HAYEF: Journal of Education, 23; 1-10

DOI: 10.5152/hayef.2026.26057

Received: June 11, 2026
Revision Requested: July 11, 2026
Last Revision Received: July 12, 2026
Accepted: July 18, 2026
Publication Date: September 18, 2026

HAYEF: Journal of Education

ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Protecting Face in the L2 Corrective Moment: Positive Teacher Interpersonal Behaviors and the Reconfiguration of Credibility

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What is already known on this topic?

- *Corrective feedback research has focused predominantly on linguistic accuracy, uptake, and the efficacy of corrective moves (Ellis, 2009; Lyster & Ranta, 1997), treating error as a cognitive event while under-theorizing its relational and face-threatening dimensions.*
- *Face-work theory (Brown & Levinson, 1987; Goffman, 1967) provides a clear basis for understanding public correction as potentially face-threatening, but has not been systematically integrated with L2-specific interpersonal communication constructs..*
- *Xie & Derakhshan's (2021) model of seven positive teacher interpersonal communication behaviors has been established for the wider classroom context but has not been examined under the specific demands of the corrective moment.*

What this study adds on this topic?

- *The corrective moment is a relational face-work event: the relational conditions through which error is made visible matter as much as the corrective form itself.*
- *Care, stroke, and confirmation intensify under face risk and function as rapport-building practices through which teachers soften,*

Abstract

This study investigates how positive teacher interpersonal communication behaviors operate when learner error places face at risk in real-time L2 classroom interaction. It reframes error correction as a relational event rather than a purely linguistic or cognitive one, examining the conditions under which correction can be handled without threatening learner dignity, participation, or continued engagement. The study draws on data from culturally diverse English language teachers working with multicultural learner groups in Ireland. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with a small purposive sample: nine teachers (from Ireland, Türkiye, Brazil, and South Korea), each with professional experience in at least two countries. Interviews lasted between 45 and 121 minutes and were transcribed verbatim. Segments in the focus of this study were analyzed through an interpretive re-reading, using Xie & Derakhshan's (2021) model of seven positive teacher interpersonal communication behaviors—care, clarity, credibility, rapport, stroke, immediacy, and confirmation—as the interpretive lens and face-work theory (Brown & Levinson, 1987; Goffman, 1967) as the interactional frame. The analysis yielded three distinct strands.. First, care, stroke, and confirmation intensified in the corrective moment, functioning as rapport-building practices through which teachers softened, delayed, redirected, or shared the burden of correction. Second, credibility was reconfigured away from infallibility: participants acknowledged their own errors, integrated learner corrections into their practice, and reported learning from learners' mistakes. Third, a contrastive case demonstrated that surface-level mistake tolerance can remain organized around teacher-centered authority, retraining the face-threatening dynamics it appears to mitigate. L2 corrective feedback cannot be adequately understood through corrective form alone; its effectiveness depends on the relational architecture through which error is made visible without threatening learner dignity or participation. Positive teacher interpersonal behaviors—particularly care, stroke, confirmation, and a reconfigured credibility—constitute the relational conditions under which correction becomes a protected site for learning rather than a moment of public exposure.

Keywords: Corrective moment, error correction, face-work theory, loving pedagogy, positive teacher, teacher credibility

Introduction

Corrective feedback has long been central to second-language education, usually framed through questions of linguistic accuracy, uptake, and the effectiveness of different corrective moves. This literature has generated useful ways of describing what teachers do when learners make errors. Yet, the corrective moment is not only a cognitive or linguistic event. When a learner is corrected in classroom interaction, particularly in front of peers, their contribution may become publicly exposed as insufficient. Correction therefore raises a relational question as well as a pedagogical one: how can the learner's face be protected while error is made available for learning?

This article examines that question by bringing corrective-feedback research into dialogue with face-work theory (Brown & Levinson, 1987; Goffman, 1967) and Xie & Derakhshan's (2021) model of seven positive teacher interpersonal communication behaviors: care, clarity, credibility, rapport, stroke, immediacy, and confirmation.

This article therefore asks how positive teacher interpersonal communication behaviors operate when learner error places face at risk in real-time classroom interaction. Drawing on interview data from multilingual English language teachers, it argues that corrective feedback cannot be understood through corrective form alone; it also depends on the relational conditions through which error is made visible, softened, shared, or transformed into a protected opportunity for learning.

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Cite this article as: Boynueğri, E., & Alagözlü, N. (2026). Protecting face in the L2 corrective moment: positive teacher interpersonal behaviors and the reconfiguration of credibility. *HAYEF: Journal of Education*, 23, 0057, doi: 10.5152/hayef.2026.26057.

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redirect, or share the burden of correction.

- *The findings suggest that teacher credibility may take two distinct configurations—authority-centered (grounded in infallibility) and realistic (grounded in acknowledged fallibility and openness to learner correction)—with different consequences for learner participation and dignity.*
- *Surface-level mistake-tolerance alone does not produce a learner-centered corrective environment; what matters is the credibility configuration in which that tolerance is embedded.*

Literature Review

Error correction is discussed across several strands of literature, but three are particularly relevant to the present study: corrective feedback research, which focuses on the linguistic and pedagogical handling of error; face-work theory, which explains why correction can threaten the learner's public self-image; and positive teacher interpersonal communication research, which offers concepts for understanding how teachers manage the relational risk of the corrective moment. The following discussion considers these strands in turn.

Corrective Feedback, Face-Work, and the Corrective Moment

Research on corrective feedback in second-language education has, for several decades, been strongly shaped by questions of which correction types best support linguistic accuracy, uptake, and learner development. Lyster & Ranta's (1997) typology of corrective moves—including recasts, elicitation, explicit correction, clarification requests, metalinguistic feedback, and repetition—has anchored much of this literature, with Ellis (2009), Li (2010), & Sheen (2011), among others, examining the differential effects and overall effectiveness of these moves on learner development. Although this work is not exclusively cognitive, its dominant framing has treated error as a deviation from a target form and correction as an instructional means through which the learner's interlanguage is moved closer to it. This line of inquiry has also been productive in teaching English as a foreign language in the Turkish context. For example, studies have examined teachers' beliefs and practices regarding oral corrective feedback (Ölmezer-Öztürk, 2019) and the distribution of corrective moves in classroom interaction (Öztürk, 2016), and where learners' anxiety about being corrected has been shown to shape their feedback preferences (Geçkin, 2020). Notably, Öztürk (2016) reports that teachers sometimes withheld correction partly out of concern for its negative effect on the learner.

—What this framing tends to bracket is what it costs the learner to be wrong in front of others, and what the teacher's handling of that moment communicates beyond the propositional content of correction itself. Sociocultural and interactional accounts have already challenged purely cognitive understandings by treating corrective feedback as socially mediated, contingent, and co-constructed in context (Lantolf & Thorne, 2006; Nassaji & Swain, 2000; Vygotsky, 1978). These accounts widen the frame of corrective feedback beyond form-focused repair, but they also point toward a further interactional issue: if correction is co-constructed in the classroom encounter, then the learner's public positioning within that encounter becomes central. The corrective moment therefore brings face-work into focus, as being corrected may expose the learner and that exposure must be managed interactionally.

The interactional dimension of correction is most directly theorized through face-work and politeness theory. Goffman (1967) defined face as the positive social value a person claims for themselves in an encounter, and face-work as the practices through which interlocutors protect their own face and that of others. Brown & Levinson (1987) developed this account into a typology of strategies for managing face-threatening acts, including positive politeness, negative politeness, off-record strategies, and the option of not performing the face-threatening act at all. Public correction of learner error is a paradigmatic face-threatening act: it identifies an individual in front of peers and marks their contribution as deficient. Read through this frame, the corrective moves cataloged in the corrective-feedback literature are not only delivery formats for linguistic information; they are also face-work performances. Their interactional meaning depends on how the teacher manages exposure, recognition, and the wider relational stance brought to the moment. The corrective-feedback literature has not consistently foregrounded this dimension directly, yet whether correction is experienced as guidance or as public exposure depends on a relational architecture that cognitive typologies alone do not specify.

Positive Teacher Interpersonal Communication and Loving Pedagogy

The positive-psychology turn in L2 education offers a vocabulary for understanding the relational behaviors through which teachers manage the risks created by correction. For example, MacIntyre & colleagues (2019) and Dewaele & colleagues (2019) have argued that affective dimensions of language learning are constitutive of what learners are able to do, while Mercer (2020) has developed an ecological account of language-teacher well-being. Within this broader turn, Xie & Derakhshan (2021) synthesize seven positive teacher interpersonal communication behaviors: teacher care, clarity, credibility, rapport with students, stroke, immediacy, and confirmation. Grounded in positive psychology (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000) and rhetorical and relational goal theory (Mottet et al., 2006), the model presents these behaviors as interlocking facets of the relational ground on which student engagement, motivation, willingness to communicate, learning, and achievement depend.

Each construct has a distinct conceptual lineage, which Xie & Derakhshan (2021) synthesizes from earlier work in care theory, transactional analysis, confirmation theory, credibility theory, immediacy, clarity, and rapport research. In their model, teacher care refers to attentiveness to learners' needs and well-being; stroke to verbal or non-verbal recognition; confirmation to responses that affirm learners' legitimate classroom presence; credibility to learners' perceptions of the teacher as competent, trustworthy, and possessed of goodwill; immediacy to behaviors that reduce psychological or physical distance; clarity to the negotiation of understandable meaning; and rapport to the harmonious relational ground that supports learning, motivation, and engagement. Xie & Derakhshan (2021) present these seven behaviors as facilitators of positive student outcomes in the wider classroom, with the implicit assumption that each is desirable in greater quantity. In

the corrective moment, however, this assumption becomes especially important to examine, because error is not only informational but also potentially evaluative and face-threatening. The question of how teachers sustain care and dignity under this pressure connects the seven-behavior model directly with loving pedagogy.

Wang & colleagues (2022) frame language teaching as a responsibility to find routes through difficulty rather than to judge whether the learner has already been reached, aligning this view with wider positive psychology work on student-related outcomes in language education (Wang et al., 2021). This perspective converges with Xie & Derakhshan's (2021) model in treating the teacher's relational stance as inseparable from the cognitive content of instruction. The literature on learning from errors similarly treats error as informational rather than evaluative and emphasizes the role of learners' affective responses to being wrong (Tulis et al., 2016). What remains under-specified is how this cognitive proposition is sustained relationally in the live corrective moment: how error is kept available for learning without becoming a threat to the learner's dignity or participation.

The Gap in the Literature

Three observations motivate the present study. First, corrective feedback research has developed sophisticated tools for analyzing the cognitive efficacy of corrective moves, but has under-theorized the relational conditions within which those moves register as information or as exposure. Second, face-work and politeness theory specify the interactional dimension of corrective acts, but have not been systematically integrated with L2-specific positive interpersonal communication constructs. Third, Xie & Derakhshan's (2021) seven-behavior model has been advanced as a synthesis of these constructs in the wider classroom, but has not been examined in relation to the specific demand the corrective moment places on it.

The present study addresses this gap through a qualitative analysis of how participating English language teachers describe handling learner error in real-time classroom interaction. It reads their accounts through the seven-behavior model and through face-work as its interactional grounding. The analytical scope is restricted to in-the-moment correction; formal assessment is not the focus. The study specifically asks the question: How do positive teacher interpersonal communication behaviors operate when learner error places face at risk in real-time classroom interaction?

Methods

Theoretical Orientation

The analysis is anchored in face-work as the interactional frame through which the corrective moment becomes legible as an event in which the learner's face is at risk (Brown & Levinson, 1987; Goffman, 1967). Within this frame, Xie & Derakhshan's (2021) model of seven positive teacher interpersonal communication behaviors—care, clarity, credibility, rapport, stroke, immediacy, and confirmation—is used as a substantive framework through which to read what the participants describe doing when learners produce errors in classroom interaction. The model is not used as a hypothesis to be tested in a deductive sense but as an interpretive lens through which the situated reasoning of the participants becomes legible as a coherent relational disposition rather than as a collection of intuitive kindnesses. Supporting constructs from the relevant literature—stroke in the L2 classroom (Derakhshan et al., 2019; Pishghadam et al., 2019) and loving pedagogy (Wang et al., 2022)—are drawn on where they sharpen the reading of specific extracts. Care theory (Noddings, 1984), transactional analysis (Berne, 1988), confirmation theory (Ellis, 2000), credibility theory (Teven & McCroskey, 1997), and the immediacy literature (Mehrabian, 1967) are used to articulate the sub-constructs of the model in their wider conceptual lineage. The corrective-feedback literature (Ellis, 2009; Lyster & Ranta, 1997) is treated as the standard frame against which the present analysis offers an alternative reading.

Research Design

The current study is drawn from a wider doctoral study (Boynueğri, 2026) that investigated creative thinking and professional commitment in English language teaching among culturally diverse teachers in Ireland. The affective and relational orientations evident in participants' accounts of affective commitment (Boynueğri, 2026) sensitised the present re-analysis to the interpersonal dimensions of classroom interaction. The present article focuses specifically on those parts of the interviews in which teachers described handling learner error in real-time classroom interaction.

The study employs a qualitative, interpretive research design with semi-structured interviews as the mode of data generation. The paradigmatic orientation is interpretivist: knowledge is treated as co-constructed through the dialogic encounter of the interviewer and participant.

Participants

The parent doctoral study involved nine English language teachers living and teaching in Ireland at the time of data generation: three from Ireland (Joseph, Liam, and Aidan), three from Türkiye (Zeynep, Selena, and Yağmur), two from Brazil (Camila and Carlos), and one from South Korea (Sky). All names are pseudonyms. All participants had professional experience of teaching English in at least two national contexts—the criterion through which participants were selected—and were working with multilingual, multicultural learner groups. Beyond

Table 1.
Participant Profiles (ELT: English Language Teaching; CELTA: Certificate in English Language Teaching to Adults; BA: Bachelor of Arts; MA: Master of Arts; PhD: Doctor of Philosophy; TEFL: Teaching English as a Foreign Language)

Pseudonym	Country of Origin	Professional Background and Qualifications	Experience (Countries)
Camila	Brazil	Degree in psychology; teacher training in Brazil; worked as psychologist and English teacher; theatre background	Brazil, USA, Ireland
Carlos	Brazil	Five bachelor's degrees (incl. Law, International Relations, language and literature); MA; 23+ years of ELT; 16 years of university teaching in Brazil	Brazil, Ireland
Joseph	Ireland	Degree in music performance; CELTA	Russia, Ireland
Zeynep	Türkiye	BA in ELT; postgraduate work in ELT and Applied Linguistics	Türkiye, USA, Ireland
Sky	South Korea	MA in Teaching English through Drama (UK university); PhD candidate at an Irish university (creative writing and drama in education)	South Korea, Ireland
Selena	Türkiye (Bulgarian Turk)	BA in English Language and Literature; pedagogic formation; long-term university preparatory school teaching in Türkiye	Türkiye, Ireland
Liam	Ireland	Arts degree in history; TEFL; CELTA; teaching since 2009	Ireland, Italy
Yağmur	Türkiye	BA in ELT; university-level teaching in Türkiye;	Türkiye, Ireland
Aidan	Ireland	Degree in History; CELTA	Germany, Ireland

this inclusion criterion, no systematic background or demographic data (such as age or exact years of teaching experience) were collected. Their profiles are summarized in Table 1, compiled from background information that participants shared spontaneously in the course of the interviews.

All participants gave informed consent, and identifying details have been adjusted to protect anonymity.

Data Generation

Data were generated through individual semi-structured interviews conducted in English. Interviews lasted between 45 and 121 minutes and were audio-recorded with consent. The interview protocol was designed to elicit lived accounts of teachers' classroom practice, commitment to teaching, and approaches to creative thinking in language teaching (the main interview questions are provided in Appendix A). Error-handling was not a direct prompt; its repeated emergence across the interviews is therefore methodologically significant, as participants returned to corrective practice as one of the sites through which their pedagogical disposition became visible. The researcher followed the participants' reflections responsively, with follow-up prompts used to clarify meanings, deepen descriptions, and verify interpretations in situ rather than to impose a fixed protocol. All interviews were transcribed verbatim.

Analytical Scope

The analytical focus of this study is on teachers' situated responses to learner mistakes and errors as these occur in real-time classroom interaction. Accordingly, data segments concerning formal assessment, institutional testing, examinations, or grading procedures were excluded from the analysis, even where the keywords *error*, *mistake*, *correct*, or *wrong* appeared in those segments. The corrective moment as understood here is the in-the-moment relational event in which a learner's classroom contribution is treated as incorrect; it is distinct from the assessment moment in which learner performance is judged against an external standard. Lexical occurrences of *right* and *wrong* were similarly filtered: instances in which these terms appeared as conversational discourse markers (*"am I right?"*, *"we love it, right?"*) or in idiomatic constructions concerning teacher uncertainty or moral framing (*"I may be wrong"*, *"that's not wrong to say"*) were not retained as data on error correction. Only those occurrences in which a keyword described a learner's classroom production being identified, addressed, or managed as incorrect were treated as analytically relevant. This filtering produced the corpus of substantive in-the-moment error-correction data on which the analysis proceeded.

Data Analysis and Reflexivity

Coding of the full dataset was conducted within the parent doctoral study through reflexive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2022), using MAXQDA 24, with coding strategies informed by Saldaña (2016). For the present article, the segments meeting the criteria described above were re-read and interpreted through Xie & Derakhshan's (2021) seven-behavior model as the substantive interpretive lens, with face-work theory providing the interactional frame for reading the corrective moment as a site of potential exposure. This interpretive re-reading proceeded through repeated close reading of individual transcripts and cross-case comparison, with attention to how teachers described protecting, redirecting, or reconfiguring learner error in real-time classroom interaction.

All analysis, including the coding conducted in the parent study, was carried out by the first author; accordingly, no intercoder agreement procedure was employed. While this is consistent with the study's interpretivist orientation, in which the researcher is treated as the primary instrument of interpretation, it also means that the analytical strands reported here reflect a single analyst's reading of the data. The effects of this are mitigated by member checking of transcripts, the use of an established theoretical model as an explicit and auditable interpretive lens, and the presentation of extended data extracts, which allow readers to assess the interpretations against the data themselves.

Saturation was not employed as a criterion in the analysis. Although saturation has been presented as a key marker of qualitative rigor, signaling the point at which further data yield no new information (Morse, 1995), its logic is rooted in grounded-theory designs and its uncritical transfer to other qualitative traditions has been questioned (O'Reilly & Parker, 2013).

The prevalence of patterns is not reported numerically. In a small purposive sample in which error-handling emerged without being directly prompted, the absence of a pattern in a given participant's account indicates only that the topic did not arise in that interview, not that the orientation is absent from their practice; frequency counts would therefore carry a misleading suggestion of distributional precision (Sandelowski, 2001). Instead, all extracts are attributed to named (pseudonymized) participants throughout the findings, so that the distribution of evidence across the sample remains fully visible to the reader, and the contrastive case is explicitly identified as a single account.

Ethical approval for the parent doctoral study was granted by the Hacettepe University Senate Ethics Commission at its meeting of August 24, 2021 (approval communicated on August 27, 2021, document number E-51944218-300-00001710781The approval covers the doctoral thesis study as a whole; all data analyzed in this article were generated within that study, between December 2024 and November 2025. The underlying dataset, participants, and data collection procedures therefore remain within the ethically approved doctoral study.

In this study, the artificial intelligence (AI) tool Claude (access date: March 29, 2026; Version Sonnet 4.6) was used. The AI tool was used for supporting purposes only, with the scope of use limited to English language editing. Also, the interview transcripts were initially drafted using Microsoft Word 365 and subsequently reviewed and corrected manually by the researcher. The accuracy and originality of all content used in the article in line with the AI suggestions have been reviewed by the first author, who have taken responsibility for it. Data obtained through the AI tool has been reviewed in accordance with ethical and academic principles. Artificial intelligence tools have been used in this article in accordance with *COPE* and *HAYEF: Journal of Education* publication policies. The AI tool has not been listed as an author or co-author. The scientific content, accuracy, originality, and ethical responsibility of the study belong entirely to the authors.

Results

The findings are organized around three analytical strands that show how the corrective moment operates as relational face-work.

What Intensifies Under Face Risk: Care, Stroke, and Confirmation as Rapport-Building

The participants describe care, stroke, and confirmation not as separate dispositions but as the interpersonal means through which the relational ground of the classroom—its rapport—is built and protected in the corrective moment. Camila articulates this most explicitly. She frames her classroom as the place where mistakes are not a source of social cost:

> I want them to know that it's a safe environment, that they are not going to be bullied. […] They don't need to be afraid of making mistakes. […] It's the perfect scenario. […] We want to make mistakes so we can learn. I feel responsible for learning, safety, and well-being.

The sense of responsibility Camila articulates extends beyond the cognitive content of learning to the learner's well-being and emotional safety in the encounter with their own error. The corrective moment is where this responsibility becomes operative: making mistakes is not the failure case of learning, but a place where learning can happen, and the teacher's task is to construct the relational conditions under which the learner can enter it without social risk.

Camila presents a further moment in which care, stroke, and confirmation converge:

> If they make a mistake, I always ask them, "why do you think this is the answer?" […] It's just for them to understand their own thinking and then to think again and to get to the correct answer themselves.

The recognition Camila offers is not addressed to the correctness of the learner's contribution, but to the reasoning behind it. The learner is confirmed as someone whose thinking is worth examining, and the stroke is given to the process rather than to the accuracy of the answer. The mistake becomes, again, a site of learning: the learner's reasoning is valued, while the mistake itself is prevented from becoming a threat to face. Camila explicitly articulates the pedagogical logic of this move:

> They expect me to give them the right answer, right? So I said, "not anymore, you have to think about, you know, for yourself."

The learner's expectation that the teacher will provide the correct answer is named and refused. Camila's refusal is not a withholding of help but a redirection of where the answer comes from.

She engineers comparable moments deliberately:

> They are not expecting me to do like spelling a wrong word. Yeah, I write a wrong word on the board on purpose so they can get it.

Camila stages reversal by design. The teacher temporarily withholds the correct form so that the learner can occupy the position of the one who notices. This reversal lowers the face risk of correction: error is staged by the teacher, while the learner is invited into the safer position of noticing and correcting it..

Camila reinforces this stance through her refusal of self-disqualifying language by her students. She intervenes when a learner formulates their relation to error as a fixed limit:

> When someone says "I can't do it," I say "I don't want to hear that. What you can say is, I don't know it at this moment, but I will learn."

The intervention preserves the truth of the learner's present difficulty while removing its character as a permanent identity claim—the kind of claim under which dignity can be lost—keeping the learner inside the pedagogical moment. It also extends correction management beyond the teacher's own corrective utterances into the learner's self-directed evaluative field. Camila is not only withholding negative strokes from the teacher's side; she is also teaching learners to withhold negative strokes from themselves and to adopt a more enabling form of self-recognition.

Liam frames the classroom in strikingly similar terms—as the safe place for error:

> Students need to know that it's OK to make mistakes, that there won't be reprimanded for those mistakes. […] They will say […] 'I'm afraid I made a mistake.' […] 'Why are you afraid? This is where you're supposed to make mistakes. […] It's OK to make a mistake with me. This is where we fix them.'

Liam's response to the learner's articulated fear is to redefine the classroom itself as the place where mistakes can be produced, held, and worked on without reprimand. He removes the assumption that mistakes are deviations from what the classroom is for; instead, error becomes part of the classroom's function. Care operates here through confirmation: the learner remains legitimate even when mistaken. At the same time, Liam's use of "with me" and "we fix them" places the teacher inside the relational field of error rather than outside it as a detached evaluator.

This same care strategy appears in Liam's refusal to issue the public "no":

> I never would like to say "no" in the class. "That's wrong." Because if somebody gives a wrong answer […] if I say "no," then they're quiet for the rest of the class.

The refusal is reasoned from its consequence. Liam avoids "no" not because the verdict would be inaccurate but because the public verdict can threaten the learner's continued participation. Negative stroke is therefore withheld on relational grounds: the cost of issuing it is the learner's possible retreat from the classroom. This response thus engages care and confirmation while withholding negative stroke, protecting the learner's face.

Liam locates this stance within a wider developmental observation about how children come to fear being wrong:

> The old days was better for children. They just build what they want and there was no right or wrong. But then when children grow up, they get told no. They get told this is wrong.

The refusal of the public "no" is therefore not only a relational tactic in the immediate moment; it is a deliberate intervention into the developmental process through which learners acquire the fear of error in the first place.

Sky's account presents a related pattern in which negative stroke is notably absent from the reported interaction. She describes learners accustomed to an educational context in which correctness is strongly foregrounded and evaluation is embedded in writing, revision, memorisation, and testing:

> Thinking just one thing we have to do is find the correct answer. [...] Still, the test is about like grammar checking sentence structure [...] write, revise, write, revise and then memorise and then take a test. [...] So that's why when I asked them to create this story in the drama lesson [...] they will keep asking 'Can I try this one? Can I say this one? Is this the story OK?'

In this story-writing activity, learners repeatedly solicit a right/wrong judgement even though Sky has framed the task as one in which they can "imagine whatever [they] want." The corrective moment is therefore initiated from the learner side through repeated requests for evaluative approval. Yet Sky's pedagogical framing does not reproduce the correctness-oriented logic to which they are accustomed: rather than narrowing possible contributions through negative evaluation, it keeps the space for production open. Negative stroke is thus absent from the interactional pattern she describes. This stance is consistent with Sky's broader affective commitment to learners. She argues that teachers should "encourage" students and "value their little opinions," and explicitly associates being listened to and cared for with self-esteem. Here, care is enacted through a refusal to organize learner

production around an immediate right/wrong verdict, allowing contributions to remain legitimate possibilities rather than occasions for negative stroke.

Carlos's account extends the same orientation through a moment located outside the immediate corrective exchange, but continuous with it in its management of face risk. He describes a cooking activity in which learners gave each other procedural directions while preparing food. The activity was designed around the imperative, but the learners were not told this in advance. They produced the target structure spontaneously while completing the task, and Carlos made this visible only afterwards:

> They were supposed to give each other instructions about how they should cook. So, they would say add this, do that and so on. And after half an hour of cooking, I took them to the classroom and I said, I don't even know if you noticed, but you used a bunch of sentences using the imperative.

Carlos's account gives confirmation a retrospective direction. Where Sky's learners repeatedly seek evaluative approval before contributing,, Carlos's recognition follows it. The learners are confirmed after the fact as having already demonstrated the target competence, without first having to carry the anxiety of being assessed on it. Carlos's recognition effectively communicates that the learners have already "used it" successfully, without the need for immediate correction, which may also strengthen their confidence in their own language use.. The evaluative dimension is therefore not removed, but temporally redistributed: the grammatical target becomes visible only after learners have succeeded. This also works as a positive stroke, since learners receive recognition for a competence they had not been aware of demonstrating. The delay is itself the form care takes: Carlos withholds the evaluative naming until after success, protecting learners from anticipatory pressure without removing the recognition.

Joseph extends this orientation to the recognition of learner expertise:

> "Teacher, […] this word is not ideal anymore. […] better to use this word" and I wasn't aware of this and I checked it up and this student was right and I thought, "wow, I've learned something today."

He also articulates the same orientation in a more programmatic register:

> I want, as a teacher, of course there always has to be a little bit of natural authority, but I want my students to question me. I want my students to not be afraid to speak up.

Read together, the two accounts of Jospeh display one relational configuration with three interrelated dimensions—stroke, confirmation, and care. As stroke, the learner first corrects the teacher, and Joseph responds with recognition, going further by naming the learning the exchange produced for him. As confirmation, the learner is treated as a legitimate contributor whose challenge to the teacher is welcomed; "I want my students to question me" makes this stance explicit before any individual exchange occurs. As care, the learner's standing in the classroom is protected from the position of being merely instructed: the teacher's "natural authority" remains, but its mode is conditioned on the learner's freedom to participate as a knower. Recognition is not only granted in the moment; it is built into the relational structure that makes such moments possible. This pattern is also instructive from the perspective of teacher credibility, particularly in how authority is retained while fallibility and learner expertise are acknowledged; this dimension is taken up in the following section.

Zeynep extends confirmation from the discrete corrective exchange to the classroom's broader definition of participation:

> Whatever they say or whatever they do is not silly or it's not wrong. […] If you give them space, teenagers and children will naturally, spontaneously show their creative sides.

By refusing "silly" and "wrong" as available categories for learner contributions, Zeynep removes the terms through which disconfirmation could be issued. This is also a management of negative stroke, since these labels would recognize the learner's contribution in a damaging way. Care becomes structural, in that the classroom is arranged so that learner contributions remain admissible, face is protected, and participation can continue without the threat of negative evaluative recognition.

Together, these accounts show that care, stroke, and confirmation intensify in the corrective moment because error places the learner's face at risk. By intensification, we do not mean that these behaviors simply increase in quantity, but that they become more interactionally consequential under face risk. Care is given through the teacher's active reduction of social exposure: mistakes are delayed, redirected, softened, shared, or made safe. Stroke works through the management of recognition: learners are protected from negative evaluative labels and are recognized as thinkers, not merely as producers of correct or incorrect answers. Confirmation occurs when learners are kept inside the pedagogical space even when they are hesitant, mistaken, or correcting the teacher. Across these moves, rapport is not a background condition of correction; it is built through the very handling of correction itself. If rapport is built through the very handling of correction, a further question follows: what happens to the teacher's credibility when the teacher is the one being corrected? The second strand takes up this question.

Reconfigured Credibility: Teacher Fallibility and Learning from Learners

In the corrective moment, credibility—students' perception of the teacher as competent, trustworthy, and possessed of goodwill—takes a configuration that requires more careful description. The participants who appear in the preceding strands do not present themselves as infallible sources of correctness. They explicitly describe their own fallibility, and they describe learning from the very learners whose errors they handle. Liam articulates the position directly:

> Even when maybe I make a mistake as a teacher, as we all do, students can sometimes find a mistake and tell me "teacher, that doesn't sound right." I enjoy this because it means they're learning.

Joseph extends this in two directions. The first is the explicit valuation of being corrected by a learner already reported in the previous section ("this student was right and I thought, wow, I've learned something today"). The second is autobiographical: he describes his own language-learning as having proceeded through attention to his learners' errors as a source of comparative information:

> I learned a lot from my own students' mistakes when I was learning Russian. I knew from the errors that they made in English what was correct in Russian … So, I was able to apply their errors to my language learning.

This account shows an epistemic openness in which learner error becomes a source of knowledge for the teacher as well as the learner. This orientation subsequently becomes relevant to Joseph's understanding of teacher credibility:

> I would have been very conformist. What teacher says is right. […] I used to judge other students misbehaving and say, why

> can't you follow what the teacher says? […] Since I've gotten older and more life experiences, I look back at that and I think […] a lot of the teachers were actually wrong.

The realistic credibility Joseph performs in the corrective moment is therefore a deliberate position taken against an earlier conformist stance. Authority that demands compliance is, in his retrospective reading, susceptible to being wrong; the credibility he now grants learners as knowledgeable contributors is the inverse of the credibility he once granted his own teachers without question.

Yağmur's account arrives at the same orientation from a different direction—her own teaching experience in a multilingual classroom:

> They were all from different countries, different L1s, so the questions they asked were very different … they had different fossilized mistakes and I was also learning from them, and I really had to develop my teaching skills in line with their challenges.

Yağmur's account does not demonstrate credibility directly, but it shows how learners' recurring errors and challenges prompt her to adapt and further develop her teaching practice. In this sense, it supports a view of teacher competence as responsive and developing rather than fixed.

None of these participants abandon professional authority. Liam remains the teacher who decides how the corrective moment is managed; Joseph retains what he calls "natural authority"; Yağmur describes deliberately developing her teaching skills in response to what she learned. What changes is the basis of their credibility. Rather than depending on a projection of infallibility, it is grounded in teachers' willingness to acknowledge their own limitations, learn from learners, and incorporate learner contributions—including errors—into their pedagogical understanding. This is the form of realistic credibility developed across these accounts.

Contrastive Configuration: Aidan's Authority-Centred Credibility

Aidan's account is included as a contrastive case. Some of his statements, read in isolation, look continuous with the orientations developed in the preceding strands:

> One of my Asian girls … she's actually apologised to me. She said, 'I'm afraid of making mistakes and I'm afraid of disappointing you.' I said, 'Well, don't be afraid of disappointing me' for f**** sake. […] Don't be afraid of disappointing me, but try to make a few mistakes. But she won't, because she can't. She's not able to. She's just … she's psychologically unable to.

Two features of this account distinguish it from those examined above. First, the learner explicitly links her fear of making mistakes to the possibility of disappointing Aidan. Whatever the wider source of that anxiety, this positions the teacher as an evaluative reference point whose judgement carries emotional weight. Aidan responds by explicitly permitting mistake-making, but the interaction nevertheless remains asymmetrical because mistake-tolerance is still articulated through the teacher's permission. Second, Aidan subsequently interprets the learner's difficulty primarily in psychological terms, describing her as "psychologically unable to" make mistakes rather than framing the difficulty in relational or interactional terms.

Aidan's own framing reinforces this configuration. He elsewhere describes authority as central to his teaching:

> Authority with a small "a," not Authority. Authority is really key.

The qualification ("small 'a'") does not alter the structural position the construct occupies in his account. His other corrective moves are consistent with this position. He describes inviting learners to correct spelling on the board:

> Why shouldn't they correct the spelling? Why shouldn't they correct it? … It forces them to take ownership of it.

This invitation, like the mistake-tolerance offered earlier, is structured as an assignment of responsibility within a teacher-led interaction. The corrective moment in Aidan's account is therefore organized around the teacher as an evaluative reference point, and the moves available to the learner are positioned in relation to it. The contrast with the preceding strands is structural rather than a matter of degree: the same surface move—telling learners not to fear mistakes—operates differently within the two configurations.

In this contrastive case, credibility is protected through authority rather than reconfigured through fallibility. Aidan does not refuse mistake-making, but he keeps it within a teacher-centered evaluative structure: learners may make mistakes, correct spelling, or take ownership, yet these moves remain organized around the teacher's permission and judgment. This is why the case matters analytically. It shows that the language of mistake-tolerance alone is not enough to identify the relational form of correction. What differentiates the preceding accounts from Aidan's is not whether mistakes are allowed, but whether the corrective moment opens into reciprocal pedagogical learning or remains governed by authority-centered credibility.

Discussion

The findings invite reflection along four lines: the corrective moment as a face-threatening act (Brown & Levinson, 1987;Goffman, 1967;), the redistribution of Xie & Derakhshan's (2021) seven positive interpersonal communication behaviors under face risk, the differentiation of credibility into authority-centered and realistic configurations, and the contrastive case of Aidan.

The teachers regulate their responses to learner mistakes to help the learner save face. Liam's refusal of the public "no," Camila's reformulation of error as a question, and Zeynep's "respectful space" together reshape what the corrective act is—off-record rather than on-record (Brown & Levinson, 1987; Öztürk, 2016), positive politeness rather than judgment, and ambient face-protection rather than discrete repair. Error is reorganized from individual exposure into shared classroom work. These responses to error provide a new lens on Xie & Derakhshan's (2021) seven positive teacher interpersonal communication behaviors—care, clarity, credibility, rapport, stroke, immediacy, and confirmation—described in the wider classroom as facilitators of motivation, learning, engagement, and willingness to communicate. The current study showed that care, stroke, and confirmation intensify in ways that build and protect rapport, while credibility is reconfigured and clarity and immediacy appear, in two participants' accounts, strategically withdrawn or transformed. Camila's positioning of the classroom as a safe environment for mistakes and Liam's framing of the classroom as the safe place for error align with Noddings' (1984) account of pedagogical care and with Wang et al.'s (2022) loving pedagogy. In Camila's and Liam's accounts, care is enacted through attention to the social and emotional cost of being wrong, rather than through correction alone. Sky's account similarly shows how an open pedagogical framing can keep learner production from being reduced to an immediate right/wrong judgement, even when learners themselves repeatedly seek evaluative approval. Care, in the corrective moment, is the operative refusal to convert pedagogical difficulty into a verdict on the learner.

Second, stroke in the corrective moment intensifies in two directions. The first is the active provision of positive recognition. Camila's

reasoning-focused questioning, her refusal of the sole answer-provider position, and her deliberate misspellings each relocate cognitive authority within the learner and engineer opportunities to notice and be recognized. Joseph's reception of being corrected as a learning event grants the learner recognition as a knower. The second is the active management of negative stroke. Camila's intervention against self-disqualifying language, Liam's refusal to say "no," and Zeynep's rejection of "silly" and "wrong" are the deliberate withholding of negative recognition that the corrective moment otherwise makes available. Berne (1988) treats even negative stroke as preferable to no recognition at all, and this premise has been carried into L2 stroke research by Pishghadam and colleagues (Derakhshan et al., 2019; Pishghadam et al., 2019). The participants, by contrast, deliberately withhold negative stroke because its cost to rapport outweighs its recognition value. Stroke is therefore a two-directional field of evaluative signaling in which what is withheld matters as much as what is offered.

Confirmation follows a similar trajectory. Liam's assurance that errors will not be punished, his refusal to issue public negative judgment and Zeynep's framing of learner contributions as inherently legitimate rather than dismissible enact what Ellis (2000) describes as the avoidance of disconfirming responses; learners' documented anxiety about being corrected (Geçkin, 2020) underscores what these moves protect against.

Rapport, the relational substrate of the seven behaviors, emerges as the condition under which the other behaviors become operative. Camila's reframing of moments of repeated attempt as among the most valued in the classroom, Joseph's open invitation for learners to challenge his contributions, and Liam's positioning of himself inside the relational field of error, particularly suing "we", all show rapport functioning as the ground on which face-work is performed. Rapport here is not interpersonal closeness; it is a permission structure through which learners can challenge, correct, and participate without threatening the teacher's authority.

In two participants' accounts, two behaviors are strategically withdrawn or transformed: immediacy and clarity. Direct immediacy (Mehrabian, 1967) is not intensified at the moment of error but redirected. Liam's movement of corrective attention from the individual learner to the class decreases interpersonal proximity precisely because direct proximity to the producer of the error is itself a face-amplifier—a counterintuitive use of an interpersonal behavior usually theorized as reducing distance. Clarity is similarly recalibrated. Where Xie & Derakhshan (2021) position clarity as making information transparent, the corrective moment calls for indirection: Liam's use of peer correction and Camila's deliberate misspellings route the correct form through the learner rather than the teacher. The aim is not denied understanding but understanding routed through reduced face risk. This reading rests on the narrowest evidence base of the analysis—two participants' accounts—and is therefore advanced tentatively, as a candidate extension of the model to be examined in further data.

Credibility is the most analytically demanding of the seven behaviors. Here the present data offer not only a reading of the model but a possible contribution to it. Xie & Derakhshan (2021), building on Teven & McCroskey (1997) and Pishghadam & colleagues (2019), conceptualize teacher credibility as students' perception of the teacher as competent, trustworthy, and possessed of goodwill—a unitary construct in which more credibility is always better for student outcomes. The present data complicate this picture: in the corrective moment, credibility splits into two configurations with very different consequences for what the learner is asked to do with their error.

The first is most clearly visible in Aidan's account. The learner he describes—the one afraid of disappointing him—operates within a credibility relation in which the teacher is positioned as an evaluative authority whose judgment carries emotional weight. Aidan's emphasis on authority as central to his teaching, and his location of the learner's difficulty in a fixed psychological condition rather than in the relational arrangement, reinforces this. This may be called authority-centered credibility: grounded in the teacher's position as a competent and reliable, even infallible, source of knowledge whose displeasure the learner risks producing.

The second configuration is visible in Liam, Joseph, and Yağmur, who do not abandon credibility but reposition its basis. Liam's acknowledgment of teacher fallibility and his pleasure in being corrected by students, Joseph's reception of learner correction as a learning event, and Yağmur's account of developing her teaching through learners' fossilized mistakes locate credibility not in infallibility but in honesty with which the teacher treats their own performance. Joseph grounds this orientation explicitly in his own learning history—his retrospective rejection of the conformist stance of his own schooling—making realistic credibility a deliberate position rather than a stylistic preference, with direct implications for teacher education through autobiographical reflection on having been on the other side of correction.

The alternative to authority-centered credibility is not the loss of credibility nor teacher self-doubt that compromises pedagogical authority. It is what may be called realistic credibility: grounded not in the projection of infallibility but in a competent professionalism that openly acknowledges the place of error in teaching and learning. The two configurations differ along three dimensions: the teacher's position (evaluative authority vs. competent but fallible professional), the meaning of mistake (the risk of disappointing the teacher vs. a constituent moment of learning), and the basis of credibility itself (evaluative authority vs. acknowledged fallibility and pedagogical openness). These findings suggest that Xie & Derakhshan's (2021) credibility category may benefit from differentiation: in the accounts examined here, the same construct can support two distinct relational forms in the corrective moment, with markedly different consequences for what followed.

Aidan's case clarifies the analytic stakes of the credibility differentiation. His invitation—don't be afraid of disappointing me, try to make a few mistakes—read in isolation could be a Liam-type or Camila-type opening. What distinguishes the case is the credibility relation in which the invitation is embedded: the learner explicitly links her fear of mistakes to disappointing the teacher, positioning him as an evaluative reference point whose judgement carries emotional weight. Aidan responds by permitting mistake-making, while subsequently interpreting her difficulty primarily in psychological terms. This contrast carries a methodological implication. Instruments that capture declared mistake-tolerance without attending to the wider credibility configuration may treat Aidan-type and Camila-type statements as equivalent when they are not. Qualitative approaches that recover the relational structure of the corrective moment are therefore not only descriptively richer; they are analytically necessary.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This article reframes the L2 corrective moment as a relational event in which linguistic repair and face-work are inseparable. Across the accounts, the significance of a corrective move lay not only in its form but in how it positioned the learner, distributed evaluative authority, and sustained participation. The findings suggest that positive teacher interpersonal communication behaviohofsrs do not simply become more or less present under face risk; they may intensify, be redirected, or take different relational configurations. Most notably, credibility varied according to how authority and fallibility were negotiated, while Aidan's account illustrated how similar surface practices can operate

differently within different relational structures. The study therefore extends corrective-feedback research by foregrounding the relational conditions through which error can remain available for learning without becoming a source of unnecessary social exposure.

Implications, Limitations, and Directions for Further Research

Two implications follow from the analysis. For corrective-feedback theory, the findings argue that the existing typology (Ellis, 2009; Lyster & Ranta, 1997; Ölmezer-Öztürk, 2019)—productive as it remains for analyzing what teachers do at the level of corrective form—can remain insufficient on its own. What determines whether any corrective move registers as information or as exposure can be the face-architecture within which it is delivered, and that architecture is in turn structured by the configuration of credibility, care, stroke, and confirmation the teacher brings to the moment. For language-teacher education, the findings argue against a technique-level conception of corrective-feedback training. The disposition Liam, Camila, Joseph, Zeynep, Sky, Yağmur, and partially Selena describe has been cultivated over time, often in response to teachers' own learning histories. The implication is not to prescribe a single corrective technique, but to develop sensitivity to how making the error visible, when to diffuse attention, when to invite peer-mediated discovery, and when to protect the learner from negative recognition and thus save their face. Across these accounts, the professional knowledge at stake is not simply knowing which corrective-feedback move to choose, but knowing how much visibility a particular learner, in a particular relational moment, can safely bear.

Several limitations qualify the claims advanced here. The study draws on interview data, which capture teachers' articulated accounts rather than their classroom practice directly; the relationship between articulated stance and enacted practice would benefit from triangulation through classroom observation. The sample, while purposive and theoretically informative, is small. In addition, all coding and analysis were conducted by a single researcher without an intercoder agreement procedure; while this is consistent with the study's interpretivist stance, as discussed in the data analysis section, readers should weigh the interpretations accordingly. The emergent quality of error-handling as a theme in interviews that did not directly prompt it means that the present analysis can only cover those aspects the participants themselves found worth articulating when reflecting on creative teaching. At the same time, the fact that error-handling emerged without being directly prompted gives the theme a particular analytic weight: participants returned to correction because it mattered to how they understood teaching, and sometimes creative teaching.

Future research could address these limitations through classroom observation and multiple data sources, could test the distinction between authority-centered and realistic credibility across larger and more diverse samples, and could combine direct and indirect interview approaches to clarify which orientations are robust across different framings of corrective practice. Comparative and cross-cultural designs could further examine how cultural dimensions such as power distance and collectivism (Hofstede, 1986) shape the face-work of the corrective moment—a question the present sample, which was not constructed for cross-cultural comparison, cannot address.

Data Availability Statement: The data that support the findings of this study are available on request from the corresponding author.

Artificial Intelligence Usage Statement: In this study, the AI tool Claude (access date: March 29, 2026; Version Sonnet 4.6) was used. The AI tool was used for supporting purposes only, with the scope of use limited to English language editing. Also, the interview transcripts were initially drafted using Microsoft Word 365 and subsequently reviewed and corrected manually by the researcher. The accuracy and originality of all content used in the article in line with the AI suggestions have been reviewed by the first author, who have taken responsibility for it. Data obtained through the AI tool has been reviewed in accordance with ethical and academic principles. AI tools have been used in this article in accordance with COPE and *HAYEF: Journal of Education* publication policies. The AI tool has not been listed as an author or co-author. The scientific content, accuracy, originality, and ethical responsibility of the study belong entirely to the authors.

Ethics Committee Approval: Ethical committee approval was received from the Ethics Committee of Hacettepe University (Approval No.: E-E-51944218-300-00001710781; Date: August 17, 2021).

Informed Consent: Written informed consent was obtained from nine participants who participated in the parent study.

Peer-review: Externally peer-reviewed.

Author Contributions: Concept – E.B. & N.A.; Design – E.B.; Supervision – N.A.; Resources – E.B.; Materials – E.B.; Data Collection and/or Processing – E.B.; Analysis and/or Interpretation – E.B.; Literature Search – E.B.; Writing Manuscript – E.B.; Critical Review – E.B.

Declaration of Interests: The authors declare that they have no competing interests.

Funding: The authors declare that this study received no financial support.

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Appendix A

Interview Prompts

Prompts to Explore Professional Commitment

1. How important is your profession to you? Would you say it is a significant part of your life and identity? (Emotional commitment)
2. What emotions and feelings would you associate with being a teacher? How would you describe your emotional connection to the profession? (Emotional commitment)
3. Do you see teaching as a responsibility? If so, how does this responsibility differ at various levels? (Normative commitment)
4. Have you ever considered pursuing a different profession? Is it easy for you to move to another occupation? (Opportunities for a different occupation)
5. How would you describe your investment in the teaching profession in terms of time, money, and commitment? Does it make it difficult to shift your career path? (Investments made for being a teacher)

Prompts to Explore Creative Thinking in Language Teaching

1. When you hear the word "creative," what comes to mind, and what qualities or factors do you think make someone creative? (General understanding of creativity)
2. Do you think of yourself as a creative person? How do you express creativity in your daily life or as a teacher? (Personal perceptions of creativity)
3. Have you heard the term "creative thinking"? (Definition of the term)
4. Can you share a situation in your daily life or in teaching where you used creative thinking to solve a problem, and what did it feel like? (Problem-solving, originality, and emotions)
5. In what ways do you apply creative thinking in your teaching, and how do you encourage your students to do the same? (Creative thinking in language teaching)
6. How do your personal and cultural experiences shape your creative thinking? (Cultural influences)
7. What are the biggest challenges you face in being or encouraging creative thinking in your teaching? (Challenges in creative thinking)
8. How has being in a multicultural environment influenced your creative thinking, and in what ways do you think culture influences creativity in teaching? (Multicultural environment and creative thinking)
9. Can you think of a metaphor for being a teacher and for creative thinking in language teaching? (Artistic representations)