The Perlocutionary Effect of Teachers' Oral Corrective Feedback in Multigenerational EFL Classroom

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Abstract

This study investigated the emotional responses of EFL learners from different generational cohorts-Generation Z, Millenial, and Generation X- toward oral corrective feedback (OFC) provided by a Millennial lecturer in an online classroom. Rooted in speech act theory, particularly the concept of perlocutionary acts, the research explores how teachers' feedback is emotionally received, interpreted, and responded to by learners of varying age groups. A qualitative approach was employed, involving observation of a Zoom-based English class and in-depth semi-structured interviews with nine selected students representing the three generations. Data were analyzed thematically using Miles and Huberman's framework. The findings reveal five primary emotional responses to OFC: anxiety, embarrassment, motivation, appreciation, and discomfort. While Generation Z expressed higher sensitivity and nervousness, especially in response to public or explicit correction, millennials generally viewed direct feedback as constructive. Generation X preferred reflective feedback forms such as elicitation. These varied emotional reactions demonstrate that the perlocutionary effects of OFC differ based on generational identity, learner preferences, and the classroom setting. This study highlights the importance of generation-aware and emotionally responsive feedback practices in EFL instruction, particularly in online learning environments with limited non-verbal communication. It contributes to the affective dimension of corrective feedback research by emphasizing how feedback not only corrects linguistic errors but also impacts learner emotion, engagement, and motivation.

Keywords: *The perlocutionary effect, oral corrective feedback, multigenerational classroom*

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Introduction

In English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classrooms, oral corrective feedback (OCF) is widely recognized as a key instructional tool to facilitate language learning. Teachers often provide spontaneous corrections in response to students' linguistic errors, not only to promote accurate language use but also to maintain classroom communication. It is often used by teachers to address learners' language errors and guide them toward more accurate language use. From a speech act perspective, OCF is not only about the teacher's intention (illocutionary act), but also about the actual impact on the learner (perlocutionary effect). According to Austin (1962) and Searle (1969), the perlocutionary act refers to the effect of an utterance on the hearer, which in the case of feedback, includes how students feel, interpret, and respond to the teacher's correction. This becomes particularly relevant in today's EFL classrooms, where students come from multiple generations, such as Generation Z, Millennials, and even Generation X. In multigenerational classrooms, emotional responses to feedback may vary widely. Learners from different generations—Gen Z, Millennials, and Gen X—bring unique preferences, experiences, and affective expectations to the learning process (Zeng, 2022). These generational cohorts bring different expectations, learning preferences, and communication styles that can influence how they receive and react to teachers' feedback. As a result, the same feedback may be motivating for one learner but discouraging or confusing for another. As Yoshida (2008) pointed out, learners' individual preferences for feedback types—whether explicit, implicit, or elicitation—can greatly influence how they perceive the teacher's intent and how they emotionally process the correction.

Over the last decade, many studies have explored oral corrective feedback from various angles. Lyster and Saito (2010) emphasized the role of feedback types—such as recasts and prompts—in promoting learner uptake but did not consider learners' subjective reactions. Sheen (2011) investigated the influence of proficiency levels on feedback effectiveness but treated the classroom as a homogeneous space without acknowledging generational differences. Li (2018), through a comprehensive meta-analysis, highlighted that while much attention has been given to feedback strategies, learners' emotional and cognitive responses are still under-researched. Zhao (2021) added a valuable perspective by discussing how individual learner beliefs affect reactions to feedback, although age or generational identity was not part of the analysis. Lee and Lyster (2019) made one of the few attempts to examine age-related responses, showing that older learners tend to prefer explicit corrections, while younger learners are more open to implicit feedback. These studies provide useful insights into the effectiveness and delivery of feedback, yet they often overlook the learner's personal, emotional, and generational lens—significantly how these factors influence their perception of and reaction to corrective feedback. Similarly, Roothooft and Breeze (2016) found that teacher awareness of affective factors is key to effective feedback delivery. Waring (2008) also emphasized that feedback forms such as elicitation require greater sensitivity to student readiness and emotional states, especially when learners are put on the spot to self-correct. However, the majority of research overlooks how different generations emotionally interpret oral feedback, especially in virtual classrooms, which have become the norm since the COVID-19 pandemic. In such environments, feedback delivery becomes even more complex, and students may experience heightened emotional reactions due to the lack of non-verbal support (Alnasser, 2020).

This gap reveals an important research opportunity. Despite growing diversity in classroom demographics, especially with adult and non-traditional students joining language programs, little is known about how students of different generations feel about oral corrective feedback. Most previous studies have taken a one-size-fits-all approach without considering the

possibility that a Gen Z learner may interpret and emotionally react to teacher feedback very differently than a Millennial or Gen X learner. Understanding the emotional perlocutionary effects of OCF—how feedback influences learners' emotions, motivation, and willingness to engage—is essential for fostering more inclusive and effective teaching practices.

Based on this gap, the current study seeks to explore the emotional responses to teachers' oral corrective feedback in multigenerational EFL classrooms. The two guiding research questions are:

1. How do learners from different generations emotionally respond to teachers' oral corrective feedback in EFL classrooms?
2. What emotional patterns emerge across generational cohorts in reaction to various types of oral corrective feedback?

Correspondingly, the objectives of this study are: (1) To examine the emotional responses of learners from different generations toward oral corrective feedback in EFL classrooms, and (2) To identify generational patterns in emotional reactions to different types of corrective feedback.

The novelty of this study lies in its unique focus on the emotional perlocutionary effects of oral corrective feedback—how it is felt and internalized by learners from different generations. By integrating speech act theory with socio-affective perspectives, this research moves beyond traditional evaluations of feedback effectiveness and highlights the importance of emotionally responsive pedagogy in today's diverse EFL classrooms.

Method

This study employed a qualitative research design with a descriptive-interpretive approach, aiming to explore the emotional responses of learners to oral corrective feedback in multigenerational EFL classrooms. A qualitative approach was chosen because it allows for in-depth exploration of participants' subjective experiences, particularly the emotional aspects that cannot be fully captured through numerical data. This design aligns with the study's focus on understanding perlocutionary effects—how learners emotionally interpret and react to teacher feedback—which is best explored through rich, contextual descriptions rather than quantifiable measures.

The participants in this study consisted of nine (9) EFL learners who represented three different generational cohorts: Generation Z, Millennials, and Generation X. Each generation was represented by three participants, selected using purposive sampling to ensure that each age group had a voice in the data. All participants were actively enrolled in an online English course taught by a lecturer from the Millennial generation. To be eligible, participants needed to have at least six months of formal EFL learning experience and must have attended the observed online class. The interviews were conducted online via Zoom and lasted approximately 15–20 minutes per participant. This virtual format provided flexibility and convenience for participants while maintaining the depth of qualitative inquiry.

Observation and in-depth interviews were used in this study as the main research tools to collect data regarding learners' emotional responses to oral corrective feedback (OCF) in a multigenerational EFL classroom. The data collection process began with the observation of an online English class conducted via Zoom, taught by a lecturer from the Millennial generation. According to Mackey & Gass (2016), observation in language research is used to examine

communicative behaviors that naturally occur in classroom interactions. Observation can be either participatory or non-participatory and can be conducted through direct note-taking or recording for further analysis. This observation aimed to capture the overall classroom atmosphere, the interaction between teacher and students, and particularly the use of oral corrective feedback during real-time teaching. The researcher took detailed field notes on the types of feedback given (e.g., explicit correction, recast, elicitation), the timing and delivery, and any observable student reactions (such as silence, smiles, verbal hesitation, or body language). This step helped contextualize the learning environment and informed the direction of the subsequent interviews.

After the observation phase, the researcher conducted in-depth semi-structured interviews with nine students representing three generational cohorts: Generation Z, Millennials, and Generation X. According to Gay (2012), an interview is a designed conversation where one person asks another for information. Each participant took part in a 15–20 minute interview via Zoom, where they were asked to reflect on their emotional responses to the corrective feedback given during the observed session. The interview guide included open-ended questions designed to explore feelings such as embarrassment, motivation, anxiety, or appreciation, as well as their interpretations of the lecturer's tone, intention, and delivery of feedback. The two instruments—classroom observation and in-depth interviews—were used complementarily to provide a richer and more triangulated understanding of how multigenerational learners emotionally react to corrective feedback in an online EFL setting.

In analyzing the data that has been collected, the researcher uses the data analysis techniques proposed by Miles and Huberman (2014:10), which consist of three steps: data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification. Data condensation refers to the process of selecting, focusing, simplifying, and transforming the raw data from the observation notes and interview transcripts. The researcher coded emotional expressions, reactions to specific types of oral feedback, and any generational references made by the participants. In the data display stage, the condensed data were organized into matrices and thematic charts, allowing for clear comparisons of emotional responses across generational cohorts. This helped the researcher to identify trends such as anxiety, confidence, confusion, or motivation in response to different feedback strategies. Finally, the researcher interpreted the emerging patterns to formulate meaningful insights in the conclusion drawing and verification phase. These conclusions were constantly compared with the original data for consistency and were cross-validated through reflective analysis. This iterative process ensured the findings accurately represented the learners' emotional responses to oral corrective feedback within the multigenerational classroom context.

Results

This section presents the results of classroom observation and in-depth interviews conducted with nine EFL learners from three generational cohorts: Generation Z, Millennials, and Generation X. The aim was to identify and describe their emotional responses to oral corrective feedback (OCF) delivered during an online class session via Zoom by a Millennial lecturer. The results are organized thematically according to the emotional patterns that emerged from the data.

Types of Oral Corrective Feedback Observed

During the observed Zoom session, the lecturer employed several types of oral corrective feedback, including:

Explicit Correction

This occurs when the teacher indicates that students' utterances are incorrect and provides to correct them.

The student said, "*There is two variable that I want to analyze.*"

The teacher responded *"Excuse me, just a quick correction- You should say 'There are two variables'. Be careful with subject-verb agreement."*

Recast

It involves the teacher implicitly reformulating the student's error without directly indicating that a mistake was made.

The student said, *"I choose interview because it give me deep understanding."*

The teacher's responded, "*Yes interview gives deeper understanding, especially exploring participants' perspectives.*"

Elicitation

The teacher prompts the student to self-correct by pausing, asking question, or repeating the sentence with a gap.

The student said, "*My research questions is focusing on.....*"

The teacher responded directly by saying *"My research questions...?"*

The student changed the sentence to *" oh yes Maam, I mean My research questions are focusing on"*

These corrective strategies were generally delivered in a calm and supportive tone. However, student responses—both verbal and non-verbal—varied significantly across generational lines.

Emotional Responses to Feedback

Five major emotional response categories were identified from the interviews and observation field notes, each with distinct generational patterns:

Anxiety and Nervousness

Anxiety was particularly noted among Generation Z participants. They often expressed nervousness when being corrected in a public setting like Zoom, where all classmates were present:

"I get nervous when corrected, especially on Zoom because I feel everyone is looking at me." (Gen Z)

Some Millennials also reported mild nervousness, especially when the correction occurred unexpectedly. In contrast, Gen X learners appeared more composed and reported less anxiety, possibly due to greater experience with formal education or professional settings.

Embarrassment

Embarrassment was experienced by both Gen Z and Millennial learners, especially after explicit correction in front of others. A Millennial participant shared:

"It made me feel a bit exposed, like I should have known better." (Millennial)

Meanwhile, Gen X learners tended to see public correction as part of the learning process and did not express embarrassment as strongly.

Motivation and Encouragement

Millennial and Gen X participants frequently expressed that the feedback motivated them to improve. Direct and clear correction was appreciated as a tool for learning:

"I prefer direct feedback—it helps me remember and correct myself next time." (Millennial)

"I like being corrected. It means the teacher is paying attention." (Gen X)

In contrast, Gen Z students were more hesitant, and their motivation depended mainly on the tone and delivery of the feedback.

Appreciation and Gratitude

All three generational groups expressed appreciation for the teacher's effort in providing feedback, particularly when it was given in a friendly way, and a non-threatening tone. Recasts and elicitation were more likely to generate feelings of being supported and respected.

"I could tell the teacher wanted me to improve. That felt good." (Gen Z)
"She didn't embarrass me. She guided me." (Gen X)

Discomfort or Resistance

Feelings of discomfort or disagreement with the style of correction were rare but present. A Gen X participant mentioned feeling that one correction was too abrupt:

"It felt a bit rushed—as if the mistake was annoying. I wish the feedback was more encouraging." (Gen X)

One Millennial participant also shared a moment of hesitation, noting that being corrected too frequently during speaking could feel "discouraging," even though they still appreciated the help overall.

Generational Differences in Feedback Interpretation

Although all participants received feedback from the same lecturer in the same session, their emotional interpretation varied depending on generational identity:

a. Generation Z learners were more sensitive to tone, public correction, and how feedback might affect their confidence.

b. Millennials generally responded well to explicit and direct correction, viewing it as constructive and necessary.

c. Generation X learners valued respectful and reflective correction, especially when given the chance to self-correct.

These differences suggest that emotional responses to OCF are not only individual, but also shaped by generational attitudes toward authority, communication, and learning styles.

Discussion

This study explored the emotional responses of multigenerational EFL learners to oral corrective feedback (OCF) delivered by a Millennial lecturer in an online classroom setting. The findings reveal that emotional reactions to OCF are diverse and closely related to learners' generational background. While all students acknowledged the value of feedback, their emotional responses—such as anxiety, motivation, appreciation, or discomfort—were shaped by their age group, experience, and interpretation of the teacher's intent.

These findings highlight the perlocutionary dimension of teacher talk, as theorized in Speech Act Theory (Austin, 1962; Searle, 1969), where the *effect* of an utterance on the hearer is not always aligned with the speaker's intention. In this study, even feedback intended to be helpful was sometimes interpreted as embarrassing or demotivating by younger learners (Gen Z), while older learners (Millennials and Gen X) were generally more accepting or even encouraged by the same feedback. This underscores the need for teachers to be not only linguistically aware but also emotionally and generationally responsive in how they deliver corrective feedback.

The emotional variation in feedback responses aligns with findings from Zhao (2021), who noted that learners' affective responses to teacher feedback are influenced by internal beliefs and classroom context. Similarly, Li (2018) emphasized that learners' perception of feedback plays a crucial role in its effectiveness, yet emotional aspects are still underrepresented in feedback studies. Lee and Lyster (2019) found that older learners often preferred explicit corrective feedback, viewing it as more efficient and respectful, a trend also observed in this study among Gen X participants. Conversely, younger learners tend to be more sensitive to public correction, as seen in Gen Z's reaction to explicit correction in the Zoom environment. These findings also echo Dörnyei's (2009) notion of the *motivational self-system*, where learners' emotional experiences impact their self-confidence and willingness to communicate. If feedback is not delivered in a way that resonates with the learner's emotional expectations, it may backfire and reduce participation—especially in online settings where social presence is more fragile.

The results of this study offer significant pedagogical implications, particularly for EFL educators working in diverse, multigenerational classrooms. Teachers should recognize that:

a. One-size-fits-all feedback strategies may not be effective; instead, they must tailor their approach based on learners' emotional sensitivity and generational preferences.

b. Recasts and elicitation may be safer and more positively received by younger learners, while explicit correction can be more suitable for older learners who value directness.

c. Emotional awareness should become part of teacher training, especially in online teaching environments, where emotional cues are harder to detect.

Theoretically, this study expands the understanding of the perlocutionary effect in instructional settings, emphasizing that the emotional impact of teacher talk is as important as its linguistic form or grammatical correctness. The results also resonate with Yoshida (2008), who found that learner preferences differ by context and personality. Gen X learners in this study appreciated self-correction opportunities (elicitation), echoing Waring (2008)'s view that open-ended prompts invite deeper engagement. Teachers must consider emotional reactions when delivering OCF (Roothooft & Breeze, 2016), and adapt based on learner profiles (Zeng, 2022).

This study has several limitations. First, the sample size was small (n=9) and limited to a single online class taught by one lecturer. While rich in depth, the results may not be generalizable to all EFL contexts. Second, emotional responses were self-reported through interviews, which may be influenced by memory or the desire to give socially acceptable answers. Additionally, the research setting being fully online (Zoom) may also affect emotional reactions differently than in traditional, face-to-face classrooms. Lastly, the generational classification (Gen Z, Millennial, Gen X) was based on birth year categories and self-identification, which, while useful, may oversimplify the complex socio-psychological factors that shape learner behavior.

Future studies could explore the emotional impact of OCF with larger and more diverse samples across different institutions and teaching styles. Comparative studies between face-to-face and online settings would also be valuable, considering how delivery mode can influence emotional perception. Researchers may also benefit from using mixed methods, combining interviews with real-time emotion-tracking tools (e.g., facial expression analysis or physiological sensors) to validate emotional responses more objectively.

In addition, future research could investigate the teacher's awareness of perlocutionary effects: How do teachers perceive students' emotional responses to feedback? Do they adjust their strategies accordingly? By building on these directions, scholars and practitioners alike can work toward more emotionally intelligent and generation-sensitive teaching practices in EFL contexts.

Conclusion

This study aims to explore the emotional responses of EFL learners from different generations toward oral corrective feedback (OCF) provided in an online classroom by a Millennial lecturer. Drawing on classroom observation and in-depth interviews, the study revealed that while students generally appreciated the presence of feedback, their emotional reactions—such as anxiety, embarrassment, motivation, or appreciation—were shaped by their generational identity and their interpretation of the teacher's intention.

The findings show that Generation Z learners were more emotionally sensitive to the delivery of feedback, particularly to public or explicit corrections during Zoom sessions. Millennial learners responded well to direct and clear feedback, viewing it as beneficial for their learning. Meanwhile, Generation X learners preferred feedback strategies that allowed self-correction, such as elicitation, and were less emotionally reactive to public correction.

These generational patterns support the idea that feedback in language learning is not merely a linguistic tool, but a communicative act with emotional and interpersonal consequences. The study contributes to the growing understanding of perlocutionary effects in EFL pedagogy, particularly by highlighting the need for teachers to be emotionally aware and generation-sensitive in their feedback practices.

However, the study also has several limitations. The sample size was small and limited to one online class, which restricts the generalizability of the findings. Emotional responses were also self-reported and may have been shaped by recall bias or social desirability. Despite these limitations, the study offers valuable insight into how feedback is emotionally received in diverse classrooms and invites further research into the affective dimension of teacher-student interaction.

In sum, this research underscores the importance of emotionally responsive pedagogy in multigenerational EFL classrooms. It calls on educators to not only correct errors, but also to consider how their words are felt, interpreted, and internalized by learners from different generational and cultural backgrounds.

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