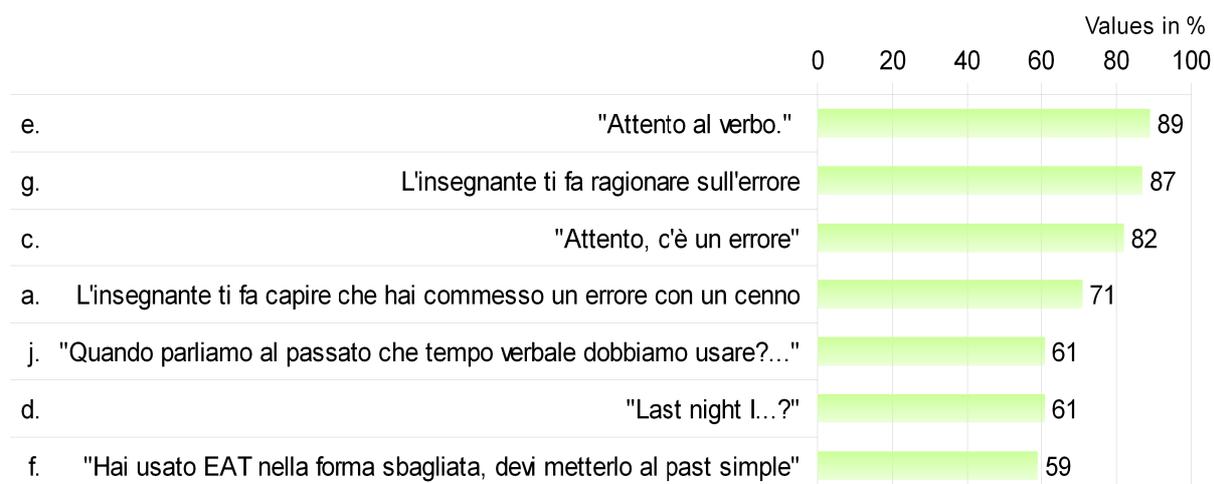


Diagram 40: Most effective feedback methods, LA group.

Effective feedback methods, HA

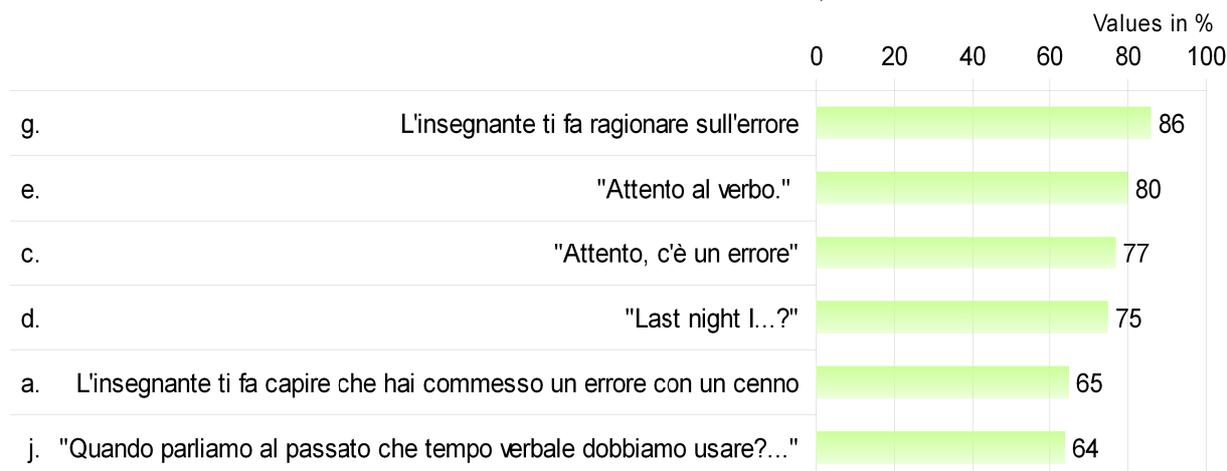


Diagram 41: Most effective feedback methods, HA group.

In the LA group 7 methods out of 10 were considered effective, although in a varied measure – the first method “e”, was chosen by 89% of the students, immediately followed by “g” (87%) and “c” (82%). All these methods provide explicit indication of the errors and prompt the students' production of correct utterances. In particular the second method, “g”, supports the students' self-

correction. In the middle of the scale, with a score of 71%, we find method “a”, a non-aggressive feedback move providing indication of the presence of an error, and, again, prompting students' self-correction. The last group of effective feedback moves includes “j”(61%), “d” (61”) and “f” (59%), providing respectively metalinguistic feedback, repetition of part of the student's utterance and explicit indication of the type of error with metalinguistic feedback. This last method (f) was considered ineffective by the HA group, who approved the effectiveness of only 6 methods, and in a different order of preference compared to the LA group. The HA group considered as most effective method “g” (86%), which was the second best choice of the LA group, focussing on teacher-guided-reasoning, immediately followed by “e” (80%), “c” (77%) and “d” (75%), all of these allowing the students the opportunity for self correction. The last two methods considered effective are “a” (65%), a non-aggressive move, and “j” (64%), metalinguistic feedback.

Conversely the following methods (see diagrams 42 and 43) are ineffective in the opinion of the large majority of students. The diagrams show the overall percentages of negative evaluations (*Per nulla efficace* and *Poco efficace*) of each group. As shown in the diagrams, in both cases the most ineffective methods were the two types of recasts. In the LA group the most ineffective is “h”, with 82% of negative evaluations, followed by “i” (79%) and “b”, a request of repetition. In the HA group the order is “i” (83%), “h” (76%), “b” (60%) and in the last position, “f” considered ineffective by 57% of the students (on the contrary, it was effective according to 59% of the students of the LA group).

Ineffective Feedback Methods, LA

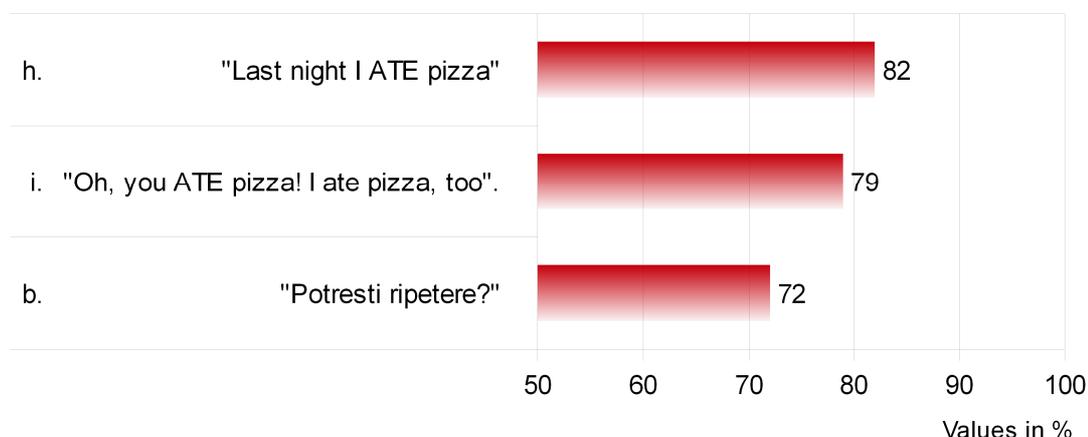


Diagram 42: Most ineffective feedback methods, LA group.

Ineffective Feedback Methods, HA



Diagram 43: Most ineffective feedback methods, HA group.

In general terms a common element in the range of methods perceived as effective is the opportunity of self-correction thanks to the use of prompting actions or the provision of sufficient wait-time. Reasoning and self-repair seem to be key points in the choice of methods for both groups. Conversely, negative evaluation was given to methods directly providing correction, as recasts, although in an implicit form, or too generic requests of repetition (as in “b”). The most significant difference between LA and HA groups was the perception of “f”, “*Hai usato EAT nella forma sbagliata, devi metterlo al past simple*” (*l'insegnante ti dice quale errore hai commesso*),

providing explicit indication of the of the error and of the target form to be used through a metalinguistic hint.

3.2.2 QUESTIONS 6-9

As explained in the presentation of the questionnaire, the aim of questions 6, 7, 8 and 9 is answering the third research question: *Does anxiety or any aspects of corrective feedback influence learners' willingness to communicate?* Question 6 investigates the causes of anxiety when producing a wrong utterance during speaking activities, in order to discover a possible relation between feedback and anxiety. Question 7 and 8 inquire about the relationship, if any, between unwillingness to communicate and feedback.. Question 9 collected students suggestions on feedback, with the aim of shedding light on the whole matter.

Question 6 was:

6) Cosa ti crea più ansia o disagio quando commetti un errore parlando in inglese in classe?

A maximum of three responses was admitted. Possible answers included the following points:

- ✓ fear of negative evaluation;
- ✓ not having enough time time for reasoning or self-correction;
- ✓ the idea of disappointing the teacher;
- ✓ fear of producing a bad self-image in front of the class;
- ✓ the teacher's negative reaction;
- ✓ a sense of failure;
- ✓ other.

Students' responses of both groups are represented in the following diagram. The total number of responses was higher in the HA group: 162 responses by the LA group and 194 responses by the HA group. Percentages in the following diagram are calculated on the total number of students of each group (out of 75 students each). In the table below complete data are reported, including percentages on the total number of responses of each group. In the table the first column, “Resp”, of

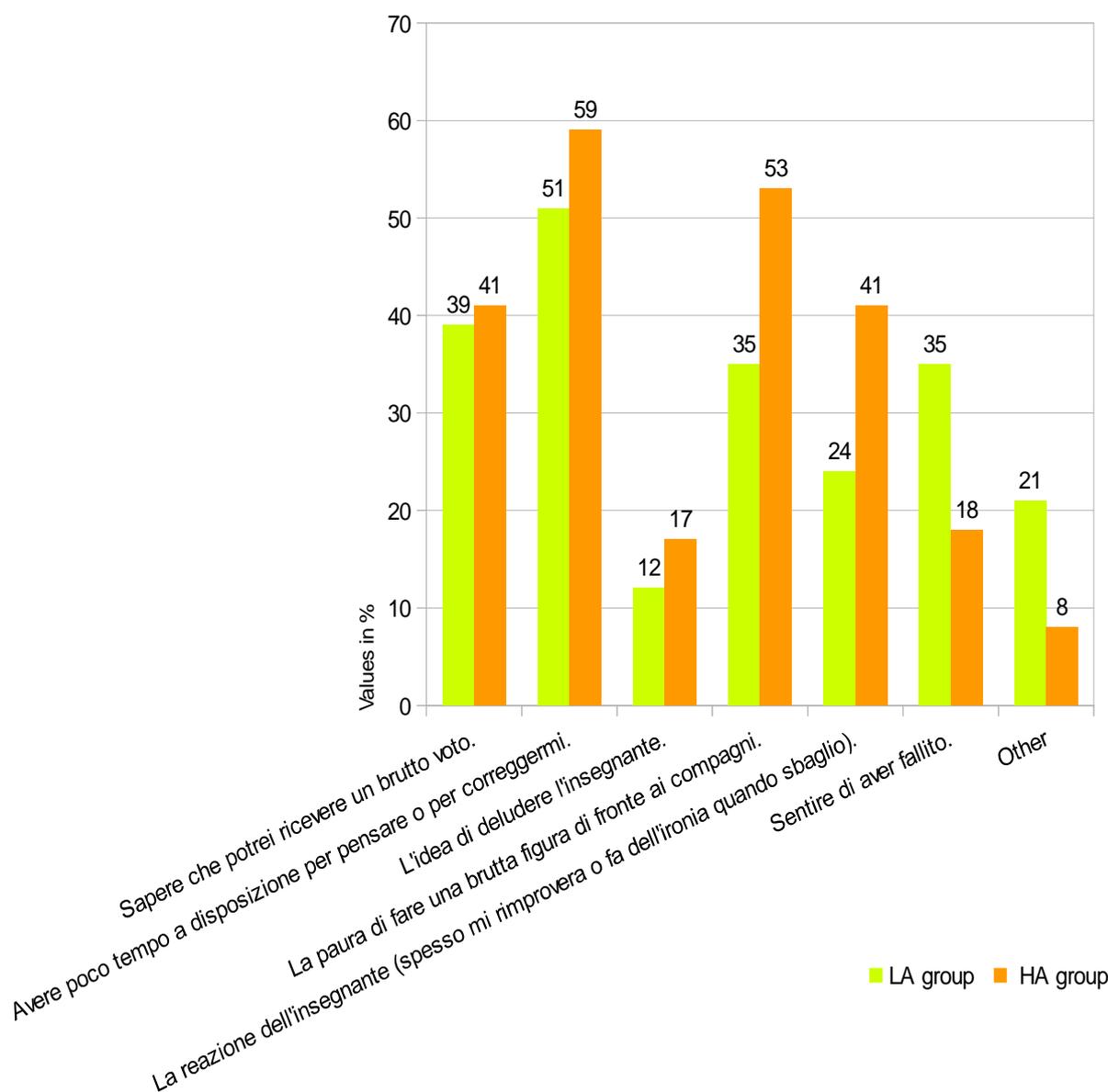


Diagram 44: Causes of anxiety when producing an error in oral activities.

each section (LA and HA), indicates the number of students who chose that option. The second column, “% resp”, shows the % values calculated on the total number of responses, and the third column “% stud” represents the per cent value of the students who chose that option (out of 75 students in each group) and the same percentages are reported in the above diagram. Values in orange to yellow highlight the most significant causes of anxiety chosen by the groups.

	LA			HA		
	N. Resp	% resp	% stud	N. Resp	% resp	% stud
Sapere che potrei ricevere un brutto voto.	29	18%	39%	31	16%	41%
Avere poco tempo a disposizione per pensare o per correggermi.	38	23%	51%	44	23%	59%
L'idea di deludere l'insegnante.	9	6%	12%	13	7%	17%
La paura di fare una brutta figura di fronte ai compagni.	26	16%	35%	40	21%	53%
La reazione dell'insegnante (spesso mi rimprovera o fa dell'ironia quando sbaglia).	18	11%	24%	31	16%	41%
Sentire di aver fallito.	26	16%	35%	29	15%	18%
Other	16	10%	21%	6	3%	8%
TOTAL RESPONSES	162			194		

Looking both at the diagram and at the table, the main cause of anxiety when producing an error during oral activities for both groups results to be the lack of wait-time to think and to operate self-correction, *Avere poco tempo a disposizione per pensare o per correggermi*. The percentage of students who chose this option is 59% of the HA group, corresponding to 44 answers, and 51% the LA group (38 answers). The second main cause of anxiety for the LA group was *Sapere che potrei ricevere un brutto voto*, (39%, 29 answers), followed by *La paura di fare una brutta figura di fronte ai compagni* and *Sentire di aver fallito*, both chosen by 35% of the students, while for the HA group the second main cause is *La paura di fare una brutta figura di fronte ai compagni*, chosen by 40 students (53%), followed by *Sapere che potrei ricevere un brutto voto* and *La reazione dell'insegnante* (both with 31 answers, 41% of the students). The students who chose the option

Other (21% of LA group, and 8% of HA group) gave several answers: some did not add anything, some wrote they do not feel anxious when committing errors, others affirm that they fear realizing they have a poor knowledge of the FL: quoting one student, “*Capire di non sapere nulla di inglese*”.

Question 7 investigates willingness to communicate, in particular how many students avoid speaking in class due to their fear of committing errors. The question is:

7) Nella tua classe capita che gli studenti vogliono evitare di parlare in lingua straniera per paura di sbagliare?

In both groups 52 students (69%) answered positively and 23 (31%) answered negatively. This means that overall 2 thirds of the students avoid communicating in class because they fear producing wrong utterances. The diagram shows the overall results of the two groups. The first number is the number of students who chose that option, while the second is the corresponding percentage.

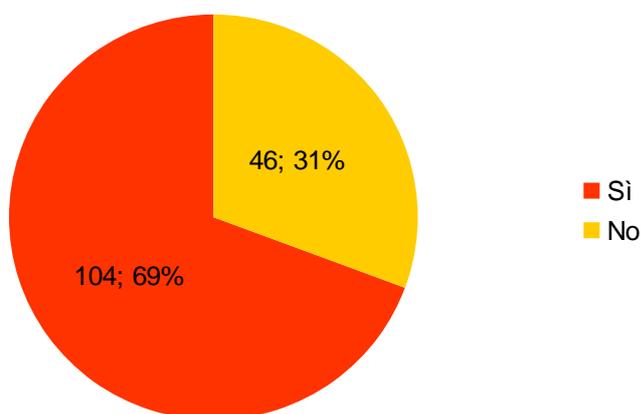


Diagram 45: Question 7, Number of students who avoid communicating in class (LA and HA groups).

Question 8 inquires about the reasons for which students do not want to communicate in class. It is linked to question 7 and aims to discover a possible relationship between unwillingness to communicate and the process of feedback (methods, management of the feedback process). As a

premise, with reference to question 8 and 9 of the questionnaire, it must be noted that several students reported to be feeling fear while speaking, especially fear of committing errors, as clearly shown in the word-cloud (Figure 6), but at the same time it resulted to be difficult for some of them to identify the direct sources of that fear, as if fear had no causes or were a matter of facts, rather than a result of a process. However, when they were asked to express their needs and suggestions with reference to feedback (in question 9), their answers revealed to be the key for the interpretation of their fears. Question 8 is:

8) Se hai risposto sì alla domanda precedente, pensi che questo sia dovuto a un modo sbagliato di correggere? Perché?

Of the 52 students in each group who answered *Sì* to Question 7, 43 students of the LA group and 40 of the HA group motivated their answers. 33 students of the LA group and 24 of the HA group (57 on the whole) maintain that fear of committing errors while speaking (causing the avoidance of communication) is not due to the (wrong) way feedback is delivered. Conversely, the remaining 26 students hold that it is not due to this reason. However, their responses did not differ, since whether they answered positively or negatively, their explanations to fear and unwillingness to communicate are very similar.

The following word-cloud, obtained from student's responses⁵ highlights the most recurring words used by students to explain the causes of this phenomenon. Among the others the word *paura* is the most recurring: it appears over 30 times in students' answers, in association with other words as, *paura di sbagliare*, *paura dell'insegnante*, *paura del giudizio dei compagni*. In other cases unwillingness to communicate is associated to personal character, lack of self-confidence, shyness, embarrassment when speaking a FL (*carattere dell'alunno*, *timidezza*, *imbarazzo*, *insicurezza*,

⁵ The word-cloud was realized by use of Wordle™ online application.

scarsa fiducia). A further cause is *poor language knowledge* and preparation. The picture allows to obtain an overview of students' perceptions and experiences when they produce a wrong utterance.



Figure 6: Question 8, Answers of LA and HA group, word cloud.

Among the answers the following sentences are reported to get a deeper insight into the moment of feedback. They have been grouped in 4 sections representing the main causes of unwillingness to communicate: **Teachers**, **Peers**, **Personal Features** and **Preparation**. Key-words and the most significant expressions are underlined in the quotations.

→ Teachers

- *Hanno paura che l'insegnante sia severa nel correggere.*
- *La prof spesso rimprovera e fa ironia quando sbagliamo.*
- *È dovuto al fatto che l'insegnante non incoraggia gli alunni a provare a intervenire, e se questi lo fanno non vengono apprezzati. Di conseguenza gli alunni evitano le delusioni.*
- *Molti temono di essere giudicati per quello che sono. Nel mio caso le persone più preparate sono prese di mira, mentre Agli altri non vengono corretti neanche banali errori di pronuncia.*
- *L'insegnante si altera molto a causa anche di piccoli errori e ciò mette in soggezione gli alunni timidi.*
- *Dipende dall'insegnante, dal carattere e non solo da come corregge l'errore (se è tranquilla e buona gli studenti si buttano di più nelle conversazioni).*
- *Dipende dall'atteggiamento dell'insegnante, dovrebbe far capire che non bisogna aver paura, ma provare.*
- *Alcuni insegnanti mortificano l'alunno che sbaglia rendendolo insicuro.*
- *L'insegnante crea un senso di colpa nell'alunno.*
- *Spesso l'insegnante corregge tutti allo stesso modo, ma ognuno reagisce in maniera diversa e chi vive la correzione come momento di fallimento non interviene.*
- *Rimprovera troppo.*
- *Spesso il comportamento dell'insegnante porta insicurezza e incertezza.*
- *L'insegnante dovrebbe mettere a proprio agio e non aggredire gli studenti quando sbagliano, dal momento che l'inglese non è la nostra lingua madre.*
- *L'interazione è utile solo se il clima è rilassato, dalla mia esperienza i professori correggono troppo pronuncia e grammatica ignorando la fluidità.*

Teachers result to be one of the major cause of students' defensive attitude toward interaction.

Teachers are often perceived as aggressive and too strict, as provoking lack of confidence due to continuous reproaching or irony when providing feedback. More than methods what students criticize is teachers' behaviour.

→ Peers

- *Il problema principale sono i compagni.*
- *Penso sia un timore legato al giudizio dei compagni, ma spesso è dovuto anche all'insicurezza e alla paura di sbagliare.*
- *Per paura di fare brutta figura.*
- *Per paura delle prese in giro dei compagni.*
- *È per scarsa conoscenza della lingua e per paura del giudizio dei compagni o dell'insegnante.*
- *I compagni prendono in giro quando si sbaglia.*

Peers are strongly perceived as competitors, as a problem; their judgements on other students' language knowledge and their opinions are feared. Such expressions inform us of a non-collaborative class environment.

→ Personal Features

- *È un fattore psicologico.*
- *Dipende dal ragazzo, se si sente a disagio per paura di sbagliare o per ansia.*
- *Timidezza e paura dei giudizi degli altri.*
- *Penso per mancanza di fiducia in sé, ma dovrebbe spettare all'insegnante spronarlo e mostrargli le sue capacità.*
- *Si preferisce non sbagliare e quindi non tentare.*
- *La paura di sbagliare c'è quando ci si sente sotto pressione.*

Several students see a connection between their desire of avoiding communication and personal features, as shyness, lack of self-confidence, trait anxiety and others. However, as we can notice in this group of answers, psychological aspects are almost always associated to other causes students are not always aware of, as other people's opinions, external pressure, feeling unease. Again the teacher is recognized as having the role of encouraging students and showing them their skills and success.

→ Preparation

- *A volte l'allievo sa di non riuscire a formulare una frase completa.*
- *Non siamo abituati a parlare quindi non sappiamo cosa dire e facciamo molti errori.*
- *Alcuni si sentono in difficoltà e in imbarazzo a parlare in un'altra lingua, quindi magari non si sentono portati.*
- *Molti non si buttano per timore delle brutte figure o di non saper parlare inglese.*
- *È per una scarsa conoscenza della lingua.*

The last group of answers regards personal preparation and language knowledge. Some students state that willingness to communicate can be discouraged by poor language knowledge and/or personal study, which can make them feel insecure during the output stage. Some add that they are not used to speak in class and this causes them to commit errors.

The last question, Question 9, intended to obtain an overview on learners' perceptions and expectations on feedback by collecting their opinions, suggestions and perceived needs with reference to feedback.

9) Cosa suggeriresti ad un insegnante per aiutarlo a correggerti nel modo giusto? Dai un suggerimento o spiega di cosa avresti bisogno.

Considering the similarity of the responses given by the LA and the HA group, answers have been analysed together.

As clearly appears in the visual representation below, students' views on feedback reflect the necessity of learners of being the main actors in the process. In responses the word *studente* was not used as simple word, but was always accompanied by other terms as *far ragionare* or *autocorrezione*, which are the second most used words, proving they are operations and processes strongly required by learners.

Looking at the verbs in the cloud we can find: *far ragionare, correggere, capire, ripetere, parlare*, followed by *imparare, aspettare, aiutarmi, coinvolgermi*. These verbs let us understand that students' desires in relation to feedback are:

- primarily, to have the opportunity to reflect on required answers and on errors (*far ragionare, aspettare*) in order to better understand both errors and correction on the one side (*capire*), but also to acquire competence in the process of correction (*imparare*):

“L'insegnante dovrebbe far notare l'errore e dare tempo di pensare per autocorreggersi; se non ci riesco dovrebbe farmi capire perchè sbaglio.”

- Secondly, they expressed not only the need of reflecting, but especially of self-correction (*autocorrezione*);

“L'importante è capire, ragionare e assimilare, non essere corretti passivamente. Favorire l'autocorrezione e l'autonomia.”

- Moreover they talk about the teacher as the a person who can guide them through the process of correction;

“Un insegnante dovrebbe mettere in moto in noi il ragionamento che ci faccia capire gli errori. In questo modo gli alunni possono imparare a correggersi da soli e migliorare le loro conoscenze.”

“L'insegnante dovrebbe aiutare e guidare gli alunni nell'autocorrezione, facendoli diventare parte attiva.”

- Finally, the aspect of repetition: several students expressed the necessity of repeating more than once their corrected sentences in order to internalize them.

“Vorrei che l'insegnante mi facesse ragionare sull'errore senza correggermi immediatamente, e che mi facesse ripetere la frase corretta più volte per ricordarmi dell'errore e non ripeterlo.”

The nouns used by students add some information on further needs. In the graphic we find, after studente, autocorrezione and insegnante, terms as *tempo*, *calma*, *pazienza*, *(senza) pressione*, *suggerimenti*. All these terms do not only reflect technical aspects, but have psychological implications as well. *Tempo* and *pressione* are strictly related.

- In general terms students require adequate time to think and to reach the correct answer. Lack of adequate wait-time – as well as of *calma* and *pazienza* - lead to increased pressure. Conversely, time and a relaxed atmosphere can foster acquisition.

“Dovrebbe farmi ragionare di più senza mettere pressione o ansia (tempo e autocorrezione).”

“Darmi tempo per autocorreggermi e se non ci riesco indicarmi il tipo di errore.”

“Non mettere pressione e aspettare che si ragioni sugli errori commessi (dare solamente la risposta corretta non aiuta nessuno).”

“Affabilità, calma, pazienza e un sorriso di incoraggiamento.”

Since the question asked for suggestions, in most cases positive words were provided by students. However, in several cases, students presented aspects which should be avoided or prevented during feedback. They use very strong expressions, as *non mettere in soggezione*, *non mettere pressione*, *non aggredire*, *non far pesare troppo lo sbaglio*, *non mettere in ridicolo*, *non mettere voti appena qualcuno parla*, *non deridere*, *non fare preferenze*, *non usare modi duri*, *non mortificare*, *senza tono di rimprovero*, etc. Some examples follow:

“Correggere con tranquillità, senza arrabbiarsi, assicurarsi di aver rispiegato bene; se poi l'alunno continua a non capire, bisogna proporre attività differenti.”

“Correggere tranquillamente, facendo capire, senza mettere in soggezione.”

“Evitare di metter in ridicolo l'alunno che sbaglia o di correggerlo in modo pesante. Far ragionare lo studente sulle risposte prima di correggere.”

“Non aggredire o deridere lo studente, come spesso accade, ma cercare di metterlo a proprio agio per fargli comprendere gli errori.”

“Lasciare libertà di parola e non mettere voti appena qualcuno comincia a parlare per non impaurirlo.”

“Non saltare addosso all'alunno gridandogli contro.”

“Incentivare lo studente, non rimproverarlo o prendersi gioco di lui, e non coinvolgere i compagni nella correzione, perché a volte è umiliante verificare di essere l'unico a non sapere.”

As in the previous case, in students' perceptions these negative aspects (aggressive behaviour, pressure, derision, the use of marks as an instrument of control), can compromise acquisition, since they increase students' defensiveness and desire to avoid interaction.

3.3 Interview data

Interview data integrate questionnaire data to answer Research question 1 and 3. Seven interviews were randomly collected among the students who had filled in the questionnaire.

Question 1: *In base alla tua esperienza, quali sono gli aspetti positivi della correzione degli errori orali?* is similar to the first question of the questionnaire and it has the aim of better understanding

students' opinions on the usefulness of feedback, and eventually to highlight positive aspects of correction during oral activities. The 7 students interviewed expressed positive opinions on feedback, recognizing that it is useful to become aware of errors, to improve language knowledge and not to repeat errors “*La correzione è positiva perché ti permette di capire quando sbagli*” (Margherita), “*Così puoi migliorare la lingua, le tue conoscenze*” (Anna). Three of them stated that oral correction is more useful than written correction, since, occurring immediately or soon after the error, can be more easily memorized and internalized “*Va sempre bene avere correzioni, soprattutto nell'orale, perché ci pensi subito e ti rimane più impresso*” (Davide). Some of them added suggestions or expressed their needs, as repeating the corrected utterance, adequate wait-time to answer and for self-correction and, above all the opportunity to reflect and reason on the language.

Students' answers to the first question are reported here:

Edoardo

Sì, diciamo che la correzione serve, ma alla fine... alla fine del discorso. Se quando hai finito la frase uno ti dice “Guarda che detto così non vuol dire niente”, e lascia che tu ti corregga da solo, allora serve, perché ci arrivi da solo. Se invece uno ti blocca sempre, allora no...

Luca

Mah, quello che penso... per esempio sui tempi della correzione, che poi è quello che fa la mia prof., è che l'insegnante dovrebbe lasciarti finire il discorso e poi correggerti. Ti lascia finire, ti corregge, o lascia che ti corregga da solo, e poi ti dà la possibilità di ripetere la frase corretta, allora ti serve, perché te la ricordi. Sì, lei me la fa ridire... è meglio, piuttosto che correggere in mezzo a una frase, dove poi uno si perde.

Poi se tu sbagli, magari pensando che la frase sia giusta, correggendo ti viene eliminato l'errore, e poi magari ridicendolo ti resta impresso che quella frase era giusta in un altro modo, e quindi hai la possibilità di ricordartela e non ripetere più l'errore.

Chiara

La correzione è positiva, quella orale mi rimane più impressa di quella scritta, perché mi corregge subito, anche la pronuncia.

Davide

Va sempre bene avere correzioni, soprattutto nell'orale, perché ci pensi subito e ti rimane più impresso.

Elisabetta

La correzione è importante e secondo me soprattutto nell'orale, che è più importante, mentre nello scritto non mi rimane tanto impressa.

Margherita

La correzione è positiva perché ti permette di capire quando sbagli. Però bisogna avere tempo per pensare alle cose.

Anna

Il fatto di capire quali errori fai, così puoi migliorare la lingua, le tue conoscenze. Per me è importante poter ripetere più volte la frase corretta per ricordarmela.

The aim of question 2: *Nella tua esperienza, cosa rende poco efficace una correzione?*, was to shed light on negative aspects students experience during feedback which make it ineffective. 5

students highlighted the factor of (lack of) time as a major aspect influencing the effectiveness of feedback. Time is strictly connected to the opportunity of reaching target forms through self-correction, reported by all students *“Dovrebbe darti il tempo di ragionarci su senza interromperti e farti ragionare. Se dà lei la risposta è sbagliato secondo me, ci devi arrivare da solo, sennò la volta dopo non te lo ricordi più.”* (Edoardo) *“Quando parli e ti dicono subito la correzione, senza darti il tempo di pensare, allora poi ti dimentichi tutto.”* (Chiara). In particular, Margherita underlines the effects of insufficient time, causing pressure, anxiety and even leading to the incapability of producing an output *“non aspetta mai che io faccia il ragionamento. Si spazientisce, mi mette fretta, e quindi va a finire che dico delle cose sbagliate, anche se le so”*. Moreover, 3 students indicate that an aggressive behaviour during feedback prevents internalization *“Se uno ti assale appena dici qualcosa o sbagli, quello è male, perché uno, oltre a non capire dove ha sbagliato, non riesce neanche a rifarsi, perché entra in panico e si sente demoralizzato”* (Luca); *“Quando ti aggrediscono o rimproverano troppo, va a finire che non ascolti più la correzione, perché ti mettono ansia”* (Anna). The last aspect of ineffective feedback indicated by students is unclear or missing explanations on behalf of the teacher *“Bisogna sempre spiegare l'errore. Quando dicono: “Si dice così e basta”, senza spiegare perché, uno non ci arriva, non ha senso. L'insegnante dovrebbe spiegarti perché hai sbagliato”* (Luca). Complete answers are reported as follows:

Edoardo

Quando l'insegnante ti corregge è sbagliato che dia la risposta. Sì, dovrebbe farti ragionare, in modo che ci arrivi da solo. Se non ci arrivi da solo non ti serve a niente. Dovrebbe dire “hai sbagliato” senza dare la risposta. Dovrebbe darti il tempo di ragionarci su senza interromperti e farti ragionare. Se da lei la risposta è sbagliato secondo me, ci devi arrivare da solo, sennò la volta dopo non te lo ricordi più.

Luca

Direi il modo di correggere. Se uno ti assale appena dici qualcosa o sbagli, quello è male, perché uno, oltre a non capire dove ha sbagliato, non riesce neanche a rifarsi, perché entra in panico e si sente demoralizzato, mentre se uno aspetta, ti corregge punto per punto, ti fa rifare la frase, e ti lascia ragionare finché arrivi alla frase corretta, allora funziona.

Poi bisogna sempre spiegare l'errore. Quando dicono "Si dice così e basta", senza spiegare perché, uno non ci arriva, non ha senso. L'insegnante dovrebbe spiegarti perché hai sbagliato.

Chiara

Quando ti correggono subito e non ti fanno ragionare, o sennò quando parli e ti dicono subito la correzione, senza darti il tempo di pensare, allora poi ti dimentichi tutto.

Poi di solito il mio prof ti spiega le cose la volta prima della verifica, quindi se ti rimangono dubbi o non hai abbastanza tempo di studiare, finisce che sbagli tantissime cose, ma in questo caso non è colpa dello studente.

Davide

Quando tu magari sbagli e non ti danno il tempo di ripensarci e ti dicono subito la risposta. Poi non me lo ricordo. Però in genere la mia insegnante ce ne lascia abbastanza, quindi ci troviamo bene.

Elisabetta

Quando non ti lasciano il tempo per pensarci... e ho bisogno di capire dov'è l'errore, e di ragionarci su, se mi dicono "hai fatto qui lo sbaglio, è meglio che ci pensi tu" allora è più facile ricordare.

Margherita

Mah, quando la mia prof mi chiama alla lavagna per correggere qualcosa, per fare una frase, o anche quando mi fa delle domande, non aspetta mai che io faccia il ragionamento. Si spazientisce, mi mette fretta, e quindi va a finire che dico delle cose sbagliate, anche se le so. Dal posto, quando sono fuori gli altri, so sempre le risposte, perché studio tanto, ma fuori non ci riesco, non mi lascia il tempo per pensare e per correggermi. Quindi lei pensa che io non studi o che non sappia niente.

Anna

Quando ti aggrediscono o rimproverano troppo, va a finire che non ascolti più la correzione, perché ti mettono ansia. Oppure quando non ti fanno ragionare sugli errori

Question 3: Pensi che certi metodi di correzione o atteggiamenti dell'insegnante possano influire negativamente sul clima in classe o sul desiderio degli studenti di intervenire?, intended to investigate the role of teacher during feedback possibly related to unwillingness to communicate. Although students reported different personal experiences with their FL teachers, they all agreed on the fact that aggressive or too strict behaviours, or irony on behalf of the teacher during correction can lead to unease, insecurity, lack of confidence and to the desire of avoiding communication: *“Se penso alla mia prof... insomma, ti salta sempre addosso quando sbagli, ti urla contro. Per me quando uno corregge dovrebbe essere calmo e tranquillo (Edoardo)”*, *“Quando ti mettono in ridicolo davanti a tutti. Il mio prof è molto bravo in questo (...) allora i ragazzi hanno*

paura di sbagliare perché li mette in ridicolo, e così alla fine rispondono sempre le stesse persone.”

(Chiara). Conversely a serene, collaborative behaviour can promote interaction “*Se una professoressa, quando sbagli ti corregge con calma... credo che la classe sia molto più disponibile a intervenire e a partecipare*” (Luca). According to one student, who experiences being evaluated every time she or her classmates intervene, marks are a further aspect preventing communication and causing silence: “*La mia prof ti mette voto ogni volta che parli, anche se fai una domanda o chiedi una spiegazione. Sempre. Quindi in classe c'è sempre un silenzio tremendo, tutti hanno paura di parlare*” (Anna).

Complete answers to question 3 are reported below.

Edoardo

Beh, se penso alla mia prof... insomma, ti salta sempre addosso quando sbagli, ti urla contro. Per me quando uno corregge dovrebbe essere calmo e tranquillo. Dovrebbe pensare anche all'aspetto umano, basta dire “guarda, non si dice così”, senza prendersela.

E poi, non è che lo fa ogni volta, ma quando dici qualche castronata, o la scrivi nei compiti in classe, lei si mette davanti a tutta la classe a dire “Guarda che cosa hai scritto qui”, si mette a fare ironia su tutta la classe, diciamo...Noi ce ne fregiamo, ma... sì, ti dà un po' fastidio sapere che tutta la classe sa cos'hai sbagliato; ci dà fastidio, ci fa arrabbiare, anche perché ti mette in imbarazzo.

Luca

Sicuramente, perché se una professoressa, quando sbagli ti corregge con calma, è disponibile a correggerti tranquillamente quando provi a dire qualcosa, anche se

sbagli, ma ci provi, credo che la classe sia molto più disponibile a intervenire e a partecipare. Mentre se uno ti assale appena intervieni, o ti corregge in modo brusco, senza spiegarti, qualsiasi cosa tu dica sicuramente è peggio.

Chiara

Quando ti mettono in ridicolo davanti a tutti. Il mio prof è molto bravo in questo, ci prende spesso in giro. Per esempio quando succede una cosa così, che prende in giro qualcuno perché ha sbagliato, e poi fa una domanda in generale a tutta la classe, allora i ragazzi hanno paura di sbagliare perché li mette in ridicolo, e così alla fine rispondono sempre le stesse persone. Di solito quelli che vanno meglio, e rispondono sempre quelli.

Poi non mi sento libera di chiedere spiegazioni, perché poi ti dice “Sono cose che abbiamo già fatto, dovresti saperle”.

Davide

Sì, quando ti ridicolizzano o ti prendono in giro davanti alla classe, poi nessuno vuole più parlare. Però con la mia professoressa d'inglese non succede. Ci corregge normalmente, come è giusto che sia, e quindi anche la classe è tranquilla. E poi spiega bene.

Elisabetta

A volte il fatto di non voler intervenire è un fattore personale, però altre capita che ci si senta in colpa, perché magari ci dice: “Ma come si fa a fare un errore di questo tipo!”. È che... sì, per alcune persone a volte può essere anche semplice, ma magari non è sempre così per tutti. Anche perché non sempre ci spiega bene le cose, gli errori.

Margherita

*Sì, interrompere sempre, non dare tempo, arrabbiarsi e aggredire quando uno sbaglia.
Tutte queste cose non ti fanno sentire sicuro.*

Anna

Sì, per esempio la mia prof ti mette voto ogni volta che parli, anche se fai una domanda o chiedi una spiegazione. Sempre. Quindi in classe c'è sempre un silenzio tremendo, tutti hanno paura di parlare e di dire qualcosa di sbagliato.

The last question was: **Normalmente pensi di avere abbastanza tempo per rispondere alle domande in modo corretto o vorresti che l'insegnante te ne lasciasse di più?** This question inquired on the perceived necessity of wait-time on behalf of students. All 7 students perceive time as a determining factor in the feedback process, as already emerged in question 2 “*Se la prof ti dà il tempo di pensare e ti segue passo dopo passo, magari ti dice dov'è l'errore e tu puoi arrivare da solo a correggerti usando le tue conoscenze*” (Luca). Two students stated they are allowed adequate wait-time. One student reported they are given time to think; however the management of time is poor, since the feedback moment is so long that the teacher loses the thread of the conversation and both correction and objectives become unclear “*Il mio insegnante ci lascia tanto tempo, però poi si perde, perde il filo del discorso, quindi... è troppo lungo per me, poi la correzione non arriva più, divaga.*” (Chiara). 4 students affirmed they would like to have more time to find solutions, to think, to answer correctly. Answers to question 4 are reported below.

Edoardo

Mah, a volte sì, a volte no. Quando ci corregge per esempio, ci interrompe ma non ci lascia fare, non ci lascia pensare, vuole una risposta immediata, e comunque ti grida

contro.

Luca

Sì, e penso che il tempo sia molto importante. Se la prof ti dà il tempo di pensare e ti segue passo dopo passo, magari ti dice dov'è l'errore e tu puoi arrivare da solo a correggerti usando le tue conoscenze. Però ci vuole il tempo per pensare, anche perché è una lingua. Se proprio non ci arrivi allora te lo dice, ma è importante arrivarci da soli usando le proprie conoscenze, senza trovarsi una cosa pronta.

Chiara

Il mio insegnante ci lascia tanto tempo, però poi si perde, perde il filo del discorso, quindi... è troppo lungo per me, poi la correzione non arriva più, divaga.

Davide

Sì, la prof d'inglese ci lascia il tempo per rispondere e correggerci.

Elisabetta

No, ne vorrei di più. A volte dipende anche da come è presa la prof, a volte ce ne lascia, a volte no, ma in generale ne vorrei di più, è importante.

Margherita

No, come dicevo prima non ci lascia tempo. Se ne avessi abbastanza, avrei voti molto più alti.

Anna

A volte ci lascia tempo, ma la maggior parte no, e poi mette così tanta ansia che mi dimentico tutto.

4 DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

The analysis of the data gathered has confirmed the first and the third research hypotheses, and has disconfirmed the second one⁶. The most relevant results of the study show that, firstly, nearly hundred per cent of the participants feel the necessity of feedback and direct instruction to become conscious of the gap between their knowledge of the target language and the TL correct forms and utterances. Secondly, student's preferences for types of errors to be treated, methodologies, timing, and frequency of errors correction seem to depend more on individual features than on language anxiety level. However, both high and low anxiety groups agree on immediate or slightly delayed correction of personal most frequent errors, especially grammar, and of errors hindering communication. Finally, the large majority of students strongly agree on two aspects that in their view determine the effectiveness of correction: on the one hand, the necessity of getting affective support while receiving feedback on their production, which can also influence their willingness to communicate; on the other hand FL learners consider self-repair, in the context of a teacher-guided process, as the most effective – and motivating – corrective action. This last aspect reveals itself to be especially important since it shows that FL learners want to become active participants in the feedback process, and not simply “receive” correction, since their effort to reach the correct form or expression both allows them to better remember and thus internalize rules, and, being seen as challenge, is a highly motivating activity. In particular recasts, today often considered as one of the best non invasive corrective methods, occupy the last position among the feedback methods perceived as effective by students. All these cognitive-procedural and socio-psychological aspects

6 For Research question 1 it was hypothesized that students want to receive corrective feedback during oral production and to be active participants in the process, preferring feedback types that prompt modified output, provided that they are allowed adequate wait-time. For Research question 2 it was hypothesized that students' preferences for feedback vary according to their language anxiety level. For Research question 3 it was hypothesized that learners' willingness to communicate can be affected by the teacher's behaviour when providing correction and by the atmosphere in class.

will be discussed in the following paragraphs.

4.1 Cognitive-procedural aspects

4.1.1 FEEDBACK AND DIRECT INSTRUCTION: A NECESSITY

The data show that secondary school students see feedback as an integral part of the learning process, and that it is necessary for three main reasons:

- improving their language knowledge and competence,
- becoming aware of their language level, of errors and of the gap between their real competence and target language forms,
- avoiding the repetition of errors.

The reasons reported by students demonstrate that they are aware that feedback is an instrument supporting their learning and most of them perceive errors as natural steps toward learning, although, as we will see later on, both methodological and psychological components can compromise this positive view. Furthermore students are conscious that some errors can become systematic and fixate in their mind, unlike occasional errors. This would confirm Corder's distinction between error and mistake (Corder, 1967, in Park, 2010:6) and the hypothesis of fossilization, which can be prevented by effective feedback (Higgs and Clifford, 1982 and Omaggio, 1984, both in Dekeyser, 1993:502). This strong request for correction would lead then to conclude that learners are more focussed on forms than on fluency. In fact, even though some wished for more attention to be dedicated to fluency, others had the idea that learning a language corresponds to the absence of errors, especially of grammar errors, which were the most highly rated among the types of errors for which they wanted correction. However this opinion could be due to the students' everyday experience in class, since grammar errors are the most frequently

corrected errors.

4.1.2 THE STUDENT AT THE CENTRE OF THE FEEDBACK PROCESS: THE ROLE OF LEARNERS, TEACHERS AND PEERS

A very positive aspect is that, more than *receiving* correction, students want to be given the opportunity, and the time, to repair their wrong utterances on their own. Moreover they want to be able to formulate “da soli la frase corretta usando le nostre conoscenze”, in one word *uptake*. In students' opinions reasoning, understanding the error and making an effort to reach target-like utterances are the aspects which help them remember and internalize correction, allowing them to modify their internal grammar. In particular, on uptake, Ellis et alii (2001a) pointed out the theoretical grounds on which uptake can result beneficial.

Firstly, uptake can facilitate acquisition by "providing opportunities for learners to proceduralize target language knowledge already internalized in declarative form (Lyster 1998a:191). So, producing the correct form may help learners automatize their production and lead to increased fluency (Swain 1995). Secondly, uptake constitutes one type of "pushed output" (Swain, 1995). It allows learners to reanalyze and modify their nontarget output as they test new hypotheses about the target language (Lyster, 1998a:191). Finally, this pushed output may be an indication of noticing, which Schmidt (1990, 2001) has argued is necessary for second language acquisition (Loewen, 2004: 156).

In this view the student becomes an active participant in the feedback process meant as part of the entire learning process, as shown both by the open-ended questions of the questionnaire and by the interviews. These contribute in fact to shed new light on the role of teachers and students in feedback. In appearance the quantitative data gathered from question 4 and the qualitative data both from the questionnaire and the interviews seem to be contrasting, showing, in the first case that students want to be corrected by teachers (not by peers, or others), while, in the second case, teachers seem to be left out, in favour of self-correction. However, an accurate analysis of qualitative data enlightened this point: the teachers' role is not denied by students. On the contrary,

teachers are recognized as fundamental actors in the feedback process; their role, however, is not to directly provide correction, but rather to support learners in activating and using their own resources to produce target utterances, and to guide them with the aid of prompts and hints towards self-correction and modified output. Jimena et alii's observation (2005) well summarises this view:

In terms of teachers' roles in giving correction, the popular misunderstanding overemphasises teachers' responsibility in carrying out the task while ignoring learners' roles in the process of error correction. In fact, learners can make more progress when they are given chances to respond to correction and contribute to the process. However, the decisive job of selecting the appropriate method lies in the hands of the teachers. (Jimena et alii, 2005:1)

In this way not only students become active participants, but their motivation towards learning grows thanks to an increased involvement in the task, this being in accordance with the communicative approach and especially the humanistic-affective approach which put the students at the centre of the learning process (Balboni, 2008).

The role of peers in feedback remains controversial: they are not considered as possible agents performing correction by the majority of students, confirming therefore Chaudron's considerations on the unwritten rules of social interaction (Chaudron, 1988:132):

In most other social interactions, no one participant is specified as having the automatic right to impose judgment on the other's behavior, especially linguistic behavior. If correction of another is to be done, it is done discreetly, with deference, since there is strong preference to allow speakers correct themselves (see Schlegoff, Jefferson, and Sacks 1977). Repair of the communication by another is usually only allowed in the form of noncomprehension signals, such as (...) clarification requests and confirmation checks.

Students' opinions reflect this view, in which classmates, being "peers", on the same level, do not have the authority to provide correction (authority held, conversely, by the teacher). Moreover peers are often viewed as competitors whose judgement is feared ("può mortificare"), as emerged from the answers to Question 8, which is one of the causes of tension during feedback. However, most

students declared⁷ they are not used to group work (which would be the most natural context for peer correction) and this could be the reason for their poor attitude towards peers correction. Therefore, it would be interesting to discover how peers' correction is considered by learners in whose classes group-work or cooperative learning is a common practice, since a collaborative environment can reduce anxiety and promote learning (Young, 1990, 1991) and offers the opportunity to see the other person as a resource and a collaborator, making learning an enriching experience not only from the instructional point of view, but especially for the development of both social and professional skills. As Brown (in Bertazzi, 2003) says: “Le capacità necessarie per il lavoro di gruppo, comprese le comunicazioni interpersonali, la capacità di negoziare, il lavoro di squadra, sono essenziali negli odierni ambienti eterogenei della scuola e del lavoro”. In line with Mason (1999), a class can be a community in which learners' interactions foster their social abilities and develop their metacognitive skills and critical thinking:

L'idea di una classe scolastica come sistema socioculturale, [...] che caratterizza una comunità di apprendimento, è innanzitutto la consapevolezza delle mete da raggiungere intenzionalmente tramite le attività scolastiche che esso mette in moto. [...] L'interazione rende i processi di pensiero «visibili», ossia pubblici e condivisi dando loro un valore sociale. Gli studenti vengono socializzati ad essere attivi, metacognitivamente consapevoli mediante la partecipazione a una comunità che richiede loro di pensare e riflettere, di considerare se stessi come impegnati in analisi critiche e risoluzione di problemi per trasformare la conoscenza, a partire dalla revisione delle proprie idee e credenze” (Mason, 1999, in Bertazzi, 2003:11).

4.1.3 OUTPUT PROMPTING VERSUS INPUT PROVIDING METHODS

Critical thinking and metacognitive processing of information are the aspects which emerged also from the student's preferences for feedback methods: methods directly providing solutions, as recasts, surprisingly occupy the last positions in the students' preference scale. Students' preferences

⁷ The research instruments adopted did not include a specific question on the practice of group-works, however, this extra point was inquired in quick class surveys before or after administering questionnaires. All classes answered they are used to individual or pair work, while they never or almost never work in groups.

go to output prompting methods, allowing them to notice their errors – be it in an explicit or implicit way – though not providing explicit correction. As mentioned before, learners consider effective those types of feedback allowing for a more direct involvement of the students in the correction process. Conversely, explicit correction providing target-like forms is considered the last option to be chosen when giving feedback “se proprio non ci arrivi allora te lo dice” (Interview, Luca), together with too generic requests of repetitions. This result is striking since recasts are the one of the most frequent type of feedback in a range of classroom settings, as explained by Lyster and Mori (2006) and Sheen (2004 and 2008).

The reasons for the effectiveness of corrective methods prompting learners' repairs through their own discovery of the language, or reuse of own resources for the production of target-like forms, have been clearly stated by the students both in the questionnaires and in the interviews, even though no specific question focussed on this aspect. In students' perceptions such methods – as teacher-guided repair process, implicit or explicit indication of the type of error or of the presence of an error, partial repetition of the student's utterance up to the point in which the error occurred, and metalinguistic feedback – promote their improvement in language competence by making learners become active participants, which helps them remember corrections, internalize revised rules, and acquire new skills (self-correction ability). This is true, provided that they are given sufficient wait-time and that feedback is immediate or slightly delayed, in order to have clear the context of the error.

On the other hand, the reasons for discarding recasts can only be inferred. Studies on recasts are contrasting: some researchers found they are helpful, as demonstrated by Sheen (2004), who explored learners' uptake and reactions to several corrective feedback types in four different instructional settings, French immersion, Canada ESL, New Zealand ESL and Korean EFL, showing that the rate of learners' repairs after the exposure to the several feedback types was

similar, which would prove the effectiveness of recasts. Lyster and Izquierdo (2009:485) in their study argue that both recasts and prompts provided evidence of students' progress in language learning (accuracy and reaction-time): recasts in that they provide positive exemplars, “input features related to length, number of changes and intonation”; prompts since they offer “negative evidence and opportunities to produce modified output”. However, a great deal of research on the matter shows that recasts are often perceived as ambiguous by learners, who more often recognize them as repetitions of their utterances rather than as corrective interventions; in this way the benefits deriving thereof are lost, as argued by Carpenter et alii (2006). In their analysis of learners' interpretations of recasts two groups were exposed to video clips showing recasts; one group was shown the videos without the initial learner's utterances, while the second group was shown the same videos including the utterances. Although the second group recognized a higher number of recasts as corrective, the high majority of recasts were interpreted as simple repetitions by both groups. Recasts resulted therefore to be an ineffective feedback type. Ambiguity could thus be the reason, or one of the possible reasons, for which the participants in the present study did not choose recasts as an effective feedback method. Moreover Mackey et alii (1999, 2002) and Philp (2003, both cited by Carpenter et alii, 2006:227) highlight that there are many potential reasons for which learners do not perceive the corrective nature of recasts, as the fact that “learners might not be at the correct developmental level to recognize correction or might experience limitations in aspects of working memory at the time of recast”. Whatever it be, although students' perceptions are not to be intended as a must-do, such a high number of students reporting the ineffectiveness of recasts and the aspect of ambiguity should be taken into consideration and further investigated.

4.1.4 WHEN AND WHAT TO CORRECT

In terms of timing, FL learners agree on the fact that correction, in order to be effective, must be immediate or slightly delayed, for example at the end of the sentence, affirming that reduced time

between error and correction helps them on the one hand to understand their error better, since in that moment the context of the error is clear, and, on the other hand it is useful for remembering and for internalizing correction, unlike what happens in written correction, considered less effective due to the long time existing between the moment of performance and feedback. This aspect had already been highlighted by Long (1977) and Allwright and Bailey (1991:103), who stated that “feedback becomes less effective as the time between the performance of the skill and the feedback increases”.

When indicating their preferences on the errors to be treated, it is striking that almost all students perceive the importance of grammar, but, at the same time they do not require very frequent correction when the expressions used are not appropriate to the context, as, for example, the correct use of different registers. The sociolinguistic aspect is not taken into consideration by around half of the students, while its significance in language use is undeniable. As argued by Criper and Widdowson (1975:155):

While knowledge of these rules, the rules of grammar, will ensure that each sentence generated is correctly formed, it will not ensure that the forms of any utterances are appropriate. (...) The very essence of a language is that it serves as a mean of communication; it involves people in some kind of social interaction. To know a language, then, means to know something about how it fulfils this communicative function.

Considered therefore the importance of sociolinguistic appropriateness in the use of language as a mean of communication, it is impressive that secondary school students do not acknowledge it. It is however possible that respondents, being foreign language learners with few opportunities to be in contact with native speakers in natural contexts, are not aware that mastering a language does not only mean to know its linguistic system, but to be competent in its use, which includes a variety of aspects and skills, as stated by the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR, p. 13).

Communicative language competence can be considered as comprising several components: *linguistic*, *sociolinguistic* and *pragmatic*. Each of these components is postulated as comprising, in particular, knowledge and skills and know-how. (...) The sociolinguistic component strictly affects all language communication between representatives of different cultures, even though participants may often be unaware of its influence.

In the other categories of errors, students would prefer that their most frequent errors be always corrected, as well as serious errors impairing communication. Chaudron's study (1988:141), however, reveals that in fact teachers tend not to treat the most frequent learners' errors: "where the more a type of error is made, the less likely the teacher appears to be inclined to correct it". In the students' opinion this tendency should therefore be inverted.

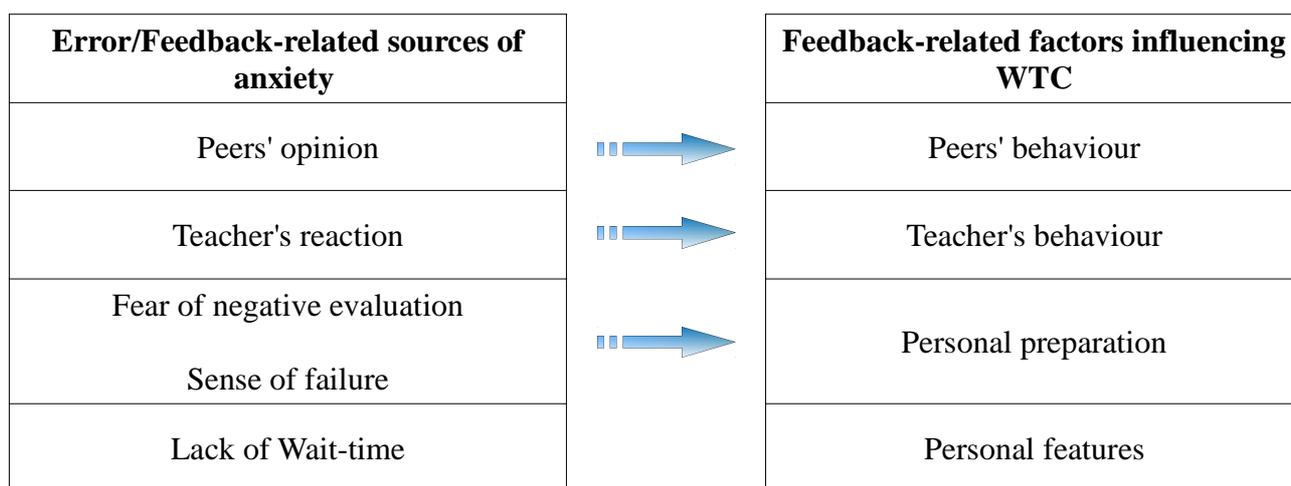
4.2 Socio-psychological factors

4.2.1 FEEDBACK-RELATED FACTORS INFLUENCING WILLINGNESS TO COMMUNICATE

As previously explained, feedback itself is not only recognized as positive by almost all the secondary school learners interviewed, but it is strongly perceived as necessary, together with direct instruction, showing that learners have a genuine interest in improving their language knowledge and competence. However, in line with Young (1991) the way feedback is provided is crucial, as it can turn this moment into an anxiety-generating experience and even lead to reticence and to the desire to avoid communication. Several aspects related to the moment of feedback are perceived as sources of anxiety. The *lack of wait-time*, *peers' opinions*, *negative evaluation*, *the teacher's reaction* and *a sense of failure* are recognized as the major causes provoking anxiety when committing an error in speaking activities. This confirms what argued by Holley and King (1971), White and Lightbown (1984), and Long et al. (1984, all cited by Chaudron 1988:128-129) on the relationship between time and improved performance, and the studies on the sources of language anxiety (MacIntyre and Gardner, 1989, 1991b, 1994; MacIntyre 1995; Horwitz and Young, 1991, Allwright and Bailey, 1991, Ohata, 2005), although in this case, anxiety sources are not related to

general aspects of language learning or speaking, but they turn out to be specifically related to feedback. Furthermore, based on learners' personal experience, the data gathered show that in their views unwillingness to communicate is mainly due to four elements playing a critical role in feedback; in order: *teachers' behaviour*, *peers' behaviour*, *personal features* and *personal preparation*. It can be noticed that these aspects clearly mirror the sources of anxiety highlighted by the students, stressing once again the relationship between anxiety and willingness to communicate (see the table below): teachers as a cause of unwillingness to communicate is related to the anxiety-provoking teacher's reaction, since aggressive, ironic, or other types of negative reactions to learners' errors can create in the learners both anxiety and other negative feelings, such as discomfort, unease and fear, leading to silence and avoidance of communication.

A similar correlation can be found between peers' behaviour as a factor influencing WTC and the fear of peers' opinion; as in the aforementioned studies, self-image, competitiveness, a non-collaborative classroom environment can lead to uncomfortable feelings (and behaviours) discouraging interaction.



As a further point, the fear of negative evaluation and the sense of failure can both be a cause and a consequence of poor personal preparation. In fact, while on the one hand being unprepared can increase the fear of negative evaluation and anxiety deriving thereof, on the other hand highly

anxious students may procrastinate in doing homework and even avoid engaging in any language activity (Horwitz et alii, 1986). On the basis of the responses given, a consideration must be done, however, concerning the fact that speaking activities seem to be restricted exclusively to oral examinations or tests on specific language or content aspects, based on the memorization of contents and structures, or anyhow strictly tied to evaluation, rather than being activities aimed to learn and master oral production skills and to improve interaction and social abilities. In this context oral activities are no longer a learning instrument; on the contrary, students' performance is required as a result of learning, which leads inevitably to perceive production activities as overcharged with expectations, easily turning into anxiety. Finally, personal features (shyness, self-confidence, introversion/extroversion, etc.) are a further cause of WTC. It is striking that the frame obtained from all these data on anxiety and WTC finds a perfect coincidence with McIntyre et alii's pyramid model of WTC (McIntyre et alii, 1998), where the WTC-influencing factors emerged in this study correspond to the basic layers (IV, V and VI) of the pyramid (see Appendix B for reference), revealing that they are at the very basis of students' preparation to use the language. Feedback is therefore a crucial moment learners have to cope with daily, which can strongly influence the social and the affective-cognitive context and the motivation of each student. A good management of feedback and correction can therefore result supportive and motivating for the learners who are engaged in the effort of building the layers of their competence.

4.2.2 LANGUAGE ANXIETY AND LEARNER'S PREFERENCES ON FEEDBACK

The data gathered from the questionnaire show that different perceptions and views on the necessity of feedback, on the agents performing correction, on feedback timing and methods and on the errors to be corrected, are likely to correlate more with individual features than with the students' anxiety levels, since no substantial discrepancies emerged in the answers of the two groups. However, some differences were present in answers to questions 3, 5 and 6 of the questionnaire and will be

highlighted in the following lines.

The first aspect on which the two groups differed is on the types of errors they want to be corrected (Question 3): after grammar errors, the HA group gave priority to pronunciation, word order and lexicon, while the LA group to lexicon, word order and, last, pronunciation. It can be hypothesized that the choice of pronunciation on behalf of the HA group be related to the idea of producing a bad self-image in front of the class, which is recognized as a source of anxiety (Allwright and Bailey, 1991, Horwitz et alii, 1986). Pronouncing words, hearing one's own voice, or being concerned with the correctness of one's own speech are recognized by Horwitz (1988) and Gynan (1989, in Ohata, 2005) as possible sources of anxiety. Should this be the case, HA students could be lead to think that mispronouncing a word coincides with a misrepresentation of their knowledge or performing abilities, and therefore it requires frequent correction.

A further point on which student's opinions resulted to be different was the effectiveness of feedback methods (Question 5): the option *Hai usato EAT nella forma sbagliata, devi metterlo al past simple*, was considered effective by the LA group, while ineffective by the HA group. In this case I would exclude the aspect of aggressive/non-aggressive intervention, as well as too explicit feedback, since the other options recognized as effective belong to explicit feedback, too. It is more likely that the choice was done considering that this kind of intervention - exactly as the others which were discarded (recasts) - does not allow learners to actively use cognitive skills in order to understand their error and modify their output, which was the top option chosen by this group.

The last aspect on which the two groups gave different answers was the causes of anxiety when producing an error during oral activities (Question 6). The first point regards the number of answers, much higher for the HA group, showing that they have to cope with more and greater fears during a FL lesson and especially in the feedback moment. Moreover, if the lack of wait-time is a

common cause of anxiety, nearly half of the HA students identify peers as the second major cause of anxiety, even before negative evaluation and the teacher's reaction. Conversely the LA group chose negative evaluation as second major cause, followed by sense of failure and peers. Looking at the answers, LA students would seem to be more concerned with personal success and self-image in relation to themselves more than to classmates or the teacher, while HA students show themselves to be more sensitive towards other people's opinion or reactions, and especially they perceive competitiveness more strongly than LA students. All these sources of anxiety should be therefore taken into consideration by teachers when choosing teaching methods, and specific anxiety reduction strategies should be adopted in order to promote learning (Young, 1991), as we will see in the next paragraph.

4.3 Emerged needs and teaching implications

In the light of the qualitative and quantitative data gathered, several needs and suggestions with reference to feedback have been expressed by learners, which can be summarized as follows.

First of all students show a positive attitude towards form-focussed instruction and error correction, demonstrating their interest in learning and in improving their language, which is proved moreover by the fact that their answers were not limited to expressing views on feedback, but extended to include wider views and suggestions on teaching and learning. This shows great involvement and high motivation to actively participate in the learning process and, as Figure 7 (page 78) demonstrates, learners want to be the main protagonists of their learning. Respondents highlighted both procedural and socio-psychological factors which can enhance the effectiveness of feedback. In the perspective of differentiated learning, the use of varied feedback methods seems particularly significant, as stated by Lyster and Izquierdo (2009:487):

Teachers therefore, are not in a position to use only one type of feedback over another and instead need

“to orchestrate, in accordance with their student's language abilities and content familiarity, a wide range of feedback types befitting of the instructional context” (Lyster, 2007, p.124).

Not only using different methods but also considering the class-specific context and discussing with learners on their beliefs and preferences would be helpful to find out the most effective ways to be adopted when providing feedback.

As a further point, students stressed the importance of a friendly and relaxed classroom environment, since only this can make interaction and feedback effective. A positive, collaborative attitude on behalf of teachers and peers is therefore essential to create adequate conditions for successful learning. As previously stated, although feedback itself is not directly perceived as anxiety-provoking, *how* it is provided (social, affective-cognitive, motivational aspects) determines whether it is a positive and effective experience leading to rules internalization, improved skills and knowledge, self-confidence and WTC. Thus in the learners' views, several conditions have to be met, including:

- ✓ a relaxed and collaborative atmosphere in class;
- ✓ an adequate amount of time to allow students to process information and build correct utterances (avoid errors) or to perform self-correction (repair errors);
- ✓ being active participants in the feedback process, through self-correction;
- ✓ the avoidance of aggressive, ironic comments or overreactions to students' errors;
- ✓ the avoidance of direct comparison between students' performance unless it occurs in a climate of cooperation aimed at building language together;
- ✓ a supportive, respectful behaviour on behalf of the teacher, who is recognized as the person who should guide the student towards self-correction;

- ✓ clear and exhaustive explanations of the errors;
- ✓ the possibility for learners to recast and repeat the correct utterance.

Meeting these needs means giving appropriate information on errors and solutions, lowering feedback-related anxiety, promoting willingness to communicate and keeping learners' motivation high, which satisfy Annett's (1969, in Chaudron, 1988:134) tripartite functions of feedback, *information, reinforcement, motivation*. In particular, motivation seems the best answer to the affective filter, being able to break the recursive relations among anxiety, cognition and behaviour described by McIntyre (1995). Coonan (2002, on Krashen, 1987) writes:

Una motivazione positiva, psicologica e affettiva, rappresenta la base irrinunciabile per un apprendimento riuscito, duraturo e profondo. Alla luce di ciò, il punto di partenza per ogni unità didattica (e per ogni tipo di intervento didattico) è costituito da azioni che mirano a stimolare la motivazione dello studente e a eliminare “blocchi” psicologici.

The general picture outlined by learners puts in evidence that the first two aspects of Balboni's *need-duty-pleasure* model of motivation (2008) have been satisfied in relation to feedback: corrective feedback is perceived both as a necessary and positive obligatory step towards language improvement. Conversely, as the proportion of the word *paura* in Figure 6 (page 74) clearly shows, the third component, *pleasure* is missing. However, if corrective feedback is an integral part of the learning process, and motivation, which is the basis for effective learning, can be built only when the three components are balanced, then *pleasure* comes out as essential; students long to feel at ease when receiving feedback, to be considered “persone che stanno imparando, che possono imparare dagli errori”, and crave “calma, pazienza e un sorriso d'incoraggiamento”. All three factors, need, duty and pleasure of learning, are equally important, but pleasure comes out as more interesting, since it can be transversal to any kind of motivation (integrative/instrumental), due to the fact that pleasure can be not only a primary motivation of the student (as is, for example, the

positive attitude towards language and culture in the integrative motivation), but it can be generated by the single activity, by the attitude of the teacher towards the students and by the atmosphere in class – this in fact can be true even in the case of an initially or mainly instrumental motivation of the learner. It can be noted that the aforementioned necessities highlighted by the students stem from three main needs, which seem to faithfully trace the Transactional Analysis' motivational model developed by Torresan (2012) on the basis of Berne's transactional analysis for use in educational contexts. Relations between the factors emerged as follows:

- the need for respect and a collaborative environment: learners want to be respected, both by the teacher and the classmates, who are often considered a threat, menacing one's own self-image and rivals in an everlasting competition. These aspects reflect the need for *recognition*;
- the need to be guided by the teacher through the discovery of the language and towards self-correction and to be afforded wait-time: teacher guidance and time reflect the need for *structure*;
- the need to be active participants in language learning and especially in the corrective process through self-correction, which appears to be more effective and challenging: this reflects the need for *stimulation*.

Recognition, structure and stimulation are the three components – or *hungers* – which in Berne's view must be satisfied to achieve pleasure, in this context the pleasure of learning. Applying Torresan's model (2012) to feedback, the three components satisfying these needs can be described as follows:

Recognition: the learner is taken into consideration as a whole person and commended. The learners and their personal contributions are acknowledged by the teacher and the group and the creation of

a collaborative group and of a positive atmosphere is promoted.

Structure: structure creates a feeling of security and certainty. The tasks to be performed are adequate to the student's abilities and level. The teacher, acting as a guide, supports the student's

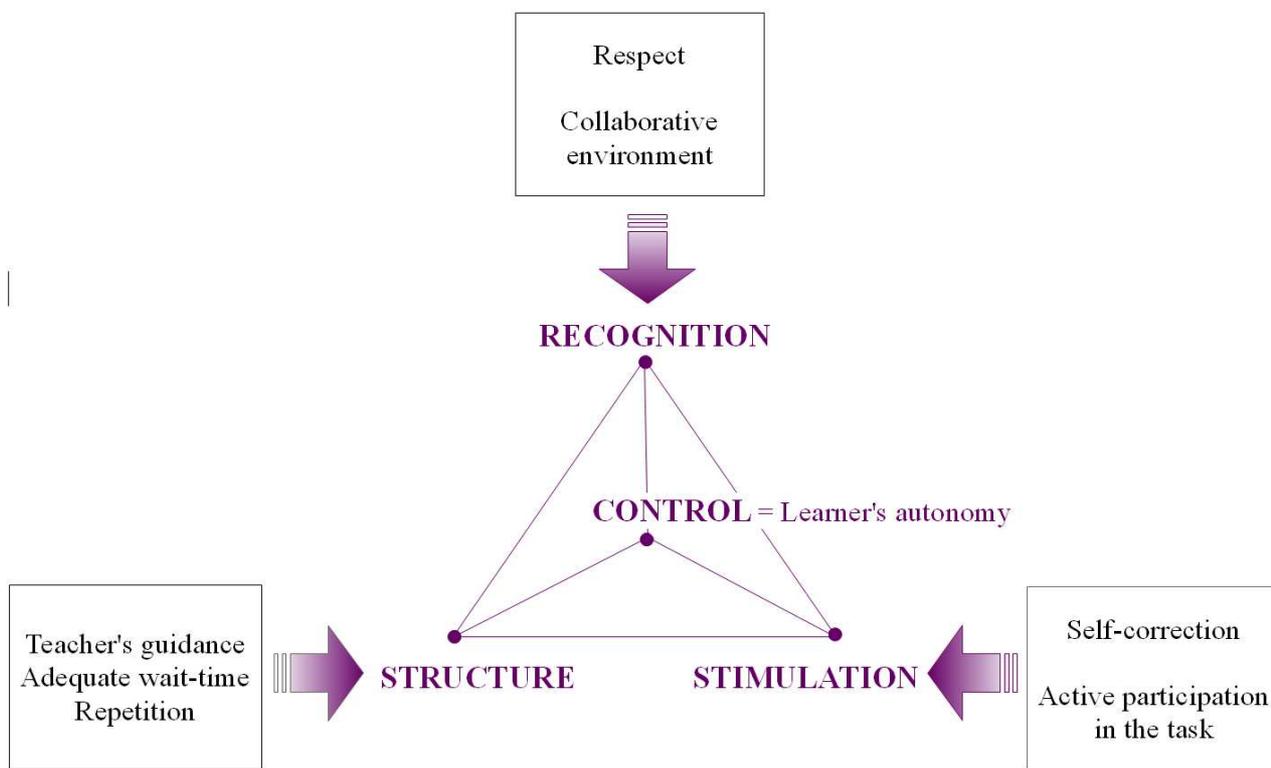


Figure 8: The Transactional Analysis' motivational model applied to Corrective Feedback. Adapted from Torresan (2012:161).

efforts both by facilitating the tasks (in the specific situation of feedback the task is repair) to be fulfilled by the students and by granting fairness and a positive climate.

Stimulation: new stimuli, creating positive challenges and the consequent involvement in the tasks, for Torresan (2012) are granted by discovery, physical, emotional and intellectual contact with others, experimentation, instead of monotony and passivity. In feedback stimulation is given by the student's participation in the process and by self-correction, which make students activate cognitive processes to reuse acquired knowledge in order to produce modified input and to review their internal grammar.

A fourth aspect, deriving from the satisfaction of the other three needs, and representing the vertex of the pyramid, is *control*, which is the development of learner's autonomy, obtained through opportunities for self-determination, metalinguistic activities and metacognitive activities. Quoting Torresan (2012:162),

In ambito educativo, lo studente che si sente *ricosciuto, stimolato e sicuro* matura una visione positiva dell'apprendere, e diventa a poco a poco egli stesso, mediante il suo sforzo, la risorsa primaria per potersi riconoscere, procurare stimolazione e orientamento in un contesto di apprendimento. In altre parole, in una situazione di autonomia: l'apprendimento diventa *autostimolante*; la *percezione di autoefficacia* ne è accresciuta; la *struttura* da eterodiretta, diventa autoprodotta. Interiorizzare i contenuti e le procedure di una disciplina diventa così un evento *significativo* di per sé, creando circoli positivi di *autoregolazione* (cfr. Pressley, Borkowski, O'Sullivan 1985; Borkowski, Mathukrisna 1992; Delmastro, 2010) e *stati di flusso*, ovvero di intenso coinvolgimento (Csikszentmihalyi, 1993).

This model seems to satisfy a lot of the conditions required to grant a learner-centred language education, such as graded and differentiated tasks, a non-threatening environment and learner's autonomy in solving corrective tasks. The *pleasure* resulting from the balanced⁸ satisfaction of the three needs and from the development of autonomy, represents the third component of Balboni's (2002) triadic model of motivation, and contributes to an enhanced effectiveness of feedback, promoting, at the same time, a way of teaching aimed at anxiety reduction. The balanced presence of the aspects presented in the model could be therefore a reference for teaching practice when providing feedback.

⁸ Ilsey Clark and Dawson (1998, in Torresan, 2012:155) show that the three elements must always be in balance, since a lack or an excess of one of them can lead to unease. A diagram showing the consequences of unbalanced conditions is reported in Appendix C.

5 CONCLUSION

5.1 Summary and conclusions

Framed in the debate on the role of direct instruction and feedback, with a special attention to learners' beliefs, the present research has analysed Italian secondary school students' views and experiences in relation to corrective feedback during oral production activities in the FL classroom. The aim of the study was to discover the several factors which, in their opinion, determine or influence the effectiveness of feedback. It intended moreover to highlight a possible correlation between corrective feedback and anxiety, eventually influencing willingness to communicate. The three research questions investigated therefore: 1) the perceived need of receiving feedback, when and how correction should be provided, who should provide it, and what errors should be treated; 2) differences in learners' preferences for feedback due to their language anxiety level (a low anxiety group and a high anxiety group were created to compare their answers), and 3) feedback-related factors possibly provoking anxiety and influencing WTC. The data gathered through questionnaires and interviews, has led to the following results:

- First of all, students demonstrate a highly positive attitude towards direct instruction and corrective feedback, showing in particular their motivation to learning and a genuine interest in improving their language knowledge and in developing autonomy.
- Secondly, in terms of cognitive-procedural aspects, they recognize the effectiveness of correction when it is provided immediately or slightly after the occurrence of the error, which allows them both to have clear the context of the error and understand the correction better, and to easily internalize rules. Moreover they assert that very frequent correction should be provided for grammar errors, for very serious errors hindering communication and for recurring errors, while only little importance is attributed to the sociolinguistic aspects of the language. With respect to the

methods to be adopted, results reveal that in students' view the most significant aspect determining the effectiveness of a type of feedback in terms of internalization is, more than the distinction between implicit and explicit feedback, the opportunity to think about the error and to produce modified output, therefore output prompting feedback types are considered the most effective; conversely recasts, although commonly used by teachers, are not recognised as effective. The use of varied feedback methods is therefore advisable, especially in a perspective of differentiated learning. This positive propensity to actively participate in learning is proved as well by their responses on the agents performing correction: teachers, identified as having superior knowledge and authority, are required not to directly correct the errors, but rather to act as facilitators in the feedback process, guiding and supporting learners in their discovery of the language. Self-correction is to be promoted.

- Furthermore the supportive function of the teacher is strictly connected to the role played by anxiety in the process. Feedback itself, being positively seen as a necessary step toward the improvement of one's language competence, is not considered as a cause of anxiety, nor was the respondents' anxiety level determining in their declared preferences on feedback – which disconfirmed the second research hypothesis. However several factors have been experienced by the majority of the students as sources of anxiety when committing an error, such as the lack of wait-time, peers' opinions, the teacher's aggressive reaction and the fear of negative evaluation. The teacher's and peers' behaviour during feedback, a stressful environment and poor preparation in students' experience lead to unwillingness to communicate.

- Finally, in terms of psychological-behavioural factors, three main needs emerged in this study, having several implications in directing teaching: first, the need to be recognised both by the teacher and the other learners which would allow the creation of a collaborative, respectful environment where every learner is seen as a resource and his/her contribution to the class becomes an enriching

experience promoting and fostering participation and interaction. Second, the teacher's guidance during the feedback process facilitates the corrective task of the learners granting certainty and security in the efforts to develop the language. Last, the satisfaction of the need to actively participate in the learning process, and in feedback as integral part of this process, through the provision of a stimulating and challenging situation given by the opportunity of self-correction, can keep motivation high and increase the students' involvement and autonomy in learning.

Considered the lively and colourful picture outlined by students, and the significance of feedback in the learning process, it can be concluded that every action focussing on the learner as the centre of teaching and aiming at creating a stimulating environment, a warm atmosphere in the class, a good relation among students and between teacher and student, and at developing the learner's autonomy and self-confidence, is to be followed and favoured.

5.2 Limitations

The first limitation to this study concerns the impossibility to use the data gathered from diaries to further investigate the arousal of feedback-related anxiety, as originally established. Indeed, the students did not carry out the task as requested, maybe because they feared exposure or were not developmentally ready to establish a relationship between anxiety and possible external causes.

The second limitation is the absence of direct classroom observation, which was not possible due to the many permissions required to enter public schools, and, from an organizational point of view, due to the several classes and institutes involved in the study.

The last limitation, linked to the previous point, concerns the possible influence of the limited experience of the students on their answers, especially in the case of peer correction and of the perceived (high) necessity of correcting grammar errors, when compared to the other types of errors. In the first case the students could have been influenced by the fact that group work or

cooperative learning is almost never practised during FL lessons, and therefore they are not aware of the enriching contribution possibly provided by peers. In the second case, the great importance given by teachers to grammar errors could have created in the students the belief that grammar accuracy is the only aspect that matters in language learning.

5.3 Further research

The present study shows that research on students' beliefs can be enlightening on several aspects and practices of language teaching, allowing teachers and researchers to gain an insight into the world of learning. Further research would explore as well teachers' views on feedback, to compare their answers to those of students and to show both common views and possible gaps or misconceptions.

Considered then the resulting connection between corrective feedback and willingness to communicate, a further field of analysis would investigate this aspect also in relation to anxiety and corrective practices.

A further point worth of special attention is the use and the effectiveness of recasts, as well as of other feedback methods. In particular it would be intriguing to understand the reasons for which the high majority of students asserted that recasts are ineffective.

In all cases classroom observation, next to the collection of both quantitative and qualitative data would be particularly helpful in outlining a more complete picture on all aspects concerning corrective feedback.

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APPENDIX A – QUESTIONNAIRE ON FEEDBACK

Questionario sulle preferenze degli studenti per la correzione degli errori nella produzione orale durante le lezioni di lingua straniera.

Gentile studente,

le domande che seguono fanno parte di uno studio sull'apprendimento e riguardano le lezioni di lingua inglese. Ti chiedo di esprimere le tue preferenze per la correzione degli errori orali. Le tue risposte sono preziose, perché consentiranno di capire il tuo punto di vista!

Ricorda, il questionario è anonimo, quindi puoi rispondere con la massima sincerità.

Grazie per la collaborazione!

Anna Perin - Dipartimento di Studi linguistici e culturali comparati - Università Ca' Foscari, Venezia

Tipo di scuola (es.: liceo scientifico, artistico, istituto tecnico, ecc.): _____

Classe : _____

Maschio
 Femmina

1) Secondo te, quando parli in inglese in classe, è necessario che gli errori vengano corretti?

Solo 1 risposta

- Sì, gli errori devono essere corretti, perché _____
- No, la correzione non serve, perché _____

2) Quando parli in inglese in classe, in che momento preferisci essere corretto affinché la correzione sia efficace?

Solo 1 risposta

- Subito, appena faccio un errore.
- Quando ho finito la frase.
- Alla fine dell'intero discorso.
- In un momento specifico che l'insegnante dedica alla correzione degli errori più importanti della classe.

Perché?

3) Quando parli in inglese, pensi che l'insegnante debba correggere:

	Mai	Raramente	Spesso	Sempre
Gli errori di grammatica				
I termini che sbaglio o che uso in modo impreciso				
La pronuncia				
La posizione delle parole nella frase				
Quando uso espressioni informali in un contesto formale e viceversa.				

	Mai	Raramente	Spesso	Sempre
Altre espressioni non appropriate al contesto specifico.				
Gli errori che commetto più spesso				
Tutti gli errori, anche quelli che mi capitano una sola volta				
Gli errori più comuni della mia classe				
Gli errori che impediscono la comunicazione				
Gli errori meno gravi che non impediscono la comunicazione				

4) Quando parli in inglese è più utile che la correzione venga fatta:

Solo 1 risposta

- Dall'insegnante.
- Dai compagni (per esempio in un lavoro di gruppo o a coppie).
- Preferisco correggermi da solo pensandoci su.
- In tutti questi modi: a volte dall'insegnante, a volte dai compagni, a volte da solo.
- Da nessuno.

Perché?

5) Osserva questo esempio di conversazione in classe.

Insegnante: What did you eat last night?
 Studente: Last night I **EAT** pizza.

Come valuti i seguenti interventi di correzione da parte dell'insegnante?

		Per nulla efficace	Poco efficace	Piuttosto efficace	Molto efficace
a	L'insegnante ti fa capire che hai commesso un errore con un cenno, un gesto, o un'espressione del volto. Poi ti dà il tempo di correggerti da solo .				
b	"Potresti ripetere?"				
c	"Attento, c'è un errore" (l'insegnante ti dice che hai commesso un errore e attende che tu ti corregga).				
d	"Last night I...?" (l'insegnante ripete la prima parte della tua risposta lasciando che sia tu a completarla).				
e	"Attento al verbo." (l'insegnante ti indica il <u>tipo</u> di errore che hai fatto e aspetta che sia tu a correggerti).				

		Per nulla efficace	Poco efficace	Piuttosto efficace	Molto efficace
f	"Hai usato EAT nella forma sbagliata, devi metterlo al past simple" (l'insegnante ti dice <u>quale</u> errore hai commesso).				
g	L'insegnante ti fa ragionare sull'errore portandoti gradualmente a raggiungere la forma corretta.				
h	"Last night I ATE pizza" (l'insegnante riformula la tua risposta dandoti la versione corretta).				
i	"Oh, you ATE pizza! I ate pizza, too". (l'insegnante ti corregge l'errore senza fartelo notare in modo esplicito)				
l	"Quando parliamo al passato che tempo verbale dobbiamo usare?..." (l'insegnante fornisce una spiegazione sull'argomento ma senza indicare esplicitamente il tuo errore).				

6) Cosa ti crea più ansia o disagio quando commetti un errore parlando in inglese in classe?

Indica i 3 aspetti principali.

- Sapere che potrei ricevere un brutto voto.
- Avere poco tempo a disposizione per pensare o per correggermi.
- L'idea di deludere l'insegnante.
- La paura di fare una brutta figura di fronte ai compagni.
- La reazione dell'insegnante (spesso mi rimprovera o fa dell'ironia quando sbaglio).
- Sentire di aver fallito.
- Altro: _____

7) Nella tua classe capita che gli studenti vogliano evitare di parlare in lingua straniera per paura di sbagliare?

- Sì.
- No.

8) Se hai risposto sì alla domanda precedente, pensi che questo sia dovuto a un modo sbagliato di correggere? Perché?

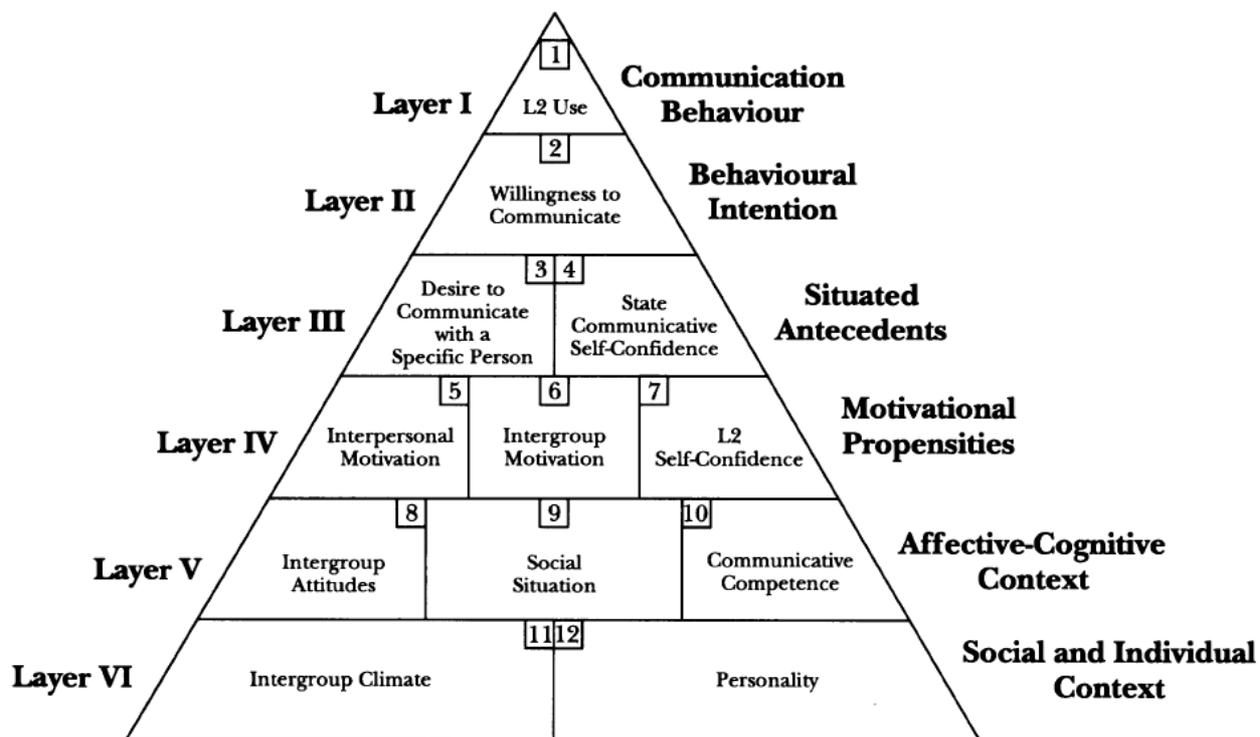
9) Cosa suggeriresti ad un insegnante per aiutarlo a correggerti nel modo giusto? Dai un suggerimento o spiega di cosa avresti bisogno.

10) Indica quanto sei d'accordo con le seguenti affermazioni.

	Per nulla d'accordo	Poco d'accordo	Mediamente d'accordo	Molto d'accordo	Del tutto d'accordo
Non mi dà fastidio quando qualcuno parla in inglese velocemente.					
Non mi dà fastidio studiare gli appunti di inglese senza averli riordinati.					
Mi piace ascoltare qualcuno che parla in inglese.					
Sentir parlare inglese mi agita, a meno che non sia parlato lentamente e ben scandito.					
Mi urta leggere in inglese perché sono costretto a rileggere molte volte per capire.					
Mi agito quando qualcuno parla inglese troppo velocemente.					
Non mi preoccupa imparare nuove parole inglesi, riesco a memorizzarle in un attimo.					
L'inglese mi mette ansia, perché, per quanto mi sforzi, ho difficoltà nel capirlo.					
L'unico caso in cui mi sento a mio agio durante le verifiche di inglese è quando avuto molto tempo per prepararmi.					
Mi sento in ansia se le lezioni di inglese mi sembrano disorganizzate.					
La mia capacità di comprendere il contenuto dei dialoghi in inglese mi dà sicurezza.					
Quando sento parole nuove o poco familiari non mi preoccupa, sono sicuro di poterle comprendere.					
Non mi sento mai teso quando devo parlare in inglese.					
Sono certo di riuscire a utilizzare i termini inglesi che conosco in una conversazione.					
Anche se conosco l'espressione inglese appropriata, quando sono nervoso mi blocca.					
Mi agitano le situazioni in cui so come comunicare qualcosa in inglese ma non riesco a dirlo.					
Non sono mai nervoso quando preparo un testo scritto per la lezione di inglese.					
Quando divento ansioso durante una verifica di inglese non riesco a ricordare nulla di quello che ho studiato.					

APPENDIX B - MODEL OF VARIABLES INFLUENCING WTC

Heuristic Model of Variables Influencing WTC. From MacIntyre et alii, 1998:547.



APPENDIX C - THE TRIANGLE OF NEEDS

Torresan's triangle of needs, adapted from Illsey Clark and Dawson (1998). From Torresan, 2012:155.

