



# The Application of Corrective Feedback Theory in Integrated English Course

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## ABSTRACT

Integrated English Course in Chinese universities serves a group of non-English major students for the main educational training purpose of second language learning together with language learning skills development under different unit themes. In the process of learning another language, as language learners, making mistakes is natural and inevitable. This procedure of making mistakes and correcting mistakes contribute to the gradual improvement from a starter to an advanced learner. Encountering mistakes made in various conditions in the classroom, teachers need to form proper awareness, and give appropriate feedback.

## 1. Introduction

Feedback in the classroom, which describes the responses from instructors, is one type of discourse facing towards students' performances, playing the vital role in the second language acquisition process. It helps learners realize the effectiveness of their output and functions as guidance for the continuing learning procedure. If the instructor does not provide feedback after activities, learners may not understand their weakness and the gap with the target language. Feedback entails positive feedbacks, like making complement shows the agreement and appreciation. However, compared with positive feed-

backs, negative feedbacks, like corrective feedback (CF) has even more powerful impacts on language learners to achieve learning goals. Suitable CF helps learners make improvements while inappropriate CF decreases learners' confidence and enthusiasm.

Briefly speaking, Corrective Feedback is a kind of formal or informal comments on learner's performances on different tasks from peers or teachers. Kepner defines feedback in general as any procedures used to inform a learner whether an instructional response is right or wrong<sup>[1]</sup>.

Corrective feedback is a controversial problem, and different scholars hold different opinions towards it. Ellis

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views corrective feedback as one type of negative feedback<sup>[2]</sup>. According to him, it is for any form of response a learner's utterance including a linguistic error. Other scholars like Krashen examined feedback as a useless and harmful process at first, so he provided little feedback to students in order not to anxious them<sup>[3]</sup>. In contrast to Krashen, Swain pointed out that language occurs through the interaction language acquisition should be on a broader perspective like from corrective feedback.

Speaking of the development of CF, since the late 1950s, attitudes towards the role of feedback have changed along with teaching methodologies in terms of the effectiveness of L2 acquisition. In the late 1950s and 1960s, based on behaviorism and structuralism, the Audio-lingual Method (ALM) was popular in L2 learning. During this time, giving feedbacks is regarded as a way of helping learners to correct mistakes and making improvement as well. In the 1970s and 1980s, Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) was commonly practiced to equip learners with communicative competence. The function of corrective feedback was seen as communicating with other people. In the early 1990s, the Interaction Approach (IAA) emerged, and corrective feedback comes as a result of the interaction that arises authentically. Since the mid-1990s, corrective feedback has been a heat discussion problem in SLA. Truscott claimed that CF should be discarded because it is ineffective<sup>[4]</sup>. But some studies suggested that CF plays a pivotal role in helping L2 students improve the quality of their writing, helping them get close to correct English. Moreover, other studies explored the effectiveness of different types of CF like oral feedback, peer feedback, audio-recorded feedback and so on. However, most studies failed to examine which feedback mode was more effective.

CF could be classified according to different dimensions. One of the ways to classify is to divide it into two types: explicit feedback and implicit feedback. Explicit feedback takes a number of forms, such as direct correction or metalinguistic explanation. Implicit feedback occurs when the corrective force of the response to learner error is marked. More specifically, implicit feedback could be divided into recasts and repetition. Also, there are other ways to divide like written feedback and oral feedback, input-based feedback and output-based feedback, and so on.

## 2. Literature Review

From theoretical perspectives, the effectiveness of the corrective feedback (CF) on language learners' interlanguage

development has been the topic of much discussion in SLA field. Gass and Long put forward that the effectiveness of CF lends support to one group of theorists who emphasize the importance of negative as well as positive evidence in second language development<sup>[5]</sup>. The opposite theorists, taking Truscott as an example, state positive evidence is sufficient and negative evidence in the form of CF can be detrimental to inter-language development<sup>[6]</sup>.

The divergence of this opposite opinion holders lies in the concerns of the uptaking levels from language learners. The study from Roy Lyster and Leila Ranta about Corrective Feedback and learners' uptake about learner' uptake in four immersion classrooms indicates an overwhelming tendency for teachers to use recasts, and also recasts accounted for the largest number of repairs but that is due to the inordinately high frequency of recasts<sup>[7]</sup>. From its data analysis, it clearly revealed that none of the feedback types stopped the flow of classroom interaction and that uptake clearly does not break the communicative flow either, which means the student's turn in the error treatment sequence. Moreover, the feedback-uptake sequence engages students more actively when there is a negotiation of form. Uptake in language courses refers to a student's utterance that follows the teacher's CF, constituting a reaction in some way to the teacher's intention.

Hossein Nassaji and Merrill Swain analyzed how CF could achieve a better effect in terms of the learners' uptaking in *A Vygotskian Perspective on Corrective Feedback in L2: The Effective of Random Versus Negotiated Help on the Learning of English Articles*<sup>[8]</sup>. They did a test to determine whether students learn from the kind of feedback they received and whether they use correctly those forms of articles they used erroneously in their compositions before receiving feedback. Therefore, for these two testers, one is given a ZPD error treatment and the other one a non-ZPD treatment procedure. The data support the effect of the ZPD corrective feedback since the students get corrective feedbacks within their ZPD outperformed the other students who just get random feedback. The finding is consistent with the Vygotskian sociocultural perspective in which knowledge is defended as a social in nature and is constructed through a process of collaboration, interaction, and communication among learners in social settings and as the result of interaction within ZPD<sup>[9]</sup>.

There are mainly two CF types: oral CF and written CF. Different CF types are applied in different assigned tasks, and have different effects. Written CF is mainly applied in writing tasks and assignments while oral CF is ap-

plied more interactive situations. According to Roy Lyster and Kazuya Saito More detailed comments like grammar mistakes and punctuations are given when using written CF while sociocultural situations like classroom are much relating to oral CF<sup>[10]</sup>.

Oral CF could be divided into three types: explicit feedback prompts and recasts. Lyster claimed that explicit corrective feedback means clearly indicates mistakes while Prompts include a variety of signals that push learners to self-repair<sup>[11]</sup>. In addition, recasts is the teacher's reformulation of all or part of a student's utterance in the right way, and L2 learners who get prompt corrective feedbacks show larger effects than those who get recasts.

### 3. Applications of CF in Integrated English Course

Currently, one of the most popular teaching planning structures in university courses, including Integrated English Course, BOPPPS structure, that does not only serve the academic purposes but also calls on for skill and cultural purposes. BOPPPS structures, briefly follows the procedure of bridge in- objectives-pretest-participation-posttest and summery. To achieve the latter objectives under this teaching structure, in the bridge in and participation stages, open questions are frequently designed to encourage students to express their own opinions and CF application is of great concerns when it comes to the content level.

#### 3.1 Student Analysis

One of the common classroom situations exists in Chinese universities is the existence of marginal students who seldom initiatively join the teacher-students' interactions or student-student interactions. Marginal students in a class are sensitive to the Corrective Feedback on the contrary to their silence due to the fear of making mistakes. However, there are still a majority of Chinese students are willing to learn from corrections because they were corrected since the first day of learning and that almost becomes their learning habit.

Therefore, instructors need to be sensitive to the goals of the person. In a university classroom, the fact that student' English levels and interests varies, and they have different expectations from instructors. Under such complicated circumstances, instructors are required to get familiar with student's background information and offer CF in the proper way. For marginalized students, conscious and non-judgmental CF cares students feeling and is not detrimental to their study passion. According to

Bound, if instructors do not act like authorities and give personal reactions and feelings rather than value-laden statement, they shorten the distance between instructors and learners<sup>[12]</sup>. One way of doing this is to use comments of the type "I feel...when you...". For students who are willing to take CF, instructors are suggested to give specific comments and basing the comments on concrete observable behavior or materials, because generalizations are particularly unhelpful.

#### 3.2 Course Analysis

Integrated English Course involves English language knowledge and application skills, learning strategies and cross-cultural communication as the main content, under the guidance of foreign language teaching theory, using a variety of teaching modes and teaching methods as a whole. Students can master good language learning methods, enhance their independent learning ability, improve their comprehensive cultural quality, and make them have a strong comprehensive English application ability, especially listening and speaking ability, to meet the needs of social development, economic construction and international exchange.

From this course syllabus, it is obvious to divide the educational aim into two parts: language knowledge and cultural affection. One the one side, in the SLA classroom setting, CF has significant and durable effect in terms of the language knowledge acquisition, especially grammar knowledge. In most correcting cases, giving instant corrective feedback is helpful for learners to realize their mistakes and avoid it next time. However, except language knowledge, Integrated English course also aims to develop students' cultural affection by setting different themes in each unit and then organizing classroom discussing activities. Considering the one of the educational objectives of this course that students are required to illustrate their own opinion in terms of one specific question, encouraging students to express themselves becomes the first place rather than correcting language mistakes.

Referring CF to the language knowledge learning in the course syllabus, one more concern of its application is about timing, which means CF should be given instantly and promptly. It is no use offering CF after the students has completed the assigned discussion or tasks. For example, when students are required to do a group discussion, it is better to give the CF while they are discussing and organizing the answers rather than displaying their works and discoursing the conclusions, as students are expecting to move on after preparation stages even while they are

displaying.

However, when it comes to giving CF for sociocultural tasks, instructors need to control the frequency and try not to interrupt the fluency throughout the whole process. To offer CF when students are given sociocultural tasks, as long as the mistake prevents the students' expression or the task moving on, instructors better put the language CF aside and focus on the context setting to inspire students to devote to the task, enjoy discussion and confident about second language application. In order to achieve better sociocultural goals in the syllabus, instructors are usually not considered as the most suitable CF giver, but learners themselves or peers may leave the correction deeper and longer in the receivers' learning journey.

#### 4. Reflections and Critiques

On the one side, some points from the theories are quite constructive. Norton Peirce claimed investment signals the socially and historically constructed relationship of learners to the target language, and their desire to learn and practice it<sup>[13]</sup>. Corrective Feedbacks could be the reasons that increase learners' interest in learning the target, but it could also be the reason that prevents learners from learning the target language. Therefore, giving feedbacks need some tips in order not to hurt the feelings of learners.

On the other side, there are also some claims from the need to be discussed when it comes to the applications of the Corrective Feedback in Integrated English Course. For example, sometimes tiny mistakes are not that necessary to point out and learners would discover the rules with enough input, and in the context setting language learning situations where expressing comes to the priority, the frequency of CF application should be controlled.

In terms of the idea of avoiding giving negative feedbacks, it is of great importance if teachers are able to apply it in the appropriate time in proper way. As Rutherford considered that negative feedback is essential to L2 learners when positive input in the natural environment is inadequate to lead the learners towards the correct form of the target language<sup>[14]</sup>. Actually, sometimes negative feedbacks could motivate students to learn the target language, achieving an effective result in the end.

Therefore, making it in a positive way and reducing the negative result as much as possible is what scholars are working with. During the process of L2 learning, if someone else could give some constructed feedbacks that could be accepted by learners is quite valuable.

#### 5. Conclusion

Integrated English Course belongs to ESL education course, in which errors are considered a natural part of the classroom teaching process and a sign of students' efforts to produce the target language. As we all know second language acquisition is one of the most complicated topics in the field and what makes it difficult is not because it is hard to study but because every human being is a different individual, having own characteristics. Therefore, it is impossible to figure out the universal rule that can be lent to every student in the classroom for instructors when giving CF.

To sum up, even though feedbacks are heated discussed and being researched, more specific and detailed researches in the future still need to be done and explore in this CF field in real classroom environment. The future directions of CF need to be considered to expand researches in this field. Firstly, Shao claimed that despite researches on recast, there is a lack of published discussion on explicit correction, metalinguistic feedback and negotiation moves like clarification and elicitation<sup>[15]</sup>. Secondly, investigating the facilitative impact of learner factors and CF can also be addressed in further researches. Moreover, CF can be provided in person, written form or through some technologies like audio form or through computers. Though the first two modes have been deeply explored, few studies have touched the latter ones.

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