The Impact of Error Correction Strategies of Speaking Tasks on the Anxiety Level of Intermediate EFL Learners

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Abstract

The goal of this study was to explore the attitudes of a group of EFL learners in Kish Air Language Institute in Kerman in Iran on two types of error correction strategy: teacher and peer corrective feedback. To this purpose, a questionnaire was designed and after following the processes of standardizing, was implemented. Twenty-nine intermediate participants gave their responses to the question after applying teacher and peer corrective feedback in speaking and conversation activities. On the whole, six main areas were focused in the study. They included the objectives, the role of anxiety, error correction strategies with more emphasis on teachers' role in correcting errors, learners' role in correcting errors, and error types in speaking and conversation activities. The approach that was supported in this study highlighted the important role of the teacher in corrective feedback strategies and also the role of the learners in helping their peers to give having confidence and support. Overall, the participants reflected their preference in receiving help from the teacher, being corrected by their classmates under supervision of their teachers and finally being corrected fully by the teacher or peers.

Keywords: speaking, error, corrective feedback, peer correction, anxiety

INTRODUCTION

To achieve the ability to communicate orally has been one of the extreme goals of most language classes in Iran. To the Iranian EFL learners, knowing a second language means speaking it as fluently as possible. Working with one or two aspects of the language e.g. speaking and listening, is looking at the matter mono-dimensionally. This view in fact neglects the communicative role of the language. Ur (1996) believed that people who know a language are referred to as speakers of that language. The learners who attend a language class long deeply to speak it as fluently and as efficiently as possible. In fact knowing a language in Iran and among language speakers is closely associated with the

ability to have mastered the oral skills although the communicative role of English in Iran has never been considered seriously. All learners have their own desires, shortcomings, limitations and abilities, any of which may differ from those of others and this is why to handle all these factors in a given situation does not seem to be easily possible. When language learners are viewed as human beings, teachers have to pay attention to the emotionaland psychological needs of these learners. Some of the most important factors to consider are the teaching and learning strategies and techniques employed by the language teacher. Any selected activity may leave its own impacts on the performance of the learners.

The goal of the present study is to investigate the impact of treating certain types of speaking errors and its impact on the anxiety of the learners. The system of correcting errors selected by the teacher can highly assist the learners, motivate and instruct them, or influence them negatively and or demotivate them. However, the study will also evaluate the existing error correction strategies of speaking and introduce one of the most suitable ones which may best suit our special learners of the study regarding the needs they follow, their psychological and administrative limitations and other intervening factors.

THE STUDY

The study means to achieve the following objectives. It means to investigate EFL learners' attitudes towards speaking error correction strategies (teacher and peer). It moreover means to investigate the impact of peer correction strategy on the anxiety of EFL learners in speaking classes. And finally it aims at investigating the impact of teacher error correction strategy on the anxiety of the EFL learners in the speaking class. It is mainly concerned at finding answers to the following research questions:

1. What is the EFL learners' attitude towards speaking error correction strategies (teacher & peer)?
2. What is the impact of peer correction strategy on the anxiety of EFL learners in speaking class?
3. What is the impact of teacher error correction strategy on the anxiety of EFL learners in speaking class?

Learning speaking is a collective activity and it takes place most effectively when language classes are viewed as unified groups within which the learners may interact and negotiate meaning (Rivers, 1981). The language teacher, to have the learners' interaction and active participation, has to assist the learners to practice both their listening and speaking and this makes the task of teaching and learning more complicated. In other words, the real principles for an effective communicative activity have to be established and addressed towards the needs of the learners.

Students of a new language will not learn to speak fluently merely by hearing speech (Rivers, 1981). This is extremely important for the learners to have enough access to the opportunities to speak the language as much as possible for different reasons and at

different situations and at the same time enough attention has to be given to their errors. In other words, language as communication has to be emphasized over teaching the form and structure.

Besides, in any educational setting, feedback plays an important role to encourage student's learning (Lazaraton, 2001). It has to be an invaluable tool for facilitating the acquisition process, assessing learners' performance and helping teachers to understand how useful can be their teaching methodology and maintain a strategy to improve the quality of the educational system. In EFL and ESL, speaking and writing are two main ways of communication for both native and non-native learners, so interaction between teacher and student need high communication skills and is considered as a necessary tool to motivate students and help teachers understand how effective could be their teaching methodology specially in terms of error correction strategies (Lazaraton, 2001). One major way of communication is speaking, and thus to assist the learners to make best use of the teaching situation is of great importance. As speaking is a challenging and painful task, providing students with suitable type of feedback have to be taken into account.

Despite the importance of writing error correction in EFL courses, very little has been done on this topic in detail. Thus the importance of the current study stands in its practical contribution to the error correction research in English as a foreign language (EFL). It can contribute to speaking improvement of the learners. Itis hoped by studying the results of this investigation, teachers will learn about the impact of corrective feedback and the speaking improvement. Also the results would make the teachers more aware of the fact that to what extent the given type of feedback to a learner contributes to success or failure of learners in speaking.

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Harmer (1998) believed that teaching speaking is necessary for three important reasons: 1) Rehearsal: classroom practice and activity will normally provide the chance and opportunity for the students to follow the same activity outside classroom. The rehearsal will get the students feel that what communication in the foreign language looks like. 2) Feedback: the gained skill will provide enough feedback both for the teacher and students. Teachers can see how well their class is doing and what language problems they are having. In the same manner, students can also see how easy they find a particular kind of speaking and what they need to do to improve. Speaking activity, if followed almost successfully by the students, can give them enormous confidence and satisfaction. 3) Engagement: good speaking activity can and should be highly motivating. If all the students participate actively, they will get enough satisfaction and motivation from it.

Bailey and Savage in Lazaraton (2001) discussed that speaking in a second or foreign language has often been viewed as the most demanding of the four skills. She moreover added that "for most people, the ability to speak a language is synonymous with

knowing that language since speech is the basic means of human communication (p.103)."

One main difficulty in the area is the integration of speaking and listening as two intervening and inseparable skills. Johnson (2001) and Shumin (2002) identified four areas of knowledge required in learning a foreign language to speak: grammatical, sociolinguistic, discourse, and strategic. Grammatical competence comprises different areas of pronunciation, morphemes, syntax, and vocabulary. Each subcategory has its own limitations and difficulties of acquisition. It enables speakers to use and understand English-language structure accurately (Brown, 1994; Stern, 1991).

Ur (1996) enumerated a number of problems belonging to speaking activity. The first is inhibition. He believes that learners are inhibited to about trying to say things in a foreign language in the classroom. They feel worried about making mistakes, criticisms, and incompetence. The second is *no*thing to say. Learners cannot think of anything to say; they have no motivation to express themselves. The next is low or uneven participation*.* Only one participant can speak at a time and in a large group; this means that each one will have only very little talking time. However, some speakers may dominate and give no chance to others to speak. The last one is stated to be mother-tongue use*.* In classes where the learners share the same mother tongue, they may tend to use it because it is easier because it feels unnatural to speak to each other in a foreign language.

Brown (2001) has enumerated the following characteristics as what makes spoken language easy as well as difficult:

1. Clustering: Fluent speech is phrase by phrase and not word by word.
2. Redundancy: The speaker has an opportunity to make meaning clearer through the redundancy of language.
3. Reduced forms: Contractions, elisions, reduced vowels, etc. all form special problems in teaching spoken English.
4. Performance variables: One of the most important differences between native and non-native speakers lies in the techniques which they use to fill the gaps in their speech using hesitations, pauses, backtracking and corrections.
5. Colloquial language: Learners in their tasks have to be familiar with the words, idioms, and phrases of colloquial language.
6. Rate of delivery: One important task of the teacher in teaching spoken English is to help learners achieve an acceptable speed along with other attributes of fluency.
7. Stress, rhythm, and intonation: These qualities convey important message along a spoken discourse and has to be acquired.
8. Interaction: In a speaking situation, there are always interlocutors to communicate and to address properly (pp. 270-71).

Three approaches have been identified regarding teaching languages: language-as-product, language-as-tool, and language-as-process or activity (Riverse, 1981). The

purpose of language-as-produce is language analysis. The grammar translation method emphasized language-as-product when students studied grammar rules and paradigms. In this case, the learners were provided with some notions on certain aspects of the code including vocabulary of the new language, phonological and morphological features, and syntactic rules often without enough practice on the application of language rules. As a result, after years of study, the learners might have obtained a great deal of knowledge of the L2 without coming to the level to use it. Language-as-tool emphasizes the way we use a language to operate upon the environment, ourselves, and to negotiate meaning. We may wish to ask, to order, to state, to deny, and to persuade. Language-as-activity or process, we go beyond linguistics into pragmatics and social psychology. It includes the cases such as to obtain the ability to conduct communicative episodes, to initiate interaction with speakers of the language, and how to respond to the initiative of others, or how to avoid or terminate communication.

Halliday, stated in Riverse (1981), presented two types of traditional views to the study of language: language as thought and language as action. The former stresses rules and grammaticality and the latter represents language as choices or as a resource. It stresses the semantic interpretation of discourse and uses. It, moreover, includes variation theory, which looks upon variety in form of utterances as choices in relation to context.

The approach having been improved and implemented by Green et al (2002) is termed to be "Developing Learner Autonomy". The approach bases the class activities on the learners' needs, capacities, desires etc. They discuss that their approach is supporting the idea that the learners in their course of language acquisition have to become self-directed and independent. This increases the learners' awareness about a few things, the most important of which are learning objectives, processes, and outcomes by requiring the learners to reflect directly on their own and others' performances rather than relying on formal pre-structured learning style or examinations. They add that all this will bring about a sort of metacognitive awareness of the learning processes.

In the same manner, Tudor (1993) discussed what the nature of a learner-centered classroom has to be and what qualities make it different from other teaching strategies. To Tudor, in a learner-centered approach, the students are seen as being able to assume a more active and participatory role than is usual in traditional approaches. This refers to a way of organizing classroom activities in which the learning strategies are determined by the students and they decide on such things as conceptual and linguistic content of their activities. All these normally and naturally enhance the students' motivation and involvement. To this purpose, the teacher has been seen as a counselor who performs five different roles: 1) preparing learners by investigating some issues such as giving self-awareness to the subjects, clarifying teaching–learning goals, and the awareness of learning options, 2) analyzing learner needs 3) selecting methodology, 4) transferring responsibility, and 5) involving learners. Tudor (1993) finally concluded:

> Learner-centered teaching is essentially very simple. Primarily, it boils
> down to responding to students' in-build-needs as both language users
> and language learners: the means by which this is achieved are

secondary, and can vary quite considerably from one learner group to another… thus, in addition to a given level of language competence, students should leave a course with a better understanding of language and of themselves as both language users and language learners (p.30).

METHODOLOGY

Participants

Thirty participants, eighteen male and twelve female, in Kerman Kish Air Institute participated in the study. They were thirty upper- intermediate subjects who were studying English as a foreign language in two groups having the same teacher, material, and teaching hours. All of the participants, aged between 19 to 28, had already studied English for at least one year and thus were in the right level to take part in a speaking course. However, the sampling strategy was based on availability strategy.

The main reason for selecting these subjects was because these learners had already had the experience of attending the language classes at least for one year, eight levels and could converse English about simple and daily topics. So they had the required basic knowledge to take part in a more advanced conversation class.

Instrumentation

To explore the attitudes of the participants of the study, a questionnaire was designed and implemented by the researcher for this purpose. It included two major parts. The first part explored some information about the subjects' sex and age. For the second part, using Likert scale, 18 items were designed on the following five areas.

Table 1. displaying the areas of investigation and the items

Categories	Item number
Objectives to follow	1-2
The role of anxiety	3-4-7-13
Error correction strategies	8-9-11-12
Teachers' role	10-16-18
Learners' role	14-15-17
Error Types	5-6

Design of the Study

The goal of the study was examining two types of error correction strategy and their impacts on the anxiety of the EFL learners. To this purpose, the following steps were taken one by one:

a) The teacher practiced conversation using their course book *Landmark, upper Intermediate*.

b) The teacher managed the class activities by encouraging the subjects to speak to others about the given topic and get the subjects participate in the activities.

c) In case the learners had any problems using any structure or vocabulary or committed any error of pronunciation or grammar, the teacher stopped them and tried to provide them with the correct form.

d) Enough time was provided for any learner to converse, give ideas, and take part in the class activities.

e) The procedure continued for two weeks, 6 sessions.

f) At the end of the sixth session, the questionnaire was distributed among them to answer and seek their attitudes about error correction strategy.

g) As the next step, the procedure continued for the third week. This time, the teacher asked the learners start working in groups and speak to each other in groups.

h) In groups, the learners had to speak to each other, correct each other's errors, and help the conversation continue as they tried to help each other. In the end of each session, the teacher asked each group to speak to other members and practice with others in class. In case the teacher noticed any error, he would ask others in the class to correct it. If they failed, he would do it personally.

i) This process also last for six sessions, two weeks with the same subjects and material. The only difference was however in the area of correcting the errors and active participation of the learners in speaking and getting the corrective feedback.

j) In this step, the teacher functioned as a facilitator, organizer, and observer. He tried to direct the class activities as corrections were done by the learners.

k) After this period, the same questionnaire was given to the learners once more to seek the learners' opinion on the employed procedures and the role of the learners and the error correction strategy. This time, they were supposed to focus on the role of the learners and change in the error correction strategy from teacher to the learners.

Data Analysis

The Statistical Package for the Social Science (SPSS) for Microsoft Windows version 21 was used to analyze the collected data. Two types of data analysis were used: descriptive and inferential. Descriptive statistics, including frequencies, means, standard deviations and percentages, were implemented in order to investigate the demographic data, and the question that were asked. Besides, inferential data was used to know if there were any significant relationship between the gender of the subjects and their response to any of the given question items.

RESULTS

The table below demonstrates the data on the given question items in terms of the minimum, maximum, the mean and standard deviation of each separately. For instance, for item 1, the mean of 1.17 shows that the participants had a positive attitude towards the question being asked. The small SD also shows how close the response of the subjects to each other is.

Table 2. Descriptive statistics for all question items

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	SD
PQ1	29	1.00	2.00	1.1724	.38443
To master speaking is very important for me.	29	1.00	2.00	1.1724	.38443
PQ2	29	1.00	2.00	1.1724	.38443
Speaking is more important than reading and writing.	28	1.00	3.00	1.5714	.74180
PQ3	29	1.00	4.00	2.4483	1.02072
I feel anxious when I decide to speak in class.	29	1.00	4.00	2.1724	.80485
PQ4	29	1.00	4.00	2.0000	.80178
One reason for my anxiety is the grammar and pronunciation errors I make.	29	1.00	4.00	1.8621	.78940
PQ5	29	1.00	4.00	1.8621	.74278
When learning speaking, committing grammar and pronunciation is quite natural.	28	1.00	3.00	1.9286	.66269
PQ6	29	1.00	4.00	2.0345	.73108
Committing pronunciation errors is more important than other types.	29	1.00	3.00	1.8966	.61788
PQ7	29	1.00	4.00	2.1034	.81700
Committing pronunciation errors leads to my anxiety.	29	1.00	4.00	1.8966	.90019
PQ8	29	1.00	3.00	1.5172	.57450
I think the teacher has to consider all types of my speaking errors.	29	1.00	3.00	1.3448	.55265
PQ9	29	1.00	3.00	1.5172	.57450
I think errors have to be corrected only the teacher not peers.	29	1.00	3.00	1.7586	.87240
PQ10	29	1.00	2.00	1.3448	.48373
The teacher has to correct any errors on the spot.	29	1.00	4.00	1.9655	.98135
PQ11	29	1.00	4.00	1.7586	.73946
Whenever the teacher highlights my errors, I feel anxious.	29	1.00	4.00	2.8276	.80485
PQ12	29	1.00	3.00	2.2414	.73946
I preferred that the teacher ignored some of the minor errors.	29	1.00	4.00	2.8276	.96618
PQ13	29	1.00	3.00	2.0690	.84223
When speaking, my great number of errors lead to my anxiety.	29	1.00	4.00	2.2069	.90156
PQ14	29	1.00	4.00	2.8621	.87522
I prefer that my errors are corrected by my classmates.	29	1.00	4.00	2.8621	.95335
PQ15	29	1.00	2.00	1.4483	.50612
Working in group and speaking with other give me	29	1.00	4.00	1.7931	.77364

confidence and decreases my anxiety.					
PQ16	29	1.00	12.00	1.7586	2.02934
Teacher's interference and his correcting my errors lead to my anxiety.	29	2.00	4.00	3.1379	.63943
PQ17	29	1.00	2.00	1.3103	.47082
I always prefer that help me correct my errors.	29	1.00	4.00	2.5172	.91107
PQ18	29	2.00	4.00	2.5862	.62776
I don't need my teacher's supervision and help to correct my speaking errors.	29	3.00	4.00	3.5172	.50855

As the means and standard deviations of the table above show, in most it the cases, the means after the two corrective feedbacks remain the same and only in limited cases, the difference is significant. For example, we can refer to questions 6, 7, 16, and 17. In fact it shows that the impact of the two types of corrective feedback cannot influence the anxiety level of the subjects in a significant way. Rather it shows how pedagogically they enjoy the two methods.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

As it was discussed before, the study did not come to certain and definite reasons to identify the sources of anxiety. In fact, the goal of the study was to investigate the role if corrective feedbacks on the anxiety level of the subjects, but the attitudes that the learners presented did not significantly prove the idea. In other words, the learners did not show that a change in the corrective feedback may change their level of anxiety.

However, a change in the error correction strategy can potentially affect the negative attitude of the learners. In fact, the ideas are in line with what Harmer (1998) discussed. He claimed that constant interruption in order to correct errors from the part of the teacher will destroy the purpose of the speaking activity. However, he believes that during the period when the teacher is presenting the new items, correction and learning the right form is important, but at the time of rehearsal and sustained oral practice, frequent correction may look harmful. In the same manner, Scrivener (1994) suggested that if the goal is to improve learners' accurate use of English, immediate correction is much more appropriate than in an activity where fluency is the objective. In this case, any interruptions may be regarded discouraging and de-motivating.

Since error correction plays a very important role in the processes of language acquisition, to employ effective and versatile error correction strategy is of great importance. To this Chastain (1988) added that errors are inevitable part of language acquisition and when learners set to speaking, especially when they follow a communicative purpose, they commit errors of different types. She adds that one reason of language teachers for frequent correction is their concern for fossilization. However, to do any correction, the teacher has to ask himself a few questions regarding the goal of the course, the level and importance of communication, the real effect of corrections and the learners' attitudes toward the correction.

The results can give ideas to language teachers to implement a more active role in corrective feedback activities. One important implication here is the tendency of the

learners to receive corrective feedback from the teacher in due time. They prefer to know more clearly about the errors they make and to them this can be done before everything by the teacher. Thus, teacher have to play a more serious role in the providing the learners with suitable feedback. On the other hand, the study achievements can assist teachers and syllabus designers to construct the syllabus and class activities that in certain cases give a more prominent role to the teacher and in some situations, to the learners. The implications can also assist the learners to play their active roles in the teaching-learning situation, especially in correcting speaking errors in collaboration with other classmates.

It moreover may give indications to the textbook designers to develop the approaches in which more opportunities are provided for the teachers to play their active roles in giving corrective feedback. Teachers on the other hand may benefit a great deal from the achieved results. Thus they will know how to develop the teaching techniques in a way that they give more opportunities to the learners and pay more attention to their speaking needs in terms of the errors they normally commit.

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APPENDIX

The Farsi Questionnaire

زبان آموز محترم: در این پرسشنامه دید گاه شما در مورد روش ترجیهی شما در باره نقش مدرس و اصلاح خطاهای مکالمه مورد بررسی قرار می گیرد. با توجه به دیدگاه تان در مورد خطاها ، یکی از موارد را در هر قسمت علامت بزنید.

جنس: مونث☐   مذکر☐   سطح: ....

1. فراگیری مکالمه به زبان انگلیسی برایم بسیار با اهمیت است.

کاملا موافق ☐   موافق ☐   مخالف ☐   کاملا مخالف ☐

2. صحبت کردن به انگلیسی برایم با اهمیت تر از خواندن و نوشتن است.

کاملا موافق ☐   موافق ☐   مخالف ☐   کاملا مخالف ☐

3. هر وقت در کلاس تصمیم می گیرم تا به انگلیسی صحبت کنم دچار اضطراب می شوم.

کاملا موافق ☐   موافق ☐   مخالف ☐   کاملا مخالف ☐

4. یکی از عوامل ایجاد اضطراب در کلاس مکالمه ترس از اشتباهات گرامری یا تلفظی است.

کاملا موافق ☐   موافق ☐   مخالف ☐   کاملا مخالف ☐

5. از نظر من، ارتکاب خطای دستوری یا تلفظی در روند یادگیری صحبت کردن کاملا طبیعی است.

کاملا موافق ☐   موافق ☐   مخالف ☐   کاملا مخالف ☐

6. از نظر من، در مکالمه ارتکاب خطاهای تلفظی از اهمیت بیشتری بر خوردار است.

کاملا موافق ☐   موافق ☐   مخالف ☐   کاملا مخالف ☐

7. ارتکاب خطاهای تلفظی باعث اضطراب من می شود.

کاملا موافق ☐   موافق ☐   مخالف ☐   کاملا مخالف ☐

8. به نظر من ، مدرس زبان باید به کلیه خطاهای من در مکالمه توجه کرده و آنها را اصلاح کند.

کاملا موافق ☐   موافق ☐   مخالف ☐   کاملا مخالف ☐

9. از نظر من، اصلاح خطاها بایستی صرفا توسط مدرس انجام شود نه سایر زبان آموزان.

کاملا موافق ☐   موافق ☐   مخالف ☐   کاملا مخالف ☐

10. مدرس در مکالمه باید بلافاصله هر نوع خطایی را اصلاح کند.

کاملا موافق ☐   موافق ☐   مخالف ☐   کاملا مخالف ☐

11. هر زمان که معلم به خطا های من اشاره می کند در من نگرش منقی ایجاد می شود.

کاملا موافق ☐   موافق ☐   مخالف ☐   کاملا مخالف ☐

12. ترجیح می دهم که معلم از اصلاح برخی خطاهای کم اهمیت صرف نظر کند.

کاملا موافق ☐   موافق ☐   مخالف ☐   کاملا مخالف ☐

13. وقتی در مکالمه خطاهای زیادی مرتکب می شوم ای امر باعث اضطراب من می شود.

کاملا موافق ☐   موافق ☐   مخالف ☐   کاملا مخالف ☐

14. ترجیح می دهم که خطاها و اشتبا هات من با کمک سایر زبان آموزان حاضر در کلاس اصلاح شود.

کاملا موافق ☐   موافق ☐   مخالف ☐   کاملا مخالف ☐

15. کار گروهی و تمرین مکالمه با سایر زبان آموزان به من اعتماد به نفس می دهد و از اضطراب من می کاهد.

کاملا موافق ☐   موافق ☐   مخالف ☐   کاملا مخالف ☐

16. حضور و دخالت معلم در اصلاح خطاهای من عامل ایجاد اضطراب و استرس است.

کاملا موافق ☐   موافق ☐   مخالف ☐   کاملا مخالف ☐

17. همیشه علاقمندم تا سایر زبان آموزان در روند مکالمه و اصلاح خطا ها به من کمک کنند.

کاملا موافق ☐   موافق ☐   مخالف ☐   کاملا مخالف ☐

18. در شناسایی و اصلاح خطاهای مکالمه نیازی به کمک و نظارت مدرس ندارم.

کاملا موافق ☐   موافق ☐   مخالف ☐   کاملا مخالف ☐

Items of the English Questionnaire

1. To master speaking is very important for me.

2. Speaking is more important than reading and writing.

3. I feel anxious when I decide to speak in class.

4. One reason for my anxiety is the grammar and pronunciation errors I make.

5. When learning speaking, committing grammar and pronunciation is quite natural.

6. Committing pronunciation errors is more important than other types.

7. Committing pronunciation errors leads to my anxiety.

8. I think the teacher has to consider all types of my speaking errors.

9. I think errors have to be corrected only the teacher not peers.

10. The teacher has to correct any errors on the spot.

11. Whenever the teacher highlights my errors, I feel anxious.

12. I preferred that the teacher ignored some of the minor errors.

13. When speaking, my great number of errors lead to my anxiety.

14. I prefer that my errors are corrected by my classmates.

15. Working in group and speaking with other give me confidence and decreases my anxiety.

16. Teacher's interference and his correcting my errors lead to my anxiety.

17. I always prefer that help me correct my errors.

18. I don't need my teacher's supervision and help to correct my speaking errors.