

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

Providing feedback is an essential function of teaching (Larsen-Freeman, 2003). Language teachers should provide learners with feedback regarding the correctness or appropriateness of their responses since it helps speed up the process of learning (Ellis, 1992).

The idea of providing feedback /correction has been supported by the learners. From the learner's perspective, there is no doubt that error correction is expected. In fact, research has shown a mismatch between teachers' and students' views concerning the amount of error correction; for example, students want to be corrected more than what the teachers generally deem necessary (Cathcart & Olsen, 1976; Chenoweth et al., 1983; both cited in Larsen-Freeman, 2003: 126). Particularly, students at all levels thought that errors in pronunciation and grammar were the most crucial to correct (Cathcart & Olsen, 1976; cited in Bailey, 1985: 112).

Observations of classrooms have shown that the most frequent technique used in providing feedback/ correction is teacher-correction (Cathcart & Olsen, 1976; Fanselow, 1977; Lucas, 1976; all cited in Walz, 1982: 18; Chumsawat, 1993:95). However, Fanselow warns that such treatment does not establish a pattern for long-term memory. Corder (1973; cited in Hendrickson, 1979: 16) affirms that teacher correction will probably help students, but that teacher correction alone is insufficient to noticeably change error patterns. He proposes that student self-correction may do more to eradicate errors than teacher correction. Similar to Corder, Allwright and Bailey (1991: 107) suggest that the most fruitful treatment is self-correction.

The concept of self-correction has been supported by a great number of studies. It is suggested that pushing learners in their output, rather than providing them with correct forms, could benefit their Interlanguage development (Allwright, 1975; Corder, 1967; Hendrickson, 1978; Vigil and Oller, 1976; all cited in Lyster, 2001: 265). Chaudron (1988; cited in Lyster, *Ibid.*) suggests that instruction that emphasizes self-repair is more likely to improve learners' ability to monitor their own target language speech. This means that self-correction can help train students to become autonomous learners.

Learner autonomy has garnered great interest and has become an ultimate goal in the context of language teaching and learning. Ideally, learners are expected to be able to

manage their own learning and to apply the rules they have learned to correct their own mistakes in real life communication. This is congruent with the policy guidelines of the Thai Ministry of Education. For the context of English language teaching in Thailand, the Ministry has framed University English Foundation Courses around two goals and seven standards. One of the descriptors for Goal 2 which is “to use English to help achieve personal and academic goals and to promote life-long learning” is “applying self-monitoring and self-corrective strategies to build and expand a knowledge base”. Accordingly, self-correction should be promoted in order to prepare students to be able to self-monitor and self-correct their own errors in the future.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Although self-correction is theoretically better than teacher correction in the sense that it promotes higher retention in learners, the implementation is yet difficult. Thai undergraduates are not familiar with seeking knowledge by themselves since they were coddled in previous educational levels. Furthermore, other factors, such as the students' ability and class size, play important roles. Regarding the ability of students, researchers such as Skehan (1998; cited in Fotos, 2001: 271) and Tomasello (1998; cited in Fotos, *Ibid.*) point out that many low level students cannot process target language input for both meaning and form at the same time because the brain's input processing capacity is limited. Support can be drawn from Leetaweekulsomboon's study (1996), where findings indicate that there were significant differences in the selection of computer-assisted instruction (CAI) feedback types of students with different levels of learning achievement. Ninety-five percent of the high level group chose the feedback that included result, correct answer and explanation. On the contrary, only fifty percent of the low level group preferred the same type of feedback. Many of them (35 percent) opted for the feedback that gave only the results, whether the answer was right or wrong. In addition, Soinam (1999) found that students with high and low English proficiency levels had significantly different attitudes towards autonomous English language learning. The high proficiency students preferred autonomous learning more than the low proficiency ones. Low proficiency students may feel uneasy to correct themselves on account of deficiencies in the language. Therefore, language ability of the students is set as a moderator variable in the present study, so that the researcher can identify an appropriate error treatment for each ability group.

Class size is another constraint to the implementation of self-correction. The researcher works at a private university that, with some exceptions, has to organize

relatively large classes. In large classes, it is very difficult to implement self-correction, since there is often insufficient time for all students to self-correct their own errors. As suggested by Krashen's monitor hypothesis (1994: 59), the monitor is constrained by three factors: knowledge of the rule, time, and focus on form. It is then virtually impossible to train a group of 60 or more students to monitor and self-correct within the time limit of a class. Apart from that, in terms of research, it is hard to control, analyze, and give treatment to the errors made by students in such classes. In natural settings, responses from students vary. Introverted students who do not answer or do not respond may make fewer errors than risk-taking extroverts who frequently try to respond to the teacher. It does not mean however that the latter group is worse than the former.

Conducting the research through computer-assisted language learning (CALL) could help solve the above problems. Doughty (1987: 134) states that the advantages of using the computer as a research tool include more control over collection, examination, and manipulation of data, as well as convenience (and speed) of data recording, storage, and computation within an appropriate experimental design. Using CALL programs enables the researcher to get data from every student as every student responds, unlike in typical classrooms; this is because every student has to practice through the assigned CALL program. After the students do so, the researcher can check the recorded responses.

CALL can also deal better with problems associated with varied responses. It is difficult to handle such difficulties in natural settings because in real communication, students may make unpredicted or uncontrolled errors. Although the researcher has tried to control the activities, the ways human beings give treatment is not as consistent as the computer. However, these intervening factors can be controlled by carefully-designed tasks on the CALL.

For the above mentioned reasons, this study has been conducted through CALL. CALL helps alleviate all the constraints. Students in large classes can work on their own, in their own time, and most importantly, at their own pace. Also, CALL offers privacy so that students are relieved from the fear of being ridiculed by their classmates when they make errors. In terms of research, CALL is more consistent than human teachers because it gives the same type of feedback to the students throughout the study. The findings, therefore, can be concluded with confidence. Finally, it allows the researcher to go back and explore the learning process of the students

1.3 Research Questions

The research questions addressed in this study are as follows:

1. Do the types of error treatment given through CALL have an effect on the usage of English tenses of the students?
2. Are there any differences among the usage of English tenses of undergraduate students with different language abilities: high achievers, moderate achievers, and low achievers? If so, how students with different abilities use the tenses?
3. Is there an interaction effect between error treatments given through CALL and students' language abilities on their usage of English tenses?
4. Do the different types of error treatment given through CALL yield different retention rates in the delayed test?
5. What are the students' perceptions of their learning and their opinions on the CALL software programs?

1.4 Objectives of the Study

The purposes of this study are:

1. To examine the effect of error treatments – overt correction and self-correction – given through CALL on the usage of English tenses of the students;
2. To identify the differences among the usage of English tenses of students with different abilities – high achievers, moderate achievers, and low achievers;
3. To investigate how students with different abilities use different tenses;
4. To identify the interaction effect between error treatments given through CALL and students' language abilities on their usage of English tenses;
5. To compare the retention of the two error treatments given through CALL; and
6. To study the students' perceptions of their learning as well as their opinions on the CALL programs.

1.5 Statement of Hypotheses

The present study compares the effect of *teacher correction* and *self-correction* on the usage of English tenses of students. Teacher correction has been found to be the most frequent technique used from classroom observations (Cathcart & Olsen, 1976; Fanselow, 1977; Lucas, 1976; all cited in Walz, 1982: 18). However, it does not establish a pattern of long-term memory (Fanselow, *Ibid.*), nor is it sufficient to noticeably change error patterns (Corder 1973; cited in Hendrickson, 1979).

Theoretically, self-correction is believed to be more effective, since it can do more to eradicate errors than teacher correction (Corder, *Ibid.*). This can be explained by the “Noticing Hypothesis” proposed by Richard Schmidt (1990; cited in Fotos, 2001). *Noticing* is the process of attending consciously to linguistic features in the input. Fotos (2001: 272) states that repeated noticing and continued awareness of the language feature is important because it appears to raise the student’s *consciousness* of the structure and will facilitate restructuring of the learner’s unconscious system of linguistic knowledge. For Schmidt, consciousness has considerable significance in language learning since it enables learners to better appreciate the instruction they are receiving, especially the correction that is being given. It can be seen that self-correction, in the present study, is more consciousness-raising than overt correction. According to the task demand, students have to pay more attention when they do self-correction. They have to compare their production with the forms that they have learned and then try to identify the gaps or differences consciously. In contrast, some students may not notice that they have made errors and are being corrected if the teacher simply provides them the correct answer.

According to both the previous research studies and the related literature stated above, four hypotheses are proposed in the present study:

Hypothesis 1: The mean score from the posttest of students receiving self-correction is significantly higher than that of the students receiving overt correction.

Hypothesis 2: On average, the gain scores from the posttest of the three ability groups are significantly different.

Hypothesis 3: There is an interaction effect of error treatments and students’ language abilities on the usage of English tenses at the 0.05 significance level.

Hypothesis 4: The decrease of scores from the posttest to the delayed test of the self-correction group is significantly lower than that of the overt correction group.

1.6 Scope of the Study

1. The population of the present study is first-year undergraduate students of Huachiew Chalermprakiet University.

2. There are two independent variables in this study — error treatment and students’ language ability. The two types of error treatment are presented through different CALL programs — self-correction (SC) and overt correction (OC). The students’ language ability comprises high achievers (HA), moderate achievers (MA), and low achievers (LA).

3. The dependent variable is the usage of English tenses of the students represented by scores from the posttest and the delayed test.

4. The contents covered by the CALL in this study are seven English tenses: 1) the simple present, 2) the simple past, 3) the present continuous, 4) the present perfect, 5) the future tenses, 6) the past continuous, and 7) the past perfect.

1.7 Assumptions of the Study

1. This study assumes that all subjects are computer literate or have at least some basic knowledge of computer operation, i.e. how to start or shut down programs, how to insert a disk into the computer, or how to use the mouse.

2. This study also assumes that the subjects paid attention when they practiced and they were honest when answering all the research instruments.

1.8 Limitations of the Study

1. Normally, CALL could be used to encourage integrated skills. However, due to the limitation of the university resources, the materials in the present study did not include the audio functions.

2. Regarding the sample size, the optimal sample size suggested by Krejcie and Morgan (1970) for the population of 908 is around 270. The present study had 210 students participated in so it is subject to the limitation of a sufficient sample size.

3. Since the study was conducted during a semester in which students were also taken their regular English foundation course, this study is then subject to the limitation of controlling the impact of the regular teaching.

1.9 Definition of Terms

Computer-assisted Language Learning (CALL) refers to uses of the computer

software that engages students in using the target language for the purpose of language learning. In the present study, two CALL programs are developed and are used as experimental materials — Overt Correction and Self-Correction.

Drill and Practice refers to a kind of computer methodology that is used primarily for providing practice for the learner who is already familiar to some degree with the subject matter. Drills are not intended to teach or to provide new information. Generally, regular structure of the drills consists of an introductory section, followed by a cycle comprising a) item selection, b)

item displayed, c) learner responds, d) the program judges the response, and e) feedback presented (Alessi & Trollip, 2001: 182). The experimental materials (CALL) in the present study were developed using this methodology.

Error treatment refers to the way in which teachers (and other learners) respond to learners' errors (Ellis, 1994:701). The treatment may cover a number of techniques ranging from very explicit to very implicit one. It includes "feedback"—teachers' attempts to supply learners with information about the correctness of their productions, and "correction"—the result of feedback (Long, 1977; cited in Ellis, 1992: 70). In the present study, two error treatments that serve as an independent variable are overt correction and self-correction.

Language ability refers to the ability of the students to use English tenses. In the present study, subjects are divided into three ability groups: high achievers, moderate achievers and low achievers, by using scores from the pretest. *High achievers* refer to the subjects whose scores are above the 70th percentile. *Low achievers* are the subjects whose scores are lower than the 30th percentile. The rest in the middle are *moderate achievers*.

Overt correction In general, overt correction is a term that is used to refer to a corrective technique where the process is obvious to the learner that he/ she is being corrected. However, in the present study, the term 'overt correction' is used to refer to the traditional 'teacher correction' (but given by CALL in this study) that is assumed to have these functions: to detect whether the answer is correct or not, to explain why it is (or is not) correct, and to reveal the correct answer.

Retention refers to the knowledge or skills that learners maintain some time after the information has been introduced to them. In this study, the retention is assessed by the delayed test which is done 6 weeks after the immediate posttest.

Self-correction refers to a corrective technique where students are supported and are provided with explanations and examples, but not a correct answer. Students are encouraged to perform self-correction, with the program supplying necessary information until they can attain the correct answer by themselves.

Usage of English tenses refers to a learner's ability to use English tenses correctly and appropriately in different contexts. In this study, the usage of English tenses

of the students is represented by scores from the Test of English Tenses Usage (TETU) developed by the researcher.

1.10 Significance of the Study

1. Theoretically, results from this study will contribute additional knowledge of the effects of self-correction and teacher correction (or overt correction in this study), both in the short and long term, on the performance of the students.

2. Pedagogically, this study provides evidence to support language teachers in choosing an appropriate error treatment to handle students with different abilities.

3. With regard to the field of CALL, this study provides evidence to support whether CALL is an effective means to facilitate language learning, especially in learning grammar.

4. In terms of research, this study may also pave the way to further research concerning error treatment and error correction in the Thai learning context.

1.11 Overview of the Dissertation

The dissertation consists of five chapters:

Chapter I is the introduction section that provides background to the present study. It includes the statement of the problem, research questions, objectives, and hypotheses. Also, scope of the study, definition of terms, and the significance of the study are included.

Chapter II reviews the underlying theoretical frameworks and previous research studies that are considered relevant to the study. The concepts discussed are categorized into 5 main areas including: errors, error treatments, computer-assisted language learning, English grammar teaching, and students' language ability.

Chapter III deals with the research methodology of the study. This includes the research design, population and samples, research process, research instruments, and the methods of data collection and data analysis.

Chapter IV presents the results of the study in accordance with the research questions.

Chapter V summarizes the study, discusses the findings and suggests implications and recommendations for further research.